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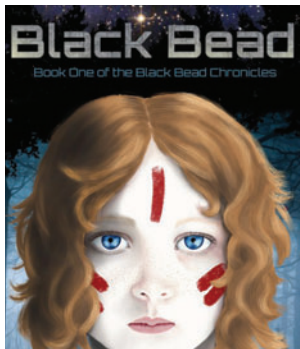
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San Diego Community News Network

# San Diego Uptown News

## TURNING BACK TIME



Almost 100 people attended the Feb. 16 meeting of Uptown Planners in the Santa Fe Room at Balboa Park Club. (Photo by Ken Williams)

### Uptown Planners reject January revisions to community plan update, support old version from June 2015

Ken Williams | Editor

The Uptown Planners have gone “back to the future” by turning down the January revisions to the Uptown Community Plan update and directing city planners to return to the June 2015 version.

The volunteer group voted 11-2, with one abstention, on Feb. 16 to reject the latest revisions to the Land Use Element, which encouraged higher density along Uptown’s major transit corridors: Park Boulevard, Washington Street, University Avenue, and Fourth, Fifth and Sixth avenues. Six bus lines provide service to those areas.

Uptown Planners did however, urge city planners to focus plans for higher density only along Park Boulevard, where SANDAG’s long-range plans call for a trolley to

eventually replace the 215 Rapid Bus that runs from Downtown along Park Boulevard to El Cajon Boulevard and eastward to San Diego State University.

Roy Dahl, a member of the Uptown Planners, reminded the large crowd gathered in the spacious Santa Fe Room at the Balboa Park Club that the North Park Planning Group had already approved increased density along the east side of Park Boulevard, which is in North Park. He suggested that Uptown Planners might as well go along with density along that major transit corridor. That area already has several residential towers, most near the intersection with University Avenue, along with high-density buildings such as The Egyptian.

Uptown Planners member Chris Ward — who is running for City Council District 3 to represent many of the Uptown and Downtown communities — said the update process over the past six years is finally close to being finished. Although he said he was disappointed with the January revisions, Ward was one of the two

see Planners, pg 10

## How African refugees become San Diegans

Somali Bantu Association of America guides immigrants through their first steps in the U.S.

By María José Durán

Madina Hussein arrived in San Diego from Ethiopia in 1995 with her mom and 12 siblings. Not one of them spoke English or knew anything about American culture.

“We got lost the first day that we came here. I remembered the tall building, which is on Estrella Avenue, and we followed that building

until we got home,” Hussein said. Her family didn’t know how to read the signs or ask for directions, much less what bus to take.

Their lack of cultural understanding caused the Hussein family to do things that were against their religion. “We didn’t know what the food tasted like. When we went to school, we ate a lot of pork. My sisters, they didn’t know beer, so they were working at a casino serving beer,” Hussein said.

Hussein is now 28 and she is more than fluent in English. She

see Refugees, page 18



(l to r) Tegest Alemu, Majuma Madende and Madina Hussein at Somali Bantu Association of America in City Heights (Photo by María José Durán)

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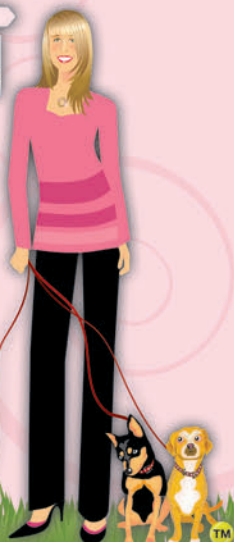
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A phone app shows the speed, terrain and the amount of electrical power generated by the Copenhagen Wheel.  
(Courtesy of superpedestrian.com)

# Are electric bicycles worth the buzz?

E-bike expo rolls into San Diego  
Feb. 26-28

By Hutton Marshall

The world has changed enormously in the past two decades. The way we power our cars, our homes and even our blankets has altered radically since we entered the new millennium. Even the bicycle, long praised for its simple but effective engineering, has begun to change as well.

In an age where city planners would like to see a greater share of residents commute by bicycle, electric-powered bicycles — e-bikes — appear to loom in the very near future.

E-bikes, for those unaware of the hottest new two-wheeled technology, is a bicycle powered partially by pedaling and partially by an electric motor. With their meager sales growing steadily each year, coupled with the constant breakthroughs in battery efficiency, e-bikes may not sound like the oddball niche transportation method for much longer.

## How they work

With folding bicycles, recumbent bicycles, adult tri-cycles and every other variety of “traditional” bikes, it might surprise the uninitiated to learn that e-bikes can be just as varied. The basic idea behind them,

however, is a relatively small and debatably lightweight electric motor typically powering the back wheel and controlled either manually with a handlebar throttle or automatically by sensing the rider’s pedaling power and adjusting accordingly.

Not all e-bikes are inherently bikes by design, either. Some manufacturers have unveiled designs that transform good ol’ fashioned bicycles into e-bikes through an added-on modification. The most popular and promising example of this is the Copenhagen Wheel, a sleek motor built around a modified back wheel.

The Copenhagen Wheel also shows how technologically complex e-bikes can be. The MIT-designed motor is designed to conform to the bicyclist’s existing riding habits as

smoothly as possible, starting by working off the bike that the rider was using before hand.

The back wheel adjusts its speed based off how hard the rider pedals (i.e., by providing more power as the rider pedals faster, and the motor switches off when the pedaling stops). The back wheel is also controlled through a smartphone mounted on the handlebars, so it can be switched between low- and high-power modes, as well as display data captured by the system. The back wheel also locks itself when the controlling smartphone is more than a few meters away.

While devices like the Copenhagen Wheel impressively display the technological heights e-bike technology is capable of reaching, the technology doesn’t come without a price. The Copenhagen Wheel can currently be pre-ordered for more than \$900.

## State of the e-bike market

The United States has yet to find a market for e-bikes. Just a few hundred thousand are sold each year. They’ve proven much more popular elsewhere, however. Europeans buy over 1 million e-bikes each year, and one estimate found that as many as 32 million e-bikes were sold in China in 2013.

Personally, I’m not going to run out and buy an e-bike — not yet, at least. At this point, they remain too expensive and, as a lesser consideration, too heavy.

However, I don’t identify with the attitude of the cycling purist who scoffs at e-bikes for their partial reliance on electric batteries over human-power. No one argues that we should allow e-bikes into the Tour de France. This technology is for commuters who just want to get from point A to point B in an affordable, fun and environmentally friendly way. Who cares if they do so by expending less energy.

## How San Diegans can buy and use them

The way Americans can use an e-bike varies from state to state, even city to city. San Diego doesn’t lay out specific regulations for bikes of the electric variety,

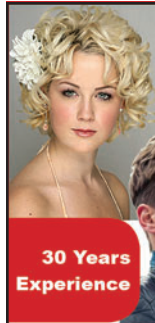


The Copenhagen Wheel is a sleek motor built around a modified back wheel. (Courtesy of superpedestrian.com)

see Biking, pg 15

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# North Park author writes powerful female characters

By Kit-Bacon Gressitt

San Diego's North Park neighborhood has a lot of history and diversity, some great galleries, microbreweries and restaurants — and plenty of gyms to compensate. Like most trendy city quarters, it also has a literary scene: closet writers who grumble across unshared pages about gentrification and rising rents, the audience-hungry who spin their tales at local open mics, and an occasional author who takes the bold plunge into the world of publishing.

JD Lakey, a 13-year North Park denizen, is bold — in a quiet, writerly sort of way.

Author of a young adult sci-fi series, the five-book “Black Bead Chronicles,” Lakey has nestled into a nice writing life in the heart of North Park, one that's garnering some recognition. Opting for self-publishing, she and her illustrator — her daughter Dylan Drake — have made a splash on Amazon.com, achieving bestseller status in science fiction.

The path to success was a classically long and improbable journey: Lakey was born in Montana, in a region not known for boutiques and microbreweries, although it has its share of UFO sightings.

“I grew up on a big wheat and cattle farm — 3,000 acres,” Lakey said in a recent interview. “I think it's the source of most of my writing. You learn to accommodate infinite space — big sky, as they say — and it gives you fuel



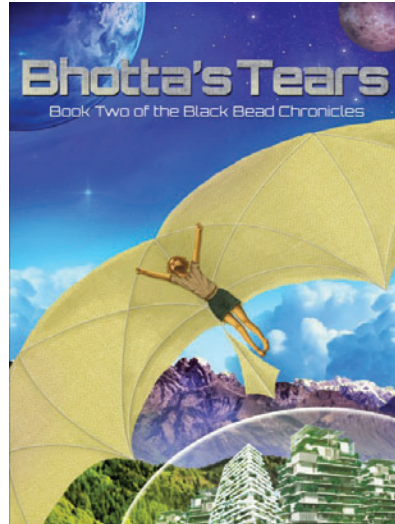
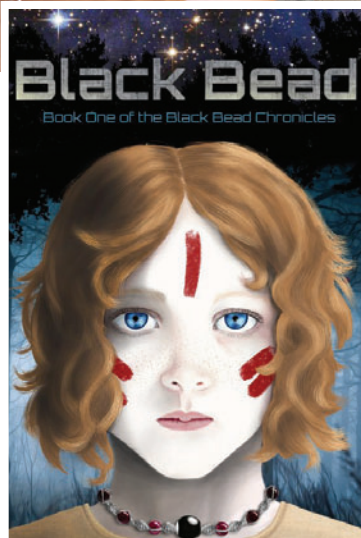
## JD Lakey will appear at a local author meet & greet

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Series books one and two, “Black Bead” and “Bhotta's Tears,” can be purchased on Amazon in paperback or e-book. Book three, “Spider Wars,” will be released in April.

[jdlakey.com](http://jdlakey.com)



North Park resident JD Lakey is the author of a young adult sci-fi series called the “Black Bead Chronicles.” The first two books in the five-part series are out, called “Black Bead” and “Bhotta's Tears.” (Photo by Dylan Drake)

crazy that expanse is.”

But life yanked Lakey around a bit, and her first grandchild reeled her into North Park. Then, in 2008, she was laid off from her job. With “a lot of free time,” she decided to write a book. She wrote three of them.

“I think it's the atmosphere,” she explained. “It's an easy place to live, relaxed. I grab a notebook, go to Claire de Lune [which unexpectedly closed Feb. 16], and sketch away, write vignettes.”

Think J.K. Rowling scribbling the first Harry Potter book in an Edinburgh café, but replace Harry with a powerful female protagonist. Actually, think Hermione Granger instead of Harry. Cheobawn, Lakey's main character, is a 7-year-old girl with her people's psychic powers, living in a matriarchal society and pursuing a quest dependent on her gifts. Lakey's stories have magic, a complex mythology, and her dedication to avoiding milquetoast females.

“I'm 61, all the college-educated women of my generation

became witches in 1992, when Estés wrote ‘Running with the Wolves’ — the powerful female thing. And the women who settled in Montana were crazy strong. My grandmother was college educated. She came out West and homesteaded with her brother. That's a source of strength in my women characters that I want to emulate. All the women I knew growing up were kick-ass women. I don't like Shakespeare because all his women are wusses. I want to write books I want to read, with characters I like,” Lakey said.

“The story of Cheobawn, I've been writing that for 30 frickin' years. It started out as a short story and everyone died in the end. It was bloody. I liked the possibilities of world building, but it was brutal. So I kept rewriting it, and she kept getting younger. It reminded me that innocence is a weapon, and the character can be strong in that respect — not physically strong, but emotionally strong. The West is littered with stories of really powerful women. Their stories don't get told much, because Hollywood controls the storytelling.”

While the genesis for Lakey's strong female characters might be found in Montana, it's San Diego that will see her through the final books of the series.

“I love the weather — it always comes back to that,” she said. “I remember winters when it was 50 below. There's a reason old people move south. But what I need to keep me writing is on the page, not outside.”

—Kit-Bacon Gressitt writes commentary and essays on her blog, “Excuse Me, I'm Writing,” and has been published by Ms. Magazine blog and Trivia: Voice of Feminism, among others. She formerly wrote for the North County Times. She also hosts Fallbrook's monthly Writers Read authors series and open mic, and can be reached at [kbgressitt@gmail.com](mailto:kbgressitt@gmail.com).

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Featured letter of the week

Hillcrest is already a model of sustainable development and smart growth. It already has high density close to transit. It is the most walkable neighborhood in San Diego. It has plenty of shops and restaurants. And it is a beautiful neighborhood with lots of green space.

But for some strange reason, we who live in Hillcrest are expected to give up our quality life when it is really the rest of sprawling San Diego that needs to change. We are expected to watch as our landscaping disappears and buildings are built to the lot line. We are expected to put up with even more traffic gridlock than we have now.

It is not Hillcrest that needs to change, it is places like Clairemont, North Park and most of the rest of San Diego that need to change.

I mention North Park, because I keep seeing letters to Uptown News criticizing Hillcrest by people who claim to live in North Park. They call Hillcrest a “dump,” and one even says that he doesn’t care what happens in Hillcrest because he’ll be sipping his craft beer in hipster North Park.

North Park is a planning disaster. It is not walkable. University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard are strip-mall eyesores. Ugly six- and 12-pack apartment buildings were shoved all through North Park between University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard and the streets are crammed with cars. Then there is the “marvel” of 30th Street with its gentrification, and eating and drinking establishments that are hip now but probably won’t be forever. All serviced by an ugly parking garage. You can put lipstick on a pig.

Transit-oriented development is a nice idea, but impractical in San Diego County, which spreads over 4,200 square miles. If you live and work Downtown, you can give up your car — and also limit your options. But guess what. Residential high-rises Downtown have parking for residents. So even high-rises Downtown don’t cause people to drive less. People are going to drive no matter what. Just look at San Francisco — after New York, probably the most car-unfriendly city in the nation — and the streets are packed day and night with cars.

Affordable housing? Show me one new housing project in the last 10 years that could be considered affordable in Uptown. When you build up, prices go up as well. The price of the cheapest condo in a high-rise going up on Fifth Avenue in Park West is \$700,000, on top of which you can expect to pay \$700 or more a month in HOA dues. I guess the North Park hipsters who want Hillcrest to “build up” are trust fund babies waiting for Mommy and Daddy to leave them their inheritances. Or maybe they’re just development industry skills.

It is nothing less than an outrage that the city expects Uptown to increase its population by 50 percent when our collapsing infrastructure doesn’t even support the population we have now. Washington Street is full of potholes. University Avenue isn’t much better. Has San Diego updated all of its water and sewage pipes? I don’t think so.

This can only happen in a town where politicians are owned lock, stock and barrel by developers. And then they have the nerve to talk about smart growth and preserving the environment! None of this has anything to do with the environment — it’s all about money and greed!

I hope that a lawsuit is filed to force the city to upgrade its infrastructure and provide the amenities it is supposed to provide (but hasn’t) before even one more unit of housing is added.

And certainly a court should order a halt to more development in San Diego until the drought ends and a water supply and storage system is developed so that we don’t go through this again in the future.

Then there are the business people who want more customers. Hey, if you can’t find them here, go somewhere else. You would think that these business owners could only do business in Hillcrest. You can do business anywhere in the world. I live in Hillcrest near Bankers Hill and I won’t even walk into central Hillcrest anymore on a regular basis. It is filthy. That has nothing to do with lack of development.

The same goes for developers. Go Downtown! You can build high-rises there.

Oh, wait. What we’re really talking about here is landowners who want Downtown prices for Uptown land. Well, sorry. That land is not Downtown, so it’s not worth the millions you are demanding. And trying to make it worth that by forcing zoning changes is nothing other than greedily demanding something that you didn’t earn and that you don’t deserve.

I sometimes think that the city has deliberately tried to cause blight in Hillcrest with lack of infrastructure and lack of maintenance in order to eventually say, “See? We told you so. Hillcrest needs to change!”

—Andrew Towne via sduptownnews.com

*(Editor’s note: Checking the walkability scores from various websites, the Hillcrest neighborhood does not rank in the Top 5 of the most walkable places in San Diego. Little Italy, Horton Plaza, Core-Columbia, Gaslamp Quarter, Cortez Hill, Marina, Harborview, East Village and North Park consistently place ahead of Hillcrest in various lists found online. One list, though, did have Hillcrest finishing ahead of North Park for walkability. Part of the problem in Hillcrest may lie in the fact that the community is divided by state Route 163. Also, Andrew, did you read our story about the rebirth of El Cajon Boulevard? [Volume 7, Issue 25 or bit.ly/1TNVbUm] Lots of good things are happening on “The Boulevard” from Park Boulevard eastward to City Heights.)*

Opinions about density

Re: “Uptown Planners enter into ‘twilight zone’” [Volume 8, Issue 4 or at bit.ly/21bsMw9]

Excellent summary of the Feb. 2 Uptown Planners meeting in Uptown News.

I look forward to a report on the Feb. 16 meeting in Balboa Park. I could not attend.

You did an excellent job summarizing the facts, issues and responses of the parties.

At a meeting to review the plan in Mission Hills earlier this winter, the audience was split 50/50 for and against increased density and for and against the constraints of the CPOZ/Design Review elements.

I have been engaged in Uptown issues since moving here in 1984. Not much has changed with respect to feelings about growth and development.

I am very glad to see the city step in and modify the draft Uptown Plan so it might better comply with the Climate Action Plan. The lack of “sustainability” in the draft plan was evident. The plan needs a whole lot more work to be integrated with North Park, Golden Hill, Downtown and the General Plan. But at least the thought process has started.

Its too bad the draft plan still leaves as tabula rasa (or terra incognita) the very large institutional parcels in Uptown: UCSD Medical Center, Florence Elementary School and San Diego City School District headquarters. They could form the heart of a redeveloped Uptown that might actually balance jobs, housing (including affordable housing), urban parks and infrastructure.

But it has not been discussed. So the update, like so many others in San Diego, continues to be a reaction and not a plan at all. —Peter H. StClair by email

Density increases can be positive if properly managed, and not so positive if done the wrong way. Turning these areas into typical big city dirty urban areas with no parking and little green space, while doing nothing to expand public transit coverage to other areas, is not smart growth. It costs less to expand transit routes than it does to build 20-story buildings everywhere.

Unfortunately Todd Gloria and his minions think everyone can be forced onto buses and that no one needs an automobile of their own. Their logic (or lack of it, as these are not the types of politicians who actually think for themselves, they merely parrot the latest “progressive” talking points) also fails to acknowledge major shifts now underway in transportation technology, and fails to acknowledge that there are more creative and more elegant approaches to smart growth than simply cramming as much density as possible along bus lines. As one example, how about actually creating inherently safe, protected bike lanes throughout San Diego? San Diego is decades behind the rest of the world in this area.

—David Gleason via our website

Interesting article, thank you. Very informative and lively. I do take exception with the use of phrases such as “against growth.” I know of no one against growth. I know many people, including

myself, who want intelligently planned and managed growth for our community, rather than uncontrolled growth designed to make absentee investors as rich as possible.

—Deborah Pettry via our website

Over these many years, Hillcrest has been a wonderful place to live and shop. It is sad that the HBA (Hillcrest Business Association) is now promoting higher density and open height areas instead of supporting the “mom and pop” businesses already established which pay membership dues to their organization.

It ain’t right! —Old Hillcrester via our website

There is nothing wrong with building and increasing density if we have the transportation solutions ... and we do not. More buses (crowding the road further) isn’t the answer. Until you put a few trolley lines or light rail in (up Fourth, Fifth, Sixth avenues and Park Boulevard and east-west corridors like Washington Street, University Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard and Adams Avenue) ... the developers will destroy the city.

Build the infrastructure first and then build the density projects. It’s absurd how backwards San Diego is. The Uptown area was built out by the trolley line in the 1900s. PUT IT BACK!

—Nathan via our website

Uptown Planner Michael Brennan says, “We need to put more money into transportation.”

But neither the city nor SANDAG are doing that! They have been putting their money into freeway expansion. And into the hands of developers who get to build height and density in Uptown with no significant funding for transportation,

There is NO funding for a Park Boulevard trolley, and just a teeny bit for a Rapid Bus that might shave 30 seconds off your already excessively long and

expensive bus trip. Why not put the density and height in the freeway transportation corridors, like Interstate 15, where they spent all our transportation dollars?

—Tim Gahagan via our website

“No parking and little green space” – ideally, the green space will go where the parking is now. Parking lots are a hideous blight.

Do you want people, or do you want cars? Nobody is saying you can’t have parking, they’re just saying the taxpayers aren’t going to pay for your car storage. Rent a spot in a garage.

—Robert via our website

Despite what some people might say, the city is not proposing increasing densities in Uptown. For proof, look at the maps in the presentation that the city staff gave at the Feb. 2 Uptown Planners meeting. The city may be proposing putting some properties back to what they currently are, but most of the maps still show down-zoning. Go to the city website for Uptown and look at the “Revised (January 2016) Land Use presentation” at bit.ly/1XAcz1t.

Why after six years of work and countless meetings has the city produced a Community Plan for Uptown that would reduce densities exactly where the City General Plan and the Climate Action Plan says we should have more housing; within walking distance of jobs, stores, and bus stops? They did it because the anti-growth activists got control of the Uptown Planners board and therefore of the plan.

None of this would matter if it weren’t for the fact that people want to live in Uptown. No one would want to build new housing in Uptown if they didn’t know they could sell or rent it quickly. The only reason to lower densities is to keep new people out. This plan won’t keep out people who can afford million dollar condos,

see Letters, pg 11

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

# A rebuttal to Mat Wahlstrom

By Elizabeth Robinson

San Diego Uptown News published a guest editorial by Mat Wahlstrom, titled “A tidal wave is about to hit Hillcrest” [Volume 8, Issue 3 or bit.ly/1nL64Nq], in which the Uptown Planners board member protests current densities while insinuating that only “absentee landowners” in a coalition called The Uptown Gateway Council have any interest in seeing that Uptown is not drastically downzoned.

The real tidal wave hitting Uptown is climate change and unaffordable housing. It's vacant businesses and deteriorating infrastructure; not new development.

Stakeholders in Uptown want to see a rational community plan update with density that complies with the Housing Element, state and regional plans, and the city's recently adopted Climate Action Plan and increases housing affordability and the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Not another drugstore.

We are experiencing a rare moment in our community when city government, small-business owners, commercial property owners, environmental groups, developers and residents are in agreement: We need more housing on our transit corridors.

In its opening remark, the guest editorial says “the San Diego Planning Department wants to increase building height limits in Hillcrest by 100 percent and building density by 66 percent.” That is inaccurate. The Hillcrest core, for example, is currently zoned to allow up to 109 dwelling units per acre (du/ac). The current draft plan released in January maintains the same density. That is not an increase. Side by side density maps from the Feb. 2 Uptown Planners meeting are available on the city's website. Look for yourself.

And then there is the issue of height. The current base zone, CN-1A, allows a height limit of 200 feet. The Interim Height Ordinance lowered the limit to 65 feet in the Hillcrest core and will sunset, or end, upon the implementation of the community plan update. However, if the new plan maintains the 65-foot limit, this would still be a significant downzone and the Hillcrest core would lose precious housing opportunities and push the city's climate goals out of reach.

The guest editorial argues that increasing infill development will also increase sprawl because residents will get displaced from their communities and be forced to live elsewhere. That is nonsense. Basic economics tells us that increasing demand while decreasing supply drives prices up. We are seeing that in home prices and rental rates across our city every day. The notion that you can prevent the addition of housing units to the market and somehow make Uptown a more affordable place to

live is a false one.

This month, a report from the Legislative Analyst's Office, a nonpartisan advisory office for California's lawmakers, makes clear that places in California where more development occurs saw a slower growth in rents for poor households. Rent control and affordable housing cannot by themselves solve the affordability problem since these programs do not benefit the middle class. To the point that the new condos being built in Bankers Hill are high-end, even these additions to the housing stock improve affordability long term. The report explains that new housing gets less expensive as it ages and becomes significantly more affordable in the decades that follow.

There are bigger concerns surrounding the community plan update that help determine the suitable density and height in Uptown. The Uptown Planners voted last year to support San Diego's Climate Action Plan (CAP), which was adopted by City Council in December 2015. The CAP identifies strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with mandatory targets set for 2020 and 2035. One of those strategies called “Bicycling, Walking, Transit & Land Use” says, “Achieve better walkability and transit-supportive densities by locating a majority of all new residential development within Transit Priority Areas.” What is a TPA? A TPA is an area within a half-mile of a major transit stop, and Hillcrest is identified as one of the largest by SANDAG since it is currently serviced by six bus lines.

Additionally, SANDAG identified “Pennsylvania Avenue, Robinson Avenue, Park Boulevard, Washington Street” as an Urban Center in their smart growth map, which requires an average of 40-74-plus du/ac and 50-plus employees per acre in these areas. If the Uptown Planners move forward with their goal to downzone the Hillcrest core to 44 du/ac, the required density averages and employment goals will not be met.

The only way to help reach the CAP mandates is to do our part in Uptown and allow more housing in the parts of our community that have the most transit, walking and biking opportunities: the Hillcrest core. Let's embrace a responsible community plan that allows for an increase in the supply of housing where our city and state require it while revitalizing the community and combating the real tidal wave that is coming: unaffordable housing and climate change. Don't downzone Uptown.

—Elizabeth Robinson is asset manager for The Greenwald Company in San Diego. Bennet Greenwald is the owner of 3715-3795 Sixth Ave. and is one of the members of The Uptown Gateway Council. ❖



## Readers Poll



### Poll results

**Regarding movies, what do you do most often?**

- 63%** Stream movies at home
- 13%** Watch on TV, cable or dish
- 12%** Go out to the cinema often
- 12%** View DVDs

### New poll

**Do you agree with planners that Park Boulevard should get higher density?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

To cast your vote, visit [sduptownnews.com](http://sduptownnews.com).

# Unreal estate

Experts say the Uptown real estate market is calming down, but things appear different

## HouseCalls Michael Good

Is it just me, or has the local real estate market gone completely crazy in the last few months? The asking price for a three-bedroom bungalow in the West End neighborhood of North Park has recently crossed the \$900,000 mark.

That's right, \$900,000. For a three-bedroom bungalow. In North Park. The former middle-class neighborhood that was once famous for its abundance of churches is now famous for its proliferation of craft-beer pubs — and skyrocketing real estate prices.

For the sober-minded, \$900,000 is a staggering number because, well, it's practically a million. Practically a million bucks for a house that sold for \$150,000 20 years ago, and cost about \$3,000 when first built.

At first glance, or even second glance, there seems to be a disconnect here. The 2015 median house price in North Park, according to a February 15, 2016 feature in the Union/Tribune, was \$450,000. North Park, the story noted, is among the 18 ZIP codes in San Diego that have returned to their pre-recession median home price. But \$450,000 is a far cry from \$900,000. In fact, asking twice the median price — and getting it — seems the very definition of "irrational exuberance." So is the market slightly unhinged?

I put the question to several local real estate experts, including Ron Rooney, who was the listing agent for a three-bedroom bungalow on 28th Street that sold for \$925,000 in December. It should be noted that I caught Rooney in an airport in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico waiting to board a plane — not the best place to talk real estate.

"I'm still seeing prices trending up and still seeing multiple offers in our area," he said, trying to overcome the cacophony around him. "In the past month, the properties we've put out offers on have had multiple offers. The market is pretty robust."

But is it too robust? "I think ... some initial listing prices may be higher than warranted. But we've just been seeing very steady, stable appreciation — not like what we were seeing before the bubble in 2008. It feels comfortable to me."

I asked him about a particular listing in the neighborhood that exceeded the \$900,000 mark. Ever judicious (a character trait probably left over from his days as a lawyer), Rooney refused to address any specific active listing — but he was willing to talk in generalities.



Sale pending: North Park, three bedrooms, 2 baths, \$915,000 (Photo by Michael Good)



Hot on the market: This two-bedroom, two-bath in North Park's West End is listed for \$859,000. (Photo by Michael Good)



Historic in more ways than one: This bungalow in the Dryden District sold for more than \$900,000 in December. (Photo by Michael Good)

"In general, I think what happens is agents look at price per square foot on other properties and try to do a dollar-per-square-foot comparison. And it doesn't always translate. You might be able to find comps to support that kind of pricing. But they're not comparable properties," he said.

Rooney brings up the example of the David Dryden Craftsman on 28th Street he just sold. When determining the value of a house of the same size in the neighborhood, he said, "an appraiser might look at that as a comp. But buyers wouldn't look at it as a comp." He explains there are too many other variables involved with vintage homes. It's not only about the numbers. For the homebuyer, there are other factors — esthetic, personal, emotional, historic.

Not surprisingly, the other real estate agents I talked to were reluctant to say that \$900,000 was too much to pay for a bun-

galow. And no one was willing to put the word "crazy" and "home prices" in the same sentence, particularly when talking to the media. Fortunately, however, through the wonders of the Internet, I was able to verify that there is indeed something wacky going on with prices in the West End.

Here are the numbers (you'll notice a rapidly rising price-per-square-foot): In May 2015, an 1,804-square-foot house in the 3500 block of Utah Street sold for \$851,000, or \$472 a square foot. In August, a 1,372-square-foot house in the 3500 block of 29th Street sold for \$750,000, or \$547 a square foot. In September, an historic house in the same block sold for \$950,000, or \$541 a square foot. In December, a 1,530-square-foot house in the 3500 block of 28th Street sold for \$925,000, or \$604 a square foot. Finally, in January 2016,

see House Calls, pg 8

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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

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Keith Comey, Owner

619-295-6242 — kconstructions@gmail.com

When Keith Comey finished working on the 1920s bungalows on Madison Avenue in University Heights 19 years ago, he never guessed that one day he'd live in one of them. Now a University Heights resident, Keith is expanding his construction business to San Diego's historic neighborhoods. KC Construction's projects range from commercial tenant improvements to historic home restorations — and everything in between.

KC Construction is a full service construction company providing professional, contentious, high-quality work at a fair price. Keith's appreciation for historic homes is reflected in his effort to retain and work around unique features while providing necessary modern conveniences to homeowners.

KC Construction's work has been featured in West Coast Craftsman, and was the Quad City Times Home & Garden section's feature story in August 2015 for a historic house renovation in the Midwest that won a preservation award from the local preservation society.

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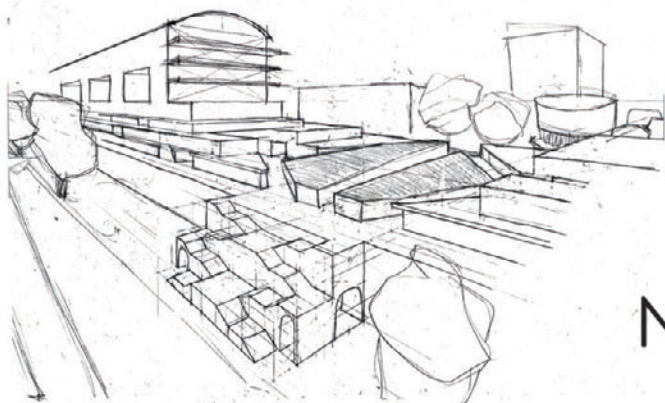
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FROM PAGE 7

## HOUSE CALLS

a 1,272-square-foot house in the 3700 block of 28th Street sold for \$790,000, or \$621 a square foot.

So, from May 2015 to January 2016, prices per square foot in this four-block area rose 31 percent, from \$472 to \$621. And the heat in this micro-neighborhood isn't a complete aberration. According to Trulia, the median price of a three-bedroom house in North Park went up 21.8 percent in 2015. Contrast that to all of San Diego, where the median price was only up 6.9 percent. (Predictions are for an even smaller increase this year.)

Although some buyers are getting priced out of the market — the percentage of renters in the 50 largest U.S. metro areas rose from 36.1 percent in 2006 to 41.1 percent in 2014 — there are still plenty willing to pay above asking price for an historic home in Uptown San Diego. The downside to that is, at that price, fewer preservation-minded people can afford to buy and restore a vintage house. When you're paying close to a million dollars, a home becomes more of an investment, and there's more incentive to remodel it as such: thinking in terms of square footage, number of bathrooms, a recently remodeled kitchen — all those things that HGTV tells us will increase the selling price of a house.

For the West End, what had once been a funky, fringe neighborhood for urban pioneers willing to turn a blighted area into a bungalow heaven has now become a magnet for flippers and wealthy investors. Young people, even successful young people, are not able to buy in as easily as they once could. According to Trulia, older millennials, ages 26 through 34, are buying fewer homes than their age counterparts 10 years ago.

Lawrence Yun, chief economist for National Association of Realtors, blames student debt for the drop in homeownership for this age group. In 2005, student debt totaled \$600 billion. Today that number has risen to \$1.3 trillion.

This situation has caught the attention of preservations. Jaye MacAskill, president of the board for Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO), San Diego's preservation group, is also a real estate agent for Bennion & Devill Homes in Mission Hills. She doesn't hesitate when asked if she thinks prices have gone crazy in Uptown San Diego. "Yes," she said. Even in Rolando, in the College Area, where she sold a house a year ago for \$335,000, prices are increasing rapidly. "Three weeks ago a similar house sold for \$479,000." For those keeping score, that's a 42 percent increase.

MacAskill recommends looking further afield than Mission Hills, Kensington, North Park and South Park. She just sold an extremely well preserved Craftsman in the historic part of Escondido for \$425,000. "La Mesa is still high, but look at Lemon Grove. National City is half the price of Uptown," she said.

"Hopefully people will continue to see historic as cool. And people will keep bringing back all the historic neighborhoods. Barrio Logan has beautiful houses. Preserving old houses always required a pioneering spirit. In the past there were people who had vision and energy and an appreciation of old houses, and a lot of those people went on to found and support SOHO. It seems younger people are again interested in vintage homes. Maybe the tide will swing back."

As for affordability in North Park, that ship may have already sailed.

—Contact Michael Good at [housecallssdun@gmail.com](mailto:housecallssdun@gmail.com). ❖

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(l to r) Councilmember Todd Gloria and Ron Ferrero-Pham, Normal Heights Community Association president, cut the ribbon at the entrance of the Ward Canyon interim dog park. (Photo by Tori Hahn)

## FROM PAGE 1 DOG PARK

nent dog park, a basketball court, a community garden and a community center.

"I'm sure you're all aware that our long-term vision for this property is much bigger," Gloria said. "But I also — looking around at all these dogs here — know you couldn't wait until we amassed the millions of dollars that's going to be necessary to actually build this vision as we want it to be for our community."

Residents from all over the Mid-City area and their canines came out to enjoy the new park. While dogs enjoyed catching Frisbees and "marking their territory," their owners participated in raffle drawings and socialized with other community members.

"Big dogs" weighing more than 25 pounds ran around on one side of the park, while the smaller dogs, separated by a fence, played on the other side.

"This is such a labor of love," said Herman Parker, director of the Park and Recreation Department for San Diego. "This is what Park and Recreation is all about. It's providing those quality facilities where we can all get out and recreate and enjoy the outdoors, and with this particular facility, enjoy our pets who are a part of our family."

Officials said about one-sixth of San Diego's dog population lives in the Mid-City area, which for years has left thousands of dogs with no local place to roam leash-free.

"I've been waiting for this for a long time," Normal Heights resident and dog owner Stephen Throop said.

It's been almost three years since the Normal Heights Community Planning Group held a workshop in August 2013 in which residents pushed for an expansion of Ward Canyon Neighborhood Park.

In February of last year, the community held the Mid-City Unleashed Rally in which residents signed a petition to present to the city. Gloria described dozens of community and public meetings that many attended to express the need for a dog park in the Mid-City area.

Jessica Pasela is involved with the Normal Heights Community Association and has worked for years to rally the community to



(top to bottom) Dogs weighing more than 25 pounds can play in the "big dog" section of the park; Jessica Pasela, a member of the Normal Heights Community Association, welcomes one of the dogs to the park; a group of dachshunds greet each other outside the park's gates (Photos by Tori Hahn)

support a dog park.

"For years [I] have been driving 20 minutes away to go to a dog park and I know everybody there," she said. "To have that with your actual neighborhood, it really does bring that sense of family for everybody."

"Having a place to ... socialize makes the dogs happier, which makes the homeowners happier."

Gloria thanked the city workers who made the park opening possible, but also recognized that

there is still a long road ahead until the project is completed as planned.

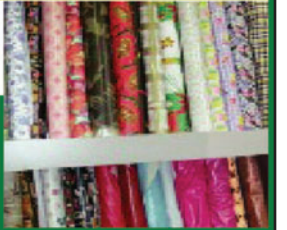
"We know that our community wants and deserves more, and so we're still a few years away from full-funded, but rest assured we are moving forward," he said.

—Tori Hahn is an intern with SDCNN and a senior majoring in journalism at San Diego State University. ❖

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FROM PAGE 1  
PLANNERS

votes in opposition to the motion to return to the June 2015 version. Vice chair Thomas Fox cast the other “no” vote, while chair J. Demetrios Mellos III abstained, which he typically does.

Marlon Pangilinan, the city planner assigned to update the Uptown Community Plan, started the special meeting by repeating his PowerPoint presentation showing how the January revisions would impact individual communities within Uptown. For the most part, the audience remained silent as he showed slides involving Mission Hills, Middletown, Park West, Bankers Hill, the Medical District and University Heights. But when he got to the slides showing the impact on Hillcrest, particularly along Fourth, Fifth and Sixth avenues, the crowd got vocal and someone yelled out “Bullshit!” Pangilinan acknowledged the concerns of those audience members, but asked them to adhere to a civil dialogue.

During the public comments, audience members were divided among residents who oppose the changes and those who support the city’s goals. San Diego had endorsed the “city of villages” concept of development, creating neighborhoods where residents can live, work, play, walk or take public transportation, without having to solely depend upon using a car. And in December, the City Council approved the Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce San Diego’s carbon footprint in the immediate future.

A handful of community leaders and activists — includ-

ing Barry A. Hager of Mission Hills Heritage, Luke Terpstra of Hillcrest Town Council, and Bankers Hill couple Nancy Moors and Ann Garwood of HillQuest.com — spoke against plans to allow more density in the core of Hillcrest.

Garwood accused a new group called The Uptown Gateway Council, which calls itself “the association of commercial property owners in Hillcrest,” of pushing for 200-foot height limits in an area bounded by Washington Street to the north, Pennsylvania Avenue to the south, Seventh Avenue to the east and Fourth Avenue to the west. Indeed, the Gateway group sent a document dated Dec. 1, 2015 to city planner Pangilinan that said, in part, “Allow projects that ‘significantly’ improve and enhance the public realm to achieve densities of one unit per 200 square feet and heights over 200 feet.”

Back in 2014, Uptown Planners instituted a temporary 50-foot height limit for Hillcrest. Buildings west of state Route 163 can go up to 65 feet, however, but this requires a discretionary review by the Uptown Planners and city staff, plus public input. Buildings east of the 163 to the west side of Park Boulevard can go up to 100 feet, but require a “super discretionary” review by stakeholders.

For years, height limits and density have been sore subjects for many Hillcrest residents, but frustrating to owners of property ripe for redevelopment. These include representatives of The Uptown Gateway Council, who also attended the special meeting. They included Sherman Harmer, who represents the Pernicano family and the Pernicano’s Res-

taurant property that has been vacant for 30 years and is an eyesore along Sixth Avenue just south of University Avenue.

Harmer told Uptown Planners to “look down the road to the future” while they are working on the update. He said the community needed to have a vision about the next 25 years and a “can-do spirit.” He said the Sixth and Fifth avenue corridors should be a “statement” property to create a “sense of arrival” when drivers exit state Route 163 onto Sixth Avenue. “It’s an important gateway to Hillcrest,” Harmer said.

Like several other speakers, Harmer said he envisions the core of Hillcrest becoming the next Little Italy neighborhood in San Diego. Others rejected that idea.

Susan Fosselman, a resident of University Heights, said she didn’t believe the Little Italy format would work for Hillcrest. She was concerned that greater density would only bring more luxury condominiums like in Bankers Hill, not affordable housing that is so badly needed.

“How can people pooh-pooh Little Italy? It’s a vibrant community,” architect Ian Epley said.

An attorney from Mission Hills, whose name was unclear, said he has lived in big cities around the world and came back to settle in the Uptown area because he didn’t want to live in the suburbs.

“I cannot afford to live Downtown,” he said.

He warned planners that regardless of their decision, the 20,000 people forecasted to move to the Uptown area by the time of build-out would be coming, no matter what.

Morgan Gelman, who owns the

prominent building on the southwest corner of University and Sixth avenues that once housed City Deli, told the Uptown Planners that they should be looking for “synergy” to revive Hillcrest’s core. He called for a balanced plan that “preserves the residential flavor” but “prepares for the future.”

“Make the entire Uptown a vibrant community,” Gelman said. “Density is not a dirty word.”

Another Mission Hills resident, whose name was difficult to hear in the large hall which exists below the airport’s landing pattern, said he supports more density because it’s smart growth.

“We have an opportunity to bring life to the streets,” he said. “It will bring a greater sense of community to the area.”

Marcela Escobar-Eck, a former planner who is now with Atlantis Group Land Use Consultants, spoke in favor of density. She also authored the letter on behalf of The Uptown Gateway Council that was sent to Pangilinan. She pointed out that greater density was allowed in the 1988 Uptown Community Plan, which is being updated and targeted to be completed by year’s end.

Escobar-Eck agreed with several millennial residents who said that the younger generation is different from their elders: They want to live in urban areas and prefer alternative modes of transportation.

“The younger generation is not big on cars,” she said, pointing to the popularity of car-sharing and bicycling.

The former planner said, “density doesn’t have to come with height,” a point emphasized by several other speakers.

Michael Brennan, one of the voices of the millennial generation on Uptown Planners, said that “density should follow transit.” He said he supported the city’s CAP but also favored the June 2015 documents.

Gary Bonner, another member, pointed out that the Uptown Planners were quibbling over “an increase of 510 units and 810 people,” based on his math.

“The devil’s in the details,” he said. “We are back to square one.”

Figures provided by city planners spell out minor differences. The January update shows that at build-out, Uptown’s population would go from 36,750 to 55,700, and the number of housing units would go from 23,160 to 32,700.

The June 2015 update shows that at build-out, there would be 55,430 residents and 32,540 housing units.

The existing projections, using the 1988 Community Plan that is still in place, project that at build-out Uptown would have 58,870 residents and 34,600 housing units.

It doesn’t take an Einstein to understand that either update is calling for less, not more.

To read the June 2015 update draft, visit [bit.ly/20MQlfc](http://bit.ly/20MQlfc).

In related news, the annual elections for the Uptown Planners will begin at 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 1, at Joyce Beers Community Center in Hillcrest.

—Ken Williams is editor of Uptown News and Mission Valley News and can be reached at [ken@sdcnn.com](mailto:ken@sdcnn.com) or at 619-961-1952. Follow him on Twitter at @KenSanDiego, Instagram at @KenSD or Facebook at KenWilliamsSanDiego. ❖

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FROM PAGE 5  
LETTERS

or the homeless; it will only keep the middle and working class out. This is social class discrimination, plain and simple.

Want to fix the plan and save the environment and the middle class? Attend the Uptown Planners board election March 1 and vote to change the board.

—Sharon Gehl via our website

After six years of hard work by informed community members, multiple meetings and workshops, input from every conceivable stakeholder, the draft plan has been revamped at the last minute to satisfy the demands of outsider developers and greedy property owners. Money is the pure objective here, not the betterment of the community.

To claim that this last minute doubling of height limits and densities in Hillcrest is necessary to satisfy the CAP, and that nothing has been built in 10 years, is absurd and laughable. Obviously these people have not been living here, and the health of the planet is not their priority. Our streets are gridlocked now and what they are building is far from affordable. I have been commuting by bike for 37 years and it has become more and more difficult, even with improved bike lanes, because of traffic. Thousands of people are not giving up their cars.

Hillcrest is and always has been dense in population. The draft plan before it was hijacked already allowed for considerable increased density and heights in a formula that would allow growth but protect the neighborhood from becoming University City. This is what our hard working planners and community members developed through this lengthy process. Why did we work this hard if it was to be thrown out to profit huge development companies? And this money does not stay in the community.

No one is trying to protect strip malls, just the sunlight on our streets, the diversity in the character of the neighborhood, the human scale. The pro-super-density people say look at North Park, but North Park has no 100-foot, 200-foot buildings. They say Hillcrest should be the next Little Italy. I recall that Little Italy rolled back their density/height allowances, as their streets became totally shadowed, etc. (And why would

we want to be Little Italy? There are many services available in our vibrant Hillcrest beyond eating and drinking.)

Uptown and Hillcrest are deficient in park space and have no recreation center or aquatics facility. Stuffing 20,000 more people in the area is excessive with little hope for improved infrastructure.

Finally, I am really disturbed by and disappointed in this sneaky last minute revamp by our City Planners. We deserve better than this.

—Deirdre Lee via our website

Ms. Lee claims there is a “doubling of densities,” yet much of Uptown is actually being down-zoned from the 1988 Community Plan: bit.ly/1oyFJC5. The “heart of Hillcrest” commercial area is being kept at the same density.

We are already witnessing record global temperatures, massive Arctic snowpack melting and seas rising at the fastest rate in 2,800 years. And Uptown residents respond by blocking San Diego’s Climate Action Plan, because of parking and traffic concerns?

—Paul Jamason via our website

About that tidal wave

Re: “Guest editorial: A tidal wave is about to hit Hillcrest” by Mat Wahlstrom [Volume 8, Issue 3 or bit.ly/1nL64Nq. Carol Emerick’s letter to the editor was printed in Volume 8, Issue 4 or at bit.ly/1QM7Qo5]

Ms. Carol Emerick, you seem to be confused. Uptown is reducing its housing potential significantly in the new updated plan. Nothing is being increased at all, in totality. Vast swaths of the community are being DOWN-ZONED in order to accommodate the NIMBY [not in my back yard] demands of homeowners who are either misguided on basic economic principals (supply/demand) or are selfishly seeking to boost their own property values. Ms. Emerick, those people whom you are concerned about (cooks, servers, renters, seniors, etc.) are being pushed out of not only Hillcrest but all of the urban core because of the restrictive housing policies put in place by community planning groups like Uptown Planners. More home construction and less regulation would lower rents and increase affordability. Supply. Demand. Simple. And Hillcrest has the bones for growth. And it’s the Uptown Planners that

have been denying necessary improvements (bike lanes, transit, new recreational facilities). The sad truth is that there will never be enough “infrastructure” in the eyes of NIMBYs. We can’t widen roads or build parking garages on every block. No, the only outcome they seek is to discriminately keep others out – which ends up destroying the very communities they want to protect (assuming that was even their genuine goal in the first place – I’m sure their property values say much more...).

—Matthew via our website

Carol: You seem to have it all wrong here. Uptown Planners is a group who only care about THEMSELVES. They are business owners and retirees whose

only agenda to keep Hillcrest stagnant, and it seems to be working. The result is a tired-looking neighborhood with a great location.

And please spare me with the gridlock on Fifth, Sixth, Robinson, etc. When? Could it be during rush hour, which happens in every large city in the world? San Diego is no different.

And as a resident of Hillcrest for 40 years, I can only imagine how much you reminisce about Mission Valley being nothing but cow pastures. Time to join the 21st century and accept change or be left in the dust. Then again, all you have to do is look out your door to see that Hillcrest is being left in the dust as we speak.


—Justin G. via our website

What’s wrong with density?

Returning to my Hillcrest home after eight years in San Francisco, I’m sorry to find that the neighborhood has lost vitality, and local residents are still bickering about density. All the world’s great, livable cities have much higher densities than Uptown. My neighborhood in San Francisco was built out at three to six stories over nearly the entire area. It was so vibrant that tourists from around the world came to enjoy its stores and restaurants. I rarely needed to use my car since everything was in easy walking distance.

Locally, Downtown San Diego has densities higher than we’d ever see in our lifetimes in Up-

see Letters, pg 16



**MICHAEL KIMMEL**  
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## Join us and learn about Reverse Mortgages

Monday, March 14th  
11:30 to 1 p.m.

\*\*\* Lunch included \*\*\*

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"Money Makes the world go round", the musical Cabaret, immortalized this phrase. Though money is important... the real question is how best can you sensibly leverage your "money" to live the American Dream, owning a Home.



Let's focus on the Boomer: who will be managing their money while the world continues it's changing. The reason: every day for the next 19 plus years 10,000 Americans will be turning 65 years old and start taking their Social Security Benefits, pensions and various financial investment tools into the market place. This scenario has worked well for past generations. The Boomer will be now be re writing the book for senior Financial survival.

The Boomer's home could be a Treasure Chest of non accessible Equity. Accessing this locked up equity is the challenge. Since many seniors are on a fixed income they can no longer qualify for a traditional loan. The reason, since the 2008 collapse of the financial Market, guidelines for repayment have tightened up. Most senior borrowers do not have the ability to repay.

One of the solutions is the Home Equity Conversion Mortgage (HECM) lovingly called a Reverse Mortgage. Before you stop reading, I agree: Reverse Mortgages for a number of reasons have taken a bad rap for the past 20 plus years and in some cases rightfully so.

That said, since 2009 major changes have taken place and new enhancements instituted in 2014 for the Reverse Mortgage Programs. Greater safe guards are in place for the senior borrower and their heirs. There is more flexibility in the HECM program to give greater options to the consumer so they will never have to consider getting a new loan.

There are many myths about Reverse Mortgages let's dispel one. If I take out a Reverse Mortgage the lender will own my home. Fact: FALSE. Homeowners still retain title, ownership, and sell their homes during the life of the loan.

You owe it to yourself to learn the changes of the Government Guaranteed Reverse Mortgage programs so if there is a time you need to consider a Reverse you have a better understanding of how it works. Enabling your money to keep your world going around.

Take the time to learn about the changes of the HECM "Reverse Mortgage" Monday, March 14th at 11:30 a.m. house333 Real Estate Office at 3586 30th Street San Diego, CA 92104

Todd Worthington, Realtor will be hosting a discussion of the changes contact Mr. Ed Badrak ebadrak@rwmloans.com to register for this informational seminar.

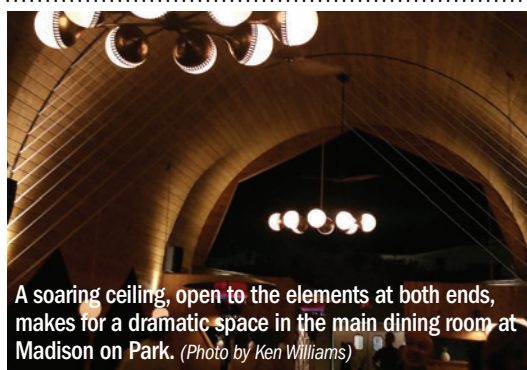
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The Big Front Door sandwich shop is coming to Bankers Hill. (Facebook)

A second location is in the works for **The Big Front Door**, which established its roots with much success four years ago on Park Boulevard in University Heights. The eatery's offshoot will open in about eight months within the mixed-use Fourth Avenue Lofts in Bankers Hill. The 2,500-square-foot space, currently under construction, will feature an outdoor patio and allow for the addition of breakfast service. 2870 Fourth Ave., bdfsandiego.com



A soaring ceiling, open to the elements at both ends, makes for a dramatic space in the main dining room at Madison on Park. (Photo by Ken Williams)

The new **Madison on Park** in University Heights will host its first wine dinner at 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 1, as the founders of **Dragonette Cellars** from Santa Barbara pair selected releases to four meal courses prepared by Chef Mario Cassineri. The wines will also be available for purchase at special prices during the event. Tickets are \$60 per person. For reservations, call 619-269-6566 or email alli@madisononpark.com. 4622 Park Blvd.



Some of San Diego's top female chefs are uniting for a four-course wine dinner March 8 to benefit the **Center for Community Solutions**, a local non-profit that provides emergency shelters to victims of domestic violence. The dinner, to be held at 6:30 p.m. at **Cucina Enoteca Del Mar**, also celebrates International Women's Day and more specifically, Festa Della Donna, which commemorates the women's liberation movement in Italy in the 19th century.

The dinner will be crafted by Rosa Geremia of **Cucina Enoteca**; Donna Antaloczy of **Ironside Fish & Oyster**; Gina Freize of **Venissimo Cheese**; Karrie Hills, formerly of **The Red Door**; and Katie Grebow, formerly of **Café Chloe**. Acclaimed local sommelier Lisa Redwine will oversee the wine pairings.

The cost is \$125 per person (plus service fee and sales tax). Tickets can be purchased at [urbankitchengroup.com](http://urbankitchengroup.com). 2730 Via de la Valle, Del Mar, 858-704-4500



Duck confit poutine and other new dishes are in the works at **Pardon My French Bar and Kitchen**, which will replace **Heat Bar and Kitchen** (Courtesy of the Delfe Group)

As of March 2, **Heat Bar and Kitchen** on the North Park/Hillcrest border will become **Pardon My French Bar and Kitchen**, a new venture by Eric Fillion and his wife, Lindsey. The couple said they recently purchased **Heat** from Sam Khorish and Pasqual Courtin, who opened the radiantly lit restaurant a few years ago after operating **Urban Grind** in the same space.

"We love this place so much that we're going to make only minor changes with the community in mind," said Fillion, who plans on adding a "European vibe" through music, art, a boutique wine list, and a few French dishes that will include Croque-monsieur (and madame) sandwiches and duck confit poutine.

The couple have been active in the art world for the past several years in their efforts to spotlight various artists through social events at local hotels and restaurants. 3797 Park Blvd., 619-546-4328

Farewell to **Claire de Lune Coffee Lounge** in North Park, which recently closed after serving as a community gathering spot and cultural hub for artists, writers and musicians since 1997. Owner Claire Magner reportedly shuttered the business because of financial losses. Magner also owns the adjacent **Sunset Temple**, off Kansas Street, which will remain open for rental events. 2906 University Ave.

—Frank Sabatini Jr can be reached at [fsabatini@san.rr.com](mailto:fsabatini@san.rr.com). ♦



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# JARS AND SQUARES

Come On  
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Dr. Ink

Happy hour at Napizza is so new that there still wasn't any signage promoting it when I recently popped in for a bite to go at the HUB Hillcrest Market location. Only after randomly inquiring did I learn that draft beers and wines by the glass (or bottle) are half-price on weekday afternoons. And slices of their famous Roman-style pizzas are \$1 off. My pending errands were put on temporary hold at that point.

For a mere \$7.30, I savored a pint of craft beer served in a glass canning jar and a square cut of pizza verging on the equivalent of two triangular-shaped slices. Today's drink-pizza deals don't get any better than this.

Well past the lunch rush, barely a few customers occupied the large dining room, which was permeated by the aromas of tomato sauce, toasted cheese and baked dough. The outdoor patios along the front and side of the building were quiet as well. Yet the pizza racks were brimming with a colorful array of oven-fresh choices.

On the other side of the central order counter are 10 taps, all craft beers. New to the lineup is Honey Hips, a strong blonde ale by Latitude 33 Brewing Company in Vista. I was practically sold on its honeydew undertones and sparkling finish when a staffer gave me sample. But then the Blood Orange Wit by Refuge Brewery caught my eye.

It's one of my favorite witbiers

on the market — cloudy, slightly fruity and exceptionally smooth when served this cold. A full jar of the beer sells for only \$3 during happy hour.

Other suds on tap included Black House coffee stout by Modern Times Brewery, Delicious IPA by Stone Brewing Company, and Racer IPA by Bear Republic. The wine selection is limited in comparison, with a few reds and whites carrying unfamiliar labels and perched on a back shelf. They're available by the glass or bottle, also at half price.

The pizza is unlike any you'll find in San Diego, given its medium-thick crust that is surprisingly airy inside. Topped with a wide choice of ingredients, the dough is made with a blend of wheat and soy flour imported from Rome, plus an extra measure of water compared to standard recipes. It's then allowed to rise for 72 hours until the yeast is dead.

After baking in sheet pans for several minutes in a high-heat oven, it becomes delicately crispy on the bottom and remarkably puffy in the middle.

I chose the "spice me up" crowned with bright tomato sauce, mozzarella, crumbled sausage, roasted peppers and jalapenos. No need to sprinkle hot chili flakes onto it because the spice factor from the meat and peppers provided a high punch that found its perfect match with the intensely refreshing blood orange wit beer.

Napizza also offers the new happy-hour deals at its Little Italy and 4S Ranch locations. ❖



The "spice me up" pizza

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A place for happy hour  
in HUB Hillcrest Market  
(Photos by Dr. Ink)

## RATINGS

**Drinks:** ★★★★  
The vino selection is limited to a few reds and whites from a mishmash of boutique wineries sold by the glass or bottle. Craft beers are available on 10 taps, including the recently introduced strong blonde ale, Honey Hips, by Latitude 33 Brewing Company.

**Food:** ★★★★  
Napizza fills a niche within San Diego for its Roman-style pizza distinguished by moist dough that is given 72 hours to rise before it's gently stretched into sheet pans. The result is lightweight crust that is both puffy and crispy.

**Value:** ★★★★  
You can drink beer and wine throughout the middle part of the weekdays at half the cost while washing down generously sized pizza squares priced mostly below \$4.

**Service:** ★★★★  
Customers order and pay at the counter, where the staff patiently guides you through the vast pizza selection and provides tasting samples of the draft beers.

**Atmosphere:** ★★★★  
The indoor dining area is modernly designed and roomy with big windows looking out to University Avenue. Ample seating is also available on the front and side patios. ❖



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## Mediterranean street food on Fifth Avenue

Restaurant  
Review

Frank Sabatini Jr.



Gone are the burgers, chicken wings and rambunctious canine gatherings that defined Doghouse Bar & Grill. In its place is a new-comer from Los Angeles known for amping up the flavors of street foods common throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.

Spitz takes doner wraps, sandwiches and french fries to a twisted, lip-smacking level, which can become redundant at times depending on how you order.

Named after the rotating "spits" on which stacked meat is cooked, most items on the menu capture the combined tang of pepperoncinis, copious red onions, creamy feta cheese and garlicky tzatziki.

We started with the Berliner fries, which brought forth the additional inclusions of shredded cabbage, carrot slaw, cucumbers, olives and house-made red sauce spiked with Fresno chilies.

Unlike carne asada fries or poutine, these are too exquisite to be labeled "drunk food." The toppings were salad-fresh and the thin-cut spuds buried underneath were intriguingly crispy. Yet if sold from a late-night cart parked outside any Uptown watering hole, they'd sell well and effectively remove the sway from your stagger. Not even in Berlin's top nightlife neighborhoods are trendy fries served with this much pizzazz.

The company's founders, Bryce Rademan and Robert Wicklund, are former college buddies. They launched their first location near Occidental College several years ago after Rademan spent a semester in Europe and fell in love with doner kebabs. They've since opened three other outlets in L.A. and two in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Spitz's San Diego outpost is co-franchised by Jordan Bernhardt, who managed locations in Los Angeles before deciding to abandon his plan of attending law school to invest in the eatery's steady success.

Here, the brightened space features a large cocktail bar stocked with vats of house-made sangria and craft beers, plus sturdy wood high tops, chandeliers crafted from aluminum work lights, and walls painted with abstract imagery by L.A. artist Devon Paulson.

The back patio, formerly a free zone for dogs under the

(clockwise from bottom left) Spitz branches into San Diego from Los Angeles; the 'street cart' doner wrap with beef and lamb; zesty feta doner sandwich with chicken; doquitos; house-made sangria  
(Photos by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

SPITZ

| 3515 Fifth Ave. (Hillcrest) | 619-326-8556 | eatatspitz.com  
Prices: salads, bowls and specialty french fries, \$3.50 to \$12; wraps and sandwiches, \$8.50 and \$9

previous tenant, now embodies freshly stained picnic tables and an AstroTurf area for playing cornhole. Table games such as Jenga and Connect Four are scattered throughout the eatery as additional welcome mats to competitive-minded hipsters.

We proceeded to chicken "doquitos," a Mediterranean spin on taquitos encased in delicate tubes of deep-fried lavash bread. Filling options also include cheese or gyros-style beef-lamb strips shaved from the spit.

Draped in a riot of ingredients, the pepperoncinis, onions, zesty feta and garlic aioli in particular left little chance for the spiced chicken inside to sing. Yet despite the similar concert of flavors we encountered on our Berliner fries, we agreed the dish was novel and dynamic, unlike anything you'll find in traditional kebab shops.

A side order of cinnamon-kissed falafel set atop a scoop of smooth hummus served as a vi-

able palate refresher before clutching our hands around a wrap and sandwich.

I chose the "zesty feta doner" with chicken nestled between two puffy slices of grilled focaccia bread. This time, green bell peppers and cool tzatziki emerged from the recurring base of tangy ingredients. I could also taste hints of seasoning infusing the poultry and the juice of ripe tomatoes oozing out the sides. Augmented crisp romaine lettuce layered somewhere within, it rivaled some of the wondrous creations I've encountered at Ike's Place in the HUB Hillcrest Market.

The sandwich was as equally gigantic as the "street cart doner" wrap boasting compact swirls of beef-lamb shavings contained in fresh lavash bread sourced from a Middle Eastern baker in L.A.

There were no pepperoncinis in this item, which we didn't mind. The meat was abundant and flavorful. And the veggies maintained their character, despite the pres-

ence of garlic aioli and tzatziki.

Other menu choices include doners with fries tucked inside; another capturing hummus, kalamata olives and feta; and a "doner basket" that features pretty much the entire menu in one huge piling – fries, salad, falafel, crispy garbanzos, olives, fried bread, a choice of meat and more.

The food at Spitz is bold and stimulating, although we learned that requesting light onions or pepperoncinis – or none at all in certain cases – might be the way to go when ordering multiple dishes. Such customizations will bring you closer to the well-prepared proteins and sauces that are at the heart of these zingy constructs.

—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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Puzzle answers on page 16

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FROM PAGE 11

LETTERS

town, yet the traffic is not so bad. Compare that to suburban areas such as the north city, where low densities go hand-in-hand with terrible traffic. The specter of Los Angeles is always raised by low-density advocates, but LA is primarily a low-density, single-family city — it's the sprawl that makes their traffic so bad. It's ironic that growth opponents point to LA as the example of what we want to avoid, while their policies would ensure that's exactly what we would become.

We need hundreds of new homes in Hillcrest as soon as pos-

sible to breathe life back into our businesses.

—Larry Penman via email

Drivers, obey the law

Re: "A rising toll: 54 lives lost in 2015" [Volume 8, Issue 4 or at bit.ly/20HkTfV]

Educating neighbors on how to create safer streets is mentioned in the article. Here's a starting point: Educate drivers about the pedestrian right-of-way law.

As I cross El Cajon Boulevard at Alabama or Mississippi streets — intersections without marked crosswalks — NO ONE, not even police cars, stops for pedestrians. Unless my understanding is obsolete, the law states that at intersections, with or without marked

crosswalks, pedestrians have right of way. And get this: When I requested that the city at least place a crosswalk at one of these intersections, the traffic engineers did their study, and the response came back that they couldn't do that. Why? Because it would create liability, since there are no "traffic calming" measures on that stretch of "The Boulevard," so drivers speed and would be less likely to stop for a pedestrian in a crosswalk! In other words, damn the law; WALKER BEWARE. Remarkable, isn't it?

—Linda Castaneda via email

Density and transportation

Re: "The law of density," an opinion column by architect Eric Domeier [Volume 8, Issue 4 or bit.ly/1TsUzqD]

Thank you Eric for this well-written opinion column. Let me add that to carry out the state climate legislation, the city of San Diego recently adopted a Climate Action Plan that was also approved by the Uptown Planners. The plan calls for reducing pollution by building half of all new housing within half a mile of trolley and bus stops in Uptown and other urban areas. Here is a link to the plan: bit.ly/1p218z8. The most important part is the map on the last page of the Appendices that shows where densities should be increased.

—Sharon Gehl via our website

There is one glaring failure in logic in this opinion column and in the statements of those who propose (apparently) unlimited density near bus lines: They have not actually quantified what level of density is appropriate and why the density allowed by current zoning would not be sufficient. They want to maximize density in central to seemingly no limit, and would be perfectly OK with building 20-story buildings in every last foot of Uptown, while the suburbs continue with yet more sprawling McMansions, zero walkability, and fancy landscaping with 20-foot palm trees planted at our expense along the medians of all the new walled-off suburban thoroughfares.

These people don't see any imbalance in this approach. They fail to see that there is any possible middle ground. They wouldn't know a balanced, smart-growth approach if it hit them in the face. They'll happily turn Uptown into a typical overcrowded, dirty, gridlocked area with no green space and no parking, while doing nothing to promote responsible, more intelligent development elsewhere. These people don't have a clue about city planning, and all they know how to do is jump on board an overly simplistic knee-jerk cause with no awareness that tradeoffs might actually exist, or that people who disagree with them might actually have an insight or two. These people (including Todd Gloria and his minions) need to come back down to Earth and start talking real data and real facts and details for a change rather than pie-in-the-sky generalizations and poo-pooing everyone who's not on their bandwagon.

—David Gleason via our website

The city hasn't kept up its infrastructure for the population that it has now.

Until it does that, there shouldn't be any more density added to Uptown.

And apparently, western

Riverside County hasn't gotten the message on smart growth. Tract after tract of sprawl development is taking over what used to be agricultural land.

This is all about developers making money — not the environment.

It's about getting Downtown prices for Uptown land by rezoning for higher densities.

Never mind that our streets are already gridlocked. Are any of these proposed high rises going to have zero parking? I doubt it. Will they be affordable? No way!

—Andrew Towne via our website

Mr. Towne refers to "infrastructure" but we know that just means more and wider roads. How do we widen our roads without tearing down existing housing? And wider roads just encourage more driving (Google "induced demand"), pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change — while making our deadly streets even more dangerous for people on bikes and foot.

San Diego is a vibrant city, with over 3 million people in its metropolitan area, yet we expect our roads to be free of congestion? That's completely unrealistic and a sorry excuse to prevent transit-oriented development in Uptown.

—Paul Jamason via our website

Veterans and road

Re: "The state of San Diego" [Volume 8, Issue 4 or bit.ly/1mKud5c]

I definitely support Mayor Kevin Faulconer's infrastructure initiatives. Properly housing our veterans and improving our roads should be top of the list!

—Steve Walker via our website

'Great insightful article'

Re: "Neighborhood schools are the new charters" [Volume 8, Issue 3 or bit.ly/1zIvrU6]

I agree with a lot you say here. If you don't "like" the neighborhood school, be part of change. My child will be attending her neighborhood school. I teach at a school about 10 miles away and my co-workers often ask if I'd enroll my child at our school. I respect my co-workers reasons for doing it but I will not. I want her to grown up with neighborhood friends. Great insightful article.

—Ruby Baker via our website

A poor choice

Re: Saving the Golden Hill Fountain Grotto [Volume 8, Issue 2 or bit.ly/1nEhwcV]

Glad to see this happen, but too bad they chose Carpobrotus for some of their ice plant.

—H. Johnson via our website\*

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PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Sudoku

Puzzle from page 15

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

Culinary Contributors

Crossword from page 15

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L | A | P | E | L | H | U | G | O | C | R | A | M |   |   |
| E | N | U | R | E | E | N | I | D | O | A | H | U |   |   |
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| S | E | E | S | A | L | O | E | L | I | S | T | S |   |   |
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| O | F | F | B | A | K | E | D | B | E | A | N | S |   |   |
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UPTOWN CALENDAR

FEATURED EVENTS

'Brew School'd'

Saturday, Feb. 27

This event by North Park's own Finest City Improv presents a unique beer tasting experience. Finest city founder and CEO Amy Lisewski narrates as a cast of four characters and one brewmaster from Green Flash Brewing Co. taste, evaluate and elaborate on four brews for the audience's entertainment. As an improv show, the script-free show relies on audience participation. This event takes place at Green Flash's new Cellar 3 tasting room (12260 Crosthwaite Circle, Poway). Visit [finestcityimprov.com](http://finestcityimprov.com) for more information.

Book signing

Saturday, Feb. 27

West Grove Collective (3010-B Juniper St., South Park) will host this free book signing from 3 – 4 p.m. The featured author will be Maria Desiderata Montana, the author of "100 Things to Do in San Diego Before You Die." Visit [westgrovesouthpark.com](http://westgrovesouthpark.com) for more information.

Oscar viewing party and red carpet event

Sunday, Feb. 28

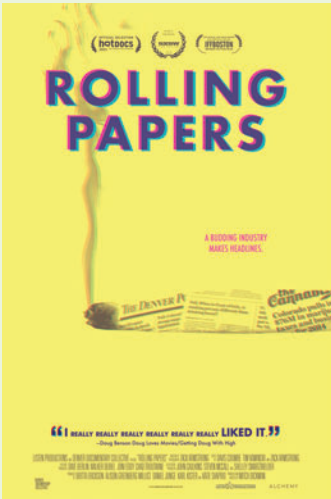
Cinema Under the Stars (4040 Goldfinch St., Mission Hills) will host a special viewing party for the 2016 Oscars. The event at the outdoor theater will feature small plates by The Patio on Goldfinch and Lefty's Chicago Pizzeria, sparkling wine, sparkling water, red and white wines and Stella Artois beer. Guests can also bring their own beverages to the party (no spirits). Guests are encouraged to dress up and be photographed on the red carpet from 4:30 – 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$50 for general admission and \$60 for limited reserved seating. Tickets can be purchased at Tops Salon (4040 Goldfinch St., Mission Hills) or by leaving a message at 619-295-4221 (a representative will return your call). Visit [topspresents.com](http://topspresents.com) for more information.

Sunday Soiree

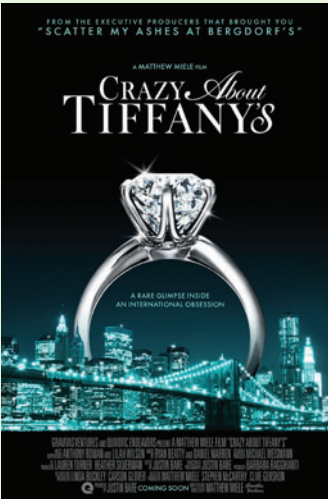
Sunday, Feb. 28

This pole and burlesque show hosted by Sunny Moon will kick off at 5 p.m. (doors open at 4 p.m.) at The Merrow (1271 University Ave., Hillcrest). Tickets are \$10 for singles and \$16 for couples. Visit [on.fb.me/1PTLkfx](http://on.fb.me/1PTLkfx) for more information.

Digital Gym gems:



**Feb. 26 – March 3:**  
"Rolling Papers" is a documentary that explores the new world of "pot journalism" following the legalization of marijuana in Colorado. The film examines the impact of the legalization on a popular newspaper, The Denver Post, as their city becomes the focus of a national conversation about the divisive topic. Unrated. 79 minutes.



**Feb. 26 – March 3:**  
The fully authorized documentary "Crazy About Tiffany's" takes viewers behind the scenes of Tiffany & Co. to show how the high-end retailer has captivated customers for decades. The film explores everything from the signature blue box to the company's influence on American culture. Unrated. 87 minutes.



**Feb. 28:** Film Geeks is starting a new film series called "Get Hammered," featuring monster movies from Great Britain's Hammer Pictures. They'll start with this screening of "Horror of Dracula" starring Christopher Lee as Count Dracula and Peter Cushing as Dr. Van Helsing. 82 minutes.

Digital Gym is located at 2921 El Cajon Blvd. in North Park. Visit [DigitalGym.org](http://DigitalGym.org) for show times and tickets and information on additional films.

RECURRING EVENTS

Mondays:

**North Park Toastmasters meeting:** 6:30 – 8 p.m., weekly meeting at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 3725 30th St., North Park. 8469. [toastmastersclubs.org](http://toastmastersclubs.org).  
**Open Mic Night:** 7:30 p.m., the mic is open to you at Lestat's Coffee House, 3343 Adams Ave., Normal Heights, free. [Lestat.com](http://Lestat.com).  
**Unsung Genius:** 6:30 p.m., bi-weekly trivia hosted by Rafael Gaitan starting at 7 p.m.; \$2 to play; cash, bar tab and other prizes. Karaoke to follow at 9 p.m. on the big stage at The Merrow, 1271 University Ave., Hillcrest. [Themerrow.com](http://Themerrow.com).

Tuesdays:

**Curbside Bites:** 5:30 – 8:30 p.m., gathering of gourmet food trucks at 3030 Grape St., South Park. [Curbsidebites.com](http://Curbsidebites.com).  
**Tasty Truck Tuesdays:** 6 – 9 p.m., Smitty's Service Station hosts several food trucks under their well-lit shade structure, 3442 Adams Ave., Normal Heights. [Sdfoodtrucks.com](http://Sdfoodtrucks.com).  
**Open Mic Charlie's:** 7 – 9:30 p.m. (except the third Tuesday), open mic night at Rebecca's Coffee House, 3015 Juniper St., South Park, free. [Rebeccascoffeehouse.com](http://Rebeccascoffeehouse.com).

Wednesdays:

**Wednesday Night Experience:** 7 – 8 p.m., uplifting and spiritually inspiring experiences for all, weekly at Universal Spirit Center, 3858 Front St., Hillcrest, love offering requested. [Universalspiritcenter.org](http://Universalspiritcenter.org).  
**Storytelling:** 7 – 8:45 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month featuring members of Storytellers of San Diego at Rebecca's Coffee House, 3015 Juniper St., South Park, Suggested \$5 donation. Ages 12 and up. [Storytellersofsandiego.org](http://Storytellersofsandiego.org).

Thursdays:

**Uptown Sunrise Rotary Club meetings:** 7 a.m., weekly meeting at Panera Bread, 1270 Cleveland Ave., Hillcrest. [Sdurotary.org](http://Sdurotary.org).  
**Gentle yoga for seniors:** 2:30 – 4 p.m., presented by The Center and Silver Age Yoga Community Outreach (SAYCO) at The San Diego LGBT Center, 3909 Centre St., Hillcrest, free. [Thecentersd.org](http://Thecentersd.org).  
**North Park Farmers Market:** 3 – 7 p.m., in the parking lot behind CVS at 32nd Street and University Avenue, North Park, free. [Northparkfarmersmarket.com](http://Northparkfarmersmarket.com).  
**Kornflower's Open Mic:** Signups at 7

p.m., open mic (no poetry or comedy) 7 – 10 p.m. Family-friendly event at Rebecca's Coffee House, 3015 Juniper St., South Park, free. [Rebeccascoffeehouse.com](http://Rebeccascoffeehouse.com).

**Liberty Toastmasters Club:** 7 p.m., at Saint Paul's Community Care Center, 328 Maple St., Bankers Hill. [Libertytoastmasters.org](http://Libertytoastmasters.org).

**Kirtan Musical Meditation:** 8:15 p.m., chant and sing contemporary mantras celebrating love and life at Pilgrimage of the Heart Yoga, 3287 Adams Ave., Normal Heights, donation requested. [Pilgrimageyoga.com](http://Pilgrimageyoga.com).

**Cinema Under the Stars:** 8:30 p.m., classic movie screenings at 4040 Goldfinch St., Mission Hills. Additional showings Friday – Sunday. Tickets start at \$15. [Topspresents.com](http://Topspresents.com).

Fridays:

**Memory Café:** 10 – 11 a.m., second and fourth Fridays. Gathering place for those with memory loss, caretakers and those worried about memory problems in the Common Room at First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, 4190 Front St., Hillcrest. At-will donation. [Memoryguides.org](http://Memoryguides.org) and [Firstuusatndiego.org](http://Firstuusatndiego.org).

**Square Dancing Classes:** 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., every Friday. No previous dance experience needed. Recital Hall, 2130 Pan American Plaza. \$50 for 13 classes. 858-277-7499 or circulators. [sdsda.org](http://sdsda.org).

Saturdays

**Old Town Saturday Market:** 9 a.m. – 4 p.m., on Harney Street and San Diego Avenue, Old Town, free. Also held on Sundays. [Oldtown-saturdaymarket.com](http://Oldtown-saturdaymarket.com).

**Golden Hill Farmers Market:** 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m., on B Street between 27th and 28th streets, Golden Hill, free. [Sdmarketmanager.com](http://Sdmarketmanager.com).

**Comedy Heights:** 8 – 10 p.m., local comedians take the stage next to Twiggs Coffeehouse at 4590 Park Blvd., University Heights, free. [Comedyheights.com](http://Comedyheights.com).

Sundays

**Hillcrest Farmers Market:** 9 a.m. – 2 p.m., under the Hillcrest Pride Flag, Harvey Milk and Normal streets, free. [Hillcrestfarmer-smarket.com](http://Hillcrestfarmer-smarket.com).

**Karaoke:** 8 p.m., your chance to shine on the big stage at The Merrow, 1271 University Ave., Hillcrest. [Themerrow.com](http://Themerrow.com).

To view local community organization meeting information online, visit: [sduptownnews.com/community-organization-meetings](http://sduptownnews.com/community-organization-meetings).

—Email calendar items to [ken@sdcdn.com](mailto:ken@sdcdn.com). ❖



'Cookies on Tap'

Friday, Feb. 26 – Sunday, Feb. 28

Mike Hess Brewing and Stone Brewing Co. are partnering with the Girl Scouts San Diego during National Girl Scout Cookie Weekend. Pairings of five beers (5.5-ounce pours) and five corresponding cookies will be available for \$15 at Mike Hess Brewing's tasting rooms in Miramar, Ocean Beach and North Park (3812 Grim Ave.) and at Stone Brewing's tasting rooms in Oceanside and Downtown. A kick-off gathering on Friday night from 6 – 8 p.m. at Mike Hess' North Park location will give attendees the chance to learn about the newly revamped Girl Scouts San Diego Alumnae Association. There will also be giveaways and a grand prize drawing (for a year's supply of Girl Scout Cookies) at the kick-off event. A portion of the proceeds from each pairing flight will go to the Girl Scouts San Diego.

'A Single Lady: Love in Three Acts'

Starts Saturday, March 5

This new monthly performance begins tonight at 8 p.m. at Finest City Improv (4250 Louisiana St., North Park). Each performance will recruit a new real-life San Diego single lady to share her dating experience with the audience and take on the role of the only non-improviser on stage. After the introduction, the stage becomes a modern-day matchmaking show and finally the scene for matrimony – but will this month's lady find love or a lifelong commitment to her Netflix account? Tickets are \$15. Get more information at [finestcityimprov.com](http://finestcityimprov.com).

Fourth annual Arts and Craft Beer Festival

Thursday, March 10

Doors will open at 6 p.m. for this event presented by the Bankers Hill Business Group and the San Diego Brewers Guild. The event will be held at The Abbey (2825 Fifth Ave., Bankers Hill) and feature some of San Diego's top breweries including Uptown-area brewers like Hillcrest Brewing Company, Thorn Street Brewing and more. There will also be food served by local restaurants including Barrio Star, Mister A's, Pizzicato and more. Community members are invited to eat, drink and mingle with business owners and neighbors. Tickets are \$25 through March 1; \$30 thereafter and \$35 at the door. Visit [bankershill.ticketleap.com/festival](http://bankershill.ticketleap.com/festival) for details and tickets.

23rd annual San Diego Latino Film Festival

Thursday, March 10 – Sunday, March 20

North Park media center Digital Gym (2921 El Cajon Blvd., North Park) will be one of the main screening venues for this festival. Digital Gym will host 20 – 30 films over the course of the 11-day festival. Some of the films to be screened at Digital Gym include: a Brazilian drama "Aspirantes," an Argentinian dramedy "Camino a la Paz," a Venezuelan drama-romance "Desde allá," and much more. Visit [sdlatinofilm.com](http://sdlatinofilm.com) for details and tickets.

FROM PAGE 1  
REFUGEES

conciliates being a mother of three children (and a fourth one is on the way) with having her own child-care business and attending Cuyamaca Community College. She wants to major in women's studies and transfer to San Diego State University to complete a psychology degree.

This Ethiopian woman doesn't fit the traditional role for her gender in Africa. "My sisters say that I'm crazy. I'm very different than my sisters. I'm very open-minded, very outgoing and very adaptive," Hussein said.

Hussein wears a colorful veil and an eye-catching long dress with brocades. She has challenged many traditions of her culture. She hung out with African-Americans in high school, divorced her first husband, and built her own business. However, the challenges that she has faced are not different from the ones of other girls that come to America as refugees.

"We slept on a floor for a couple of months when we first came and we were without a lot of hygiene products because we didn't know what to buy. We didn't have the resources or guidance that the newcomers are getting," Hussein said.

About 50,000 African refugees live in San Diego, 30,000 of them from Somalia.

The Somali Bantu Association Of America helps African refugees to settle down in their new country. When they arrive, the organization sends a volun-



(above) Tegest Alemu (left) translates from five African languages for other women at the Somali Bantu Association of America. (right) Madina Hussein uses the computer room for her studies. (Photos by María José Durán)

teer to their apartment for a cultural tour in their first language.

"There was a lot of families that whenever they went to the bathroom and flushed, they thought that there was somebody there and they run away scared," said Said Abiyou, founder and CEO of the association. "They weren't expecting all that. So families couldn't go to the bathroom; they were peeing themselves or going outside

to pee."

Many Somali refugees never had electricity, a fridge or a stovetop. If no one guides them through the most simple aspects of everyday life, they are completely lost or overwhelmed.

The newcomer families face challenges with their health, housing and employment. However, their biggest trial is the language. The association has partnered with Learning

Upgrade, a software that helps struggling students advance in English and math by using music and video games.

Refugees can learn the basics of speaking, reading and writing in 120 hours. Vinid Lobo, founder and CEO of Learning Upgrade, was delighted to see the success of this program.

"I was almost brought to tears when Said invited me to the lab and these guys were

saying 'three months ago I didn't know how to say a word and now I'm speaking,'" Lobo said. His company has donated unlimited licenses of the learning software to the association.

The association's headquarters consist of four rooms in a City Heights apartment. African refugees find there a space to gather, use the computers, make phone calls, or attend training and counseling sessions. One of their clients is Hussein.

"I don't have a computer or printer at home and I have to do my essays for school. So I can come here and print it for free," Hussein said.

Abiyou founded the association five years ago. He arrived to San Diego in 2005 after fleeing the civil war in Somalia. Abiyou's mother emigrated with her three remaining children after she had seen 12 of her sons get killed in front of her. Abiyou and his family can't imagine going back to war-torn Somalia.

"If we go back, we are going to get killed. Here we have freedom of speech. I never in my life expected to drive a beautiful car, dress like this or have this office," Abiyou said. Back in Somalia, he was enslaved.

The Somali Bantu Association Of America is Abiyou's way to give back to his community. The nonprofit, which basically runs via donations, needs volunteer attorneys, instructors and counselors. To donate or come forward, visit sbaoa.org.

—María José Durán is a freelance writer from San Diego. She can be reached at emeyin@hotmail.com.❖

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Cary Donaldson and Amelia Pedlow. Photo by Jim Cox.

# Jesus, Joseph Smith and rollicking fun

## Theater Review

Charlene Baldridge



Presented by Broadway San Diego (BSD) at the Civic Theatre through March 6, “The Book of Mormon” opened to a packed house Wednesday (Feb. 24). It was great fun to arrive at Civic Plaza for an early dinner and see hopeful theatergoers (who arrived two-and-a-half hours prior to the 7 p.m. curtain to register) at the pre-show ticket lottery for \$25 tickets. This is not, however, a recommended way to purchase tickets for the hit Broadway show that caused such a stir and grabbed 11 Tony Awards when it opened in 2011 at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre, where it is still playing. BSD first brought the musical here in May 2014.

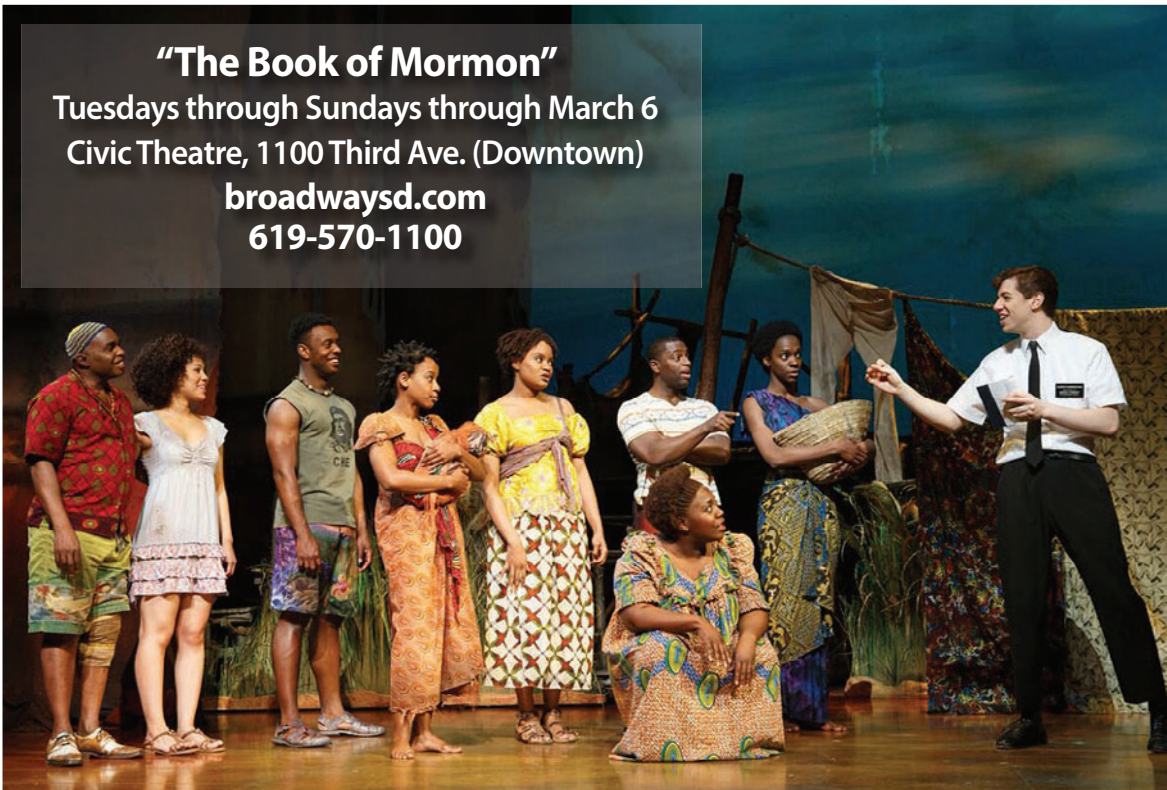
The controversy lies in the content. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Jesus is a character and so is Mormonism founder Joseph Smith) was outraged, to say the least, picketing and boycotting and threatening. Audiences have been rolling in the aisles ever since. The New York Times chief theater critic Ben Brantley called “The Book of Mormon” the “best musical of this century.”

It is easy to love such an audacious, impious and outrageous

satire, which so joyously sends up Mormon doctrine, text and religious practices. Even those with a rudimentary knowledge of Mormons get the humor in songs such as “Two by Two,” “All American Prophet,” “I Am Africa,” and especially the eventually glittering young elders’ tap number “Turn It Off.” Some even testify to being moved by the uplifting ending.

No wonder: Trey Parker, Robert Lopez and Matt Stone brought forth “The Book of Mormon.” Parker and Stone are best known for the TV series “South Park,” and Lopez wrote the musical, “Avenue Q.” So it might be said the authors’ stock-in-trade is being thoroughly and delightfully offensive. Remember the copulating puppets in “Avenue Q”? “The Book of Mormon” tops that with living cast members’ (simulated) acts, and furthermore features the village doctor, who keeps reminding us that he has maggots on his scrotum. My favorite is the “Little House of Uncle Thomas” parody that features large, floppy procreative organs. The climax of the show and the mission, it is performed to tip-top Elders from the United States who’ve heard how their Ugandan outpost has baptized an entire village.

This is largely due to the inept and “bent” Book of Mormon as told to the people by Elder Cunningham (A.J. Holmes), who “makes things up.” His egotistic mission



A.J. Holmes and cast members in a scene from “Book of Mormon” at the Civic Theatre (courtesy of broadwaysd.com)

partner, Elder Price (Billy Harigan Tighe), tries mightily, but fails to control Cunningham, who adores him and hopes to be his friend. The enclave of elders they settle is not without its homosexual innuendo, which adds to the merriment. What you should know, going in, is that young Mormon men, having reached adulthood, go off on a two-year mission, two by two, to introduce others to the Book of Mormon.

The Ugandan villagers are afflicted with AIDS, and terrorized by The General, who wants to impose female circumcision on all the young women, including

the sweet, virginal Nabulungi (Alexandra Ncube), who is protected by her brother, Mafala Hatimbi (Stanley Wayne Mathis). Nabulungi and Elder Cunningham have a truly wonderful duet when she, rather sweet on him, asks, “Baptize Me.”

Despite bumbling all around, the true mission is a success and, the Elder Hierarchy having departed; there is a happy, uplifting ending for the villagers and the young Elders, who sing the unforgettable musical number, “I Believe.”

I believe that it’s easy to become addicted to this joy-filled Broadway musical. When you see

it, you will long to return right away to hear the magic (a union orchestra of nine, five of them traveling with the tour) and to see the wonders of its production as directed by Casey Nicholaw and Trey Parker, designed by Scott Pask, costumed by Ann Roth and featuring lighting by Brian MacDevitt, sound by Brian Ronan, and choreography by Nicholaw. There is not a weak link.

—Charlene Baldridge has been writing about the arts since 1979. Follow her blog at [charlenebaldridge.com](http://charlenebaldridge.com) or reach her at [charb81@gmail.com](mailto:charb81@gmail.com).

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