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La Mesa Police Chief Ray Sweeney (Photo by Jeff Clemetson)

# Meet Chief Sweeney

By JEFF CLEMETSON

As of July 1, the City of La Mesa has a new Chief of Police. After conducting a nationwide search to replace retired Police Chief Walt Vasquez, the city ultimately promoted LMPD Capt. Ray Sweeney to lead the department.

Despite calls from some residents to hire a chief from outside the department following two well-publicized incidents involving LMPD officers' use of force on Black residents during stops for minor infractions, Chief Sweeney said his experience within the department is a positive and not a detriment in addressing needed changes to policing in La Mesa.

"I have 20-plus years here. I've seen the culture change over the years. I've experienced the need for change. I've lived through it," he said. "We already have a road-map of where we need to go — I don't think, I know we do. And so

being able to step in and look at this from an unbiased view, to me, is not an issue because, yes I know the people here, I've grown up in this agency. But it's not about us. It's not about me. It's about where this department needs to go with the community into the future."

Sweeney added that, in his experience, a new chief from outside the department would take around a year to be familiar with the culture at the department before they could address changes.

At a time when LMPD is undergoing changes mandated by a new Community Police Oversight Board (CPOB) and new state and federal policing practices, the new chief said he doesn't worry about his former colleagues in the department suddenly resenting him as he implements changes to the department now that he is their boss.

SEE NEW CHIEF, Page 8

# Relighting local community theater

Lamplighters reopens its doors with musical 'Last Five Years'

By JEFF CLEMETSON

On Saturday, March 14, 2020, five days before the state of California initiated a mandatory lockdown for schools and businesses, Lamplighters Community Theatre initiated a lockdown of its own.

"We were worrying about [the virus] a few days before that, obviously, as everything was going on and we had a couple of patrons that expressed concern so we made the decision Saturday night, that's it, we're going to close," said Lamplighters president Paul Ericson. "We realized we were an unsafe environment at that point — a small room and close together."

The shutdown cut off a production of Agatha Christie's "The Hollow" in its third week of a five-week run, and just before the end



Actress Keri Miller as 'Cathy' in the Lamplighters Theatre's production of 'The Last Five Years' (Photo by Adriana Zuniga-Williams)

of Lamplighter's 81st season. The future of La Mesa's local theater — a part of the community since 1937 when it was known as The La Mesa Little Theatre — was very much in doubt.

Ericson and the rest of the Lamplighters board of directors immediately made efforts to curb expenses.

SEE LAMPLIGHTERS, Page 17

## NEWS BRIEFS

### LA MESA BOULEVARD COMPLETE STREETS PLAN AWARDED GRANT

The City of La Mesa applied for and was awarded a \$240,000 Sustainable Communities grant from the State of California Department of Transportation to prepare a Complete Streets Plan for La Mesa Boulevard from 4th Street to Jackson Drive, and University Avenue from Spring Street to Memorial Drive.

The purpose of the Complete Streets Plan is to create a street that accommodates for all users (pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motor vehicle drivers) as well as provide improved connections to key destinations including parks, transit stops and stations, businesses, and neighborhood

SEE NEWS BRIEFS, Page 6

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# Comic book shops getting back in-person

By ELAINE ALFARO

For more than 50 years, comic book collectors and fans both near and far have made the annual trek to downtown San Diego to attend the global phenomenon, Comic-Con. Despite being a steadfast event ingrained in San Diego's history, the convention itself has evolved with the pop culture and trends of the time.

In 2020, along with other large-scale gatherings, the pandemic left its mark on Comic-Con. However, local comic book store owners have said that even amidst the pandemic, there have been opportunities to revisit collections and feel a sense of nostalgia.

Although Comic-Con took to the online world last year and will continue virtually this year, the local comic and toy industry is still thriving according to Bryan Mitch, owner of It's Geeky, a comic book store in La Mesa.

"I've seen an uptick in my store," Mitch said. "I think the year is going to turn out well."

Likewise, Ed Sandberg, owner of Comics 'n Stuff, projected: "I think this year, as far as money-wise, it's going to be a very good year."

The reason behind the growth in sales and consumer interest was the unforeseen free time the pandemic offered, according to Sandberg.

"They were locked up for so long they went back and bought supplies and were figuring out which comics they needed," he said. "They're doing something to get their minds off the pandemic. They're using comic books or collecting as a means to escape from reality."

However, one cannot escape the fact that, despite the growth currently seen, this past year came with significant setbacks for this industry, according to Chase Lirley, co-owner of Allied Gardens comic book store, TC's Rockets.

"The week where they announced all events down, everyone basically shutting down, that was the week of Comic-Con," Lirley said. "Between that and my dad [co-owner] saying, 'What do we do?' we had to cut our hourly staff."

To adjust to the pandemic, comic book store owners had to vamp up their online sales.

"I had just changed my focus from in-store business to online business to make it by," Mitch said. "I was already doing online sales but I had to work harder and harder to post more items online."

Still, even when postings went up smoothly, inventory is a diminishing resource.

"Just like the price of wood has gone up in the housing, the same thing with all the comic book supplies and everything," said Sandberg. "That's one of the struggles now, trying to find inventory to sell. People want this stuff but you can't get it."

However, the upcoming Comic-Con events of 2021 offer an escape

from the virtual world for these vendors and collectors alike. In addition to the online festivities that will feature the panels and pop-culture facets in July, Comic-Con scheduled a smaller, in-person event called "Comic-Con Special Edition" for November.

"I think it will be a great opportunity for people to go there, to be able to get out, and actually buy stuff," Sandberg said. "Most of my customers that come in can't even go to Comic-Con anymore because they're ousted by all the people who think it's cool to go to Comic-Con now. Now, my customers can actually go to Comic-Con again. It'll be a good year for the comic book collectors."

This is exactly what these owners are looking for because the online world just doesn't fit the realm of comics and toys, according to Lirley.

"I am not the biggest fan, I won't lie," said Lirley. "It's not the same, but it's coming from a skewed point of view. You lose a lot going virtual. I think conventions have to be in-person, people realized that."

The in-person gatherings are what makes this community feel connected, according to Mitch,

"People that you've met at conventions [become] life-long friends... it's hard," he said. "I have friends who are in Philadelphia [and] I haven't seen them in a few years now. It's completely different than going in person."



It's Geeky owner Bryan Mitch (Photo by Jeff Clemetson)

However, if you would like to explore some other options this summer in preparation for the November festivities, these owners have some ideas.

"A lot of people still go down to the convention and take their Hall H [the location of the biggest stage in the convention] pictures," Mitch said. "The best thing Comic-Con lovers can do is go support local comic book stores and maybe chit-chat with someone who knows a little bit more about the comic books or [a] comic character."

—Elaine Alfaro is a journalism student at Point Loma Nazarene University and a former intern for San Diego Community Newspaper Group. Reach her at [lainiejoy2002@gmail.com](mailto:lainiejoy2002@gmail.com).



(l to r) TC Rockets owners Steve and Chase Lirley (Photo by Elaine Alfaro)

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## In Memory: Jeff Kepper

It's with a heavy heart that we announce that Jeff Kepper, longtime Helix High teacher and soccer coach passed away June 4, 2021 due to a complication from recently diagnosed stage 4 cancer. Jeff grew up in various areas of the US. He came to San Diego when he was recruited by SDSU to play soccer. He loved soccer. He started when he was 8, and continued playing and coaching throughout his life. As beloved as Jeff is in the soccer community, the same is true for the people that knew him at Helix High School. He spent his entire 29 year career at Helix teaching biology and oceanography, and coaching boys' & girls' soccer. Jeff wanted to instill his love of the environment, biology, and sports in all his students. He spent hours at home thinking of ways to make classes and learning more fun and impactful. He loved spending extra time with his students and our hearts have been lifted by reading countless stories about how he changed so many lives, encouraging students to accomplish their goals. Jeff's wife, Katie, children Anders and Kenzie, sister Jody, and dad Jack as well as his extended family and friends miss him greatly.



Please help us continue his spirit of inspiration by contributing to the Jeff Kepper Reach Your Dreams scholarship fund via [www.helixhighschoolfoundation.com](http://www.helixhighschoolfoundation.com)



# The sounds of life drum once again

By CYNTHIA G. ROBERTSON

It used to be that every second Thursday of the month, people thronged to the fire station on Dallas Street at 6:30 p.m. and within 10 minutes the sound of beating drums boomed from within. For the sheer joy of making music within community, the Community Drum Circle led by Susan Hall, proprietor of RhythmWorx, gave people a fun reason to get together.

COVID-19 put an immediate stop to the beat in March, 2020. The community room in the fire station has been silent ever since. Hall would send periodic texts to people who had been in the drum circle, encouraging them to stay positive and active. "Someday we will return to gather and make music," she always wrote in her texts.

And then on June 9, 2021, Hall sent out a text to members that they would be able to meet to beat drums and make music to their heart's content the next Thursday in La Mesita Park.

The City of La Mesa is no longer providing an indoor space for the drum circle, Hall explained. But it will allow her to use the park space for up to 24 participants, including herself and her husband, who always helps with bringing out the bins and bins of drums, bells, boom whackers and other exotic noisy toys.

For months, Hall had monitored CDC, California and local COVID-19 protocols and guidelines. She frequently checked in with the City of La Mesa, confirming their specific policies regarding gatherings such as the drum circle.

"Out of an abundance of caution, it was important to wait until protocols and guidelines evolved to something that is logistically doable, while minimizing health risks.

"From an emotional, family-oriented place, it was important to wait, in order for our family to grieve and take care of our personal health and wellbeing, following the passing of two of our family members who died of COVID-19, nine days apart, earlier this year," Hall said.

But now is the time for the drum circle to re-gather because many of the community members are now fully vaccinated and outdoor



People of all ages enjoy the RhythmWorx Drum Circle on July 15, in its first gathering since the lockdown began in March, 2020. (Photos by Cynthia G. Robertson)

venues are open to multiple households gathering publicly.

On July 15, as the drum circle participants brought out their chairs to the park, an air of excitement was all around. Several people had brought their own drums and other instruments.

"Drum circles are not performances; rather, they are opportunities for community recreation and personal rejuvenation," Hall said. "Participants are never expected to drum with rhythmic precision or perform composed rhythmic patterns. Instead, everyone contributes his or her sound to the circle and the music, creating a whole that is greater than its parts."

Hall explained the way to make music on a drum, interconnecting with others playing. "All music is sound interspersed with silence. So listen for when I change the pattern and the beat, and you respond accordingly. This is what music is all about," she said.

As Hall began tapping out a rhythm on her drum, the others joined in. They happily banged on drums and shook bells and tambourines. The heart-pounding boom caused everyone in the park to stop, look and listen as the musicians took cues from Hall, who alternately slowed and sped up the tempo. About 45 minutes into the hour-and-a-half pit, Hall said it was time to use boom whackers. She went to the pail in the center of the shared space and pulled up one orange and one green plastic tube.

"When you bang on them one on top of the other, they make their own kind of music," Hall said, the tubes making a fun hollow popping sound.

"You can use them on drums and tambourines and one each other's boom whackers, but just don't use them on anyone's heads or body," she said.

At her direction, the percussionists joined in and the odd music made everyone else at the park look up to see what was happening. By the time Hall made a motion with her hand to slow then stop the commotion, everyone was laughing.

But is being in a drum circle really about creating music? Some might say it is just a lot of noise, but not according to Hall.

Long-time percussionist Dave E., who plays along in the RhythmWorx Drum Circle, is also adamant that drumming is music. "Subtract the drummers and their instruments from any orchestra, band or combo, large or

small. Sounds a bit empty, doesn't it?" he said.

An additional boon to drumming is that as someone listens to or makes music of any kind, their emotional, mental and most likely physical health improves. That is certainly true for drumming, which has been shown to have a positive impact on a person's immune system.

One of the most outstanding features of a group such as the La Mesa Drum Circle is the alleviation of depression and anxiety while elevating social resilience. A study by the Royal College of Music in London discovered that a 10-week program of group drumming reduces depression by as much as 38% and anxiety by 20%.

Plain and simple, having fun with others playing drums and other instruments puts smiles on faces and reduces cortisol in the blood. After these overwhelmingly stress-filled months, that is the perfect medicine. Drum circle participant Angela Large can personally attest to this. Her doctor recommended the drum circle to her for healing after having ovarian cancer.

"It has been very cathartic," Large said. "My kids came when they were little, and I've been participating for over nine years. I enjoy Susan and the camaraderie of making music with others."

The interaction of people with the drums and other musical instruments they play becomes a sort of conversation. Such creative conversation is a panacea for our seemingly endless months of isolation.

Hall invites anyone to participate in the Community Drum Circle. All ages are welcome, but she requests that for children under eight years, parents should contact her prior to the event. No prior experience is necessary.

The next drum circle gathering will take place on the second Wednesday of August at La Mesita Park. To stay up-to-date with the Community Drum Circle, become a member of the meetup group at the link [meetup.com/RW-DrumEvents](https://www.meetup.com/RW-DrumEvents).

—A journalist and photographer for more than 30 years, Cynthia G. Robertson is the author of "Where You See Forever," a novel set in San Diego about finding a home for the heart. She also authors a blog at [Shutterbug Angel](https://shutterbugangel.com), a unique devotional attesting to the everyday miracles and beauty she sees in nature around her. She is currently working on other books. See more of Cynthia's work and order her book at [cynthiarobertson.com](https://cynthiarobertson.com).



Susan Hall, director of RhythmWorx drum circle, walks around to hear each of the drummers.

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## Guest Editorial

# Stephen Smith's comments were racist but I still don't want to see him fired

By MARC ANG

[On July 14], I was interviewed on Fox 11 Los Angeles on the recent Stephen A. Smith controversy regarding his comments on Shohei Ohtani's use of a translator. Stephen asserts that in what should be an "American" sport, we should have someone that can at least speak English and that Shohei shouldn't be a standard bearer for the sport of baseball, even if he has attained a level of skill, no player has since Babe Ruth.

There are a few things going on. First, as an avid baseball fan and loyal Angels fan who, pre-pandemic, donated hundreds of tickets to the community, I'm loving the publicity Shohei Ohtani is getting. A win for meritocracy here. Shohei has worked so hard to get to this level. Most baseball players are known to either be great hitters or great pitchers. Shohei's talents in both are a result of a laser-like focus and dedication in being the best he can be, culminating in one of the best seasons ever and his position as the first Japanese born participant in MLB's Home Run Derby and the first player ever to be a pitcher and a position player at the All Star Game. For that, he is a role model and inspiration to many.

Shohei is a Japanese national. It is a win for both America and Japan, and especially America, for exporting a traditional American pastime to Japan, after a World War and a subsequent adaptation of the sport into Japanese culture, to produce an athlete like Shohei. Shohei represents the marriage of two cultures after war and the culmination of several decades of nurturing the talent and the sport to produce the legend that is Shohei. His success is the cherry on top of a 40-year friendship and melding of American and Japanese cultures through my favorite sport.

Now, to the controversy. Stephen A. Smith may not see the elephant in the room as

he is probably so myopic in his vision of the world and sports, that he missed everything else going on with #StopAsianHate and #BlackLivesMatter, where, for right or wrong, has heightened people's sensitivities about race. This is what the society is going through. But attacking the heritage of those who were not born in this country is kinda ugly, no matter which way you cut it. And that's what happened when he gets so into the competition of things that he insults the heritage of another athlete. Smith even had to apologize to Nigeria for butchering the names of Nigerian basketball players during his rant. It is flat-out disrespectful to demand someone speak English as a prerequisite to being an icon.

Asian culture usually has us stay quiet in the face of attacks. Shohei handled this like a champ: the same discipline that has led him to succeed in his field and to be the best. I am glad that today, in 2021, our overall American society is understanding enough to speak up. For many years, Asians are constantly bullied and we are encouraged to stay silent and "above the fray." The result? Unanswered attacks can lead people to continue their negative behavior unchecked and it does have an impact on people, especially kids. As a young child, I had less Asian role models. Growing up in the 90's was actually a departure from the 80's when there was more Asian representation in film. The invisible minority was being shut out of everything and certainly I didn't have a Shohei to look up to in baseball. Now that is changing and it's good to actually address how things were different in the past. There is no sin in identifying that things were very subtly racist against Asians, because we have heard this in private conversations, in the subtle ways Harvard and Yale put "personality scores" on Asians, saying we're somehow "less than," or when Asians are targeted for

crime because there is a perception we don't fight back. Yes, racism is there and exists.

But what shocked me was certain voices, who I had considered friends, decided that it was outrageous for me to even say that it was racist. I'll say it again, it was xenophobic and racist. If you want to put emotion in that, that's on you. Sometimes it's just a matter of fact. My white friend, Jim, who I discussed this issue with, said, "Racism is not a big deal. I'm white and I lived in Ethiopia, and I'm humble enough to say, the way I see the world sometimes is racist. I am not afraid of being called one and I can check myself on any troubling behaviors, but I'm a better person today because I test my assumptions."

I feel the same way. I have become a less racist and more inclusive person as I grow older, because I can say, "maybe how I used to see the world was wrong and I'm willing to explore the discussion." But to be so arrogant as to believe racism doesn't exist, period, is some serious delusion and moral superiority.

Maybe you can get your head out of your rear and see things from a different perspective, or at the very least, give others the space and respect to agree to disagree and explore the finer points, privately. This arrogance, in political debate, especially from a person who considers themselves a California activist leader (they relinquished certain titles by leaving the state), is the last thing I want in anyone claiming leadership. Thank goodness they moved out of state but have now devolved into keyboard warriors fighting on the Internet, making former friends into enemies. In their persistent desire to be right, they turn off more people than they convince to come to the light, and polarize people even formerly on their side.

Not reacting is now a lost art. Every debate, political or non-political, on both sides, seems to devolve into drawing

your line harder in the sand and destroying any relationship that could have occurred. How ugly and unproductive. While I find Stephen A. Smith's initial "doubling down" absolutely ridiculous, I actually applaud him for showing humility in the end.

This is why on this issue, I felt what happened to Stephen was enough. He got a public flogging. If Jeffrey Toobin can get his job back with CNN and that's the standard today, throwing hate at Stephen is not going to make the world a better place. It was a teachable moment and he can learn.

Similarly, I get sarcasm. I get "tongue in cheek." Stephen should not be fired. The market spoke. It forced a written apology, no matter how sincere or insincere it was — I don't care to psychoanalyze people I don't know. From a community perspective lens, this is a win. Like I said on Fox, which was paraphrased, Shohei remains winning and this actually gives his success more promotion. What Shohei accomplished is quiet, consistent and beautiful. So thank you, Stephen for striking that contrast!

I think part of what makes America unique is that we can exercise our First Amendment rights, look stupid in the process, and learn from it to become better. Robbing someone of that by overly harsh consequences to limit free speech will truly destroy American tradition at its core and that is the tradition we should really be hell bent on preserving, not the shallow nonsense Stephen Smith chose to make a big deal out of. Shohei certainly didn't. He moved on, and remains winning.

—Marc Ang ([marc@aib2b.org](mailto:marc@aib2b.org)) is the president of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance in Orange County, a community organizer in Southern California and the founder of AsianIndustryB2B who specializes in race relations and the minority conservative experience. His book "Minority Retort" will be released in late 2021.

## News briefs

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

services. This corridor is also located along San Diego Transit Bus Route 852, which provides direct access to both the Grossmont and La Mesa Village Trolley stations.

Community members will have multiple opportunities to be involved in development of concepts for the corridor, which will include workshops involving the public and local businesses, presentations to community groups,

participation at La Mesa community events, online surveys and a demonstration project for potential corridor improvements.

### LA MESA COLLEGE STUDENT WINS FREE WISDOM TEETH EXTRACTION

A college-bound student from La Mesa is a final recipient of The Oral Surgery & Dental Implant Specialists of San Diego's third annual Wisdom For Wisdom



Map of the Complete Streets Plan for La Mesa Boulevard (City of La Mesa)

SEE NEWS BRIEFS, Page 7



News briefs

CONTINUED FROM Page 6

program. Simon Mattar, 18, was among those selected from a group of applicants to have his wisdom teeth extracted for free at a time when tuition payments loom and many families still continue to struggle financially amid the pandemic.

Mattar received his free wisdom teeth extractions on July 22. The surgery was held at the practice's East office located at 6386 Alvarado Court, Ste 110 in San Diego.

Mattar plans to attend San Diego State University where he will major in Mechanical Engineering. He was scheduled to have his wisdom teeth taken out last year, but the procedure was canceled because of COVID-19. Knowing that he has needed them removed for longer than initially planned has created more concern around the damage his wisdom teeth could cause to his other teeth.

College affordability has been put into perspective for many graduating students as many families continue to struggle and experience economic hardships from the COVID-19 shutdowns. In fact, according to a recent survey, more than half of high school students said the economic uncertainty has affected their post-graduate plans and of those impacted, 53% said their parents were laid off and will have less to save for college; 44% of them said they would need to take debt to cover the cost of education.

FIVE CANDIDATES SEEK CITY COUNCIL SEAT

According to filings with the La Mesa City Clerk's office, five candidates will be vying for the City Council seat vacated by Dr. Akilah Weber, who now serves as a member of the state Assembly.

The candidates are: Letitia Dickerson, Mejgan Afshan, Patricia Dillard, Laura Lothian and Tony Orlando.

The special election for the City Council seat will be held on Sept. 14 in correlation with the special recall election of Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Look for special coverage in the August issue of La Mesa Courier to include candidate interviews and profiles.

SAFETY FAIR DATE ANNOUNCED

La Mesa Police Department will host its annual La Mesa Safety Fair, on Saturday Aug. 14 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the station parking lot at 8085 University Ave.

Members of the La Mesa PD and Heartland Fire and Rescue will be on hand to answer questions, including members of the PD's Special Response Team (SRT). This free event will also host several community resource booths, music for the whole family and giveaways.

'The Bean Encounter'



(Courtesy photo)

On June 19, residents of the Porter Hill Community demonstrated their generosity by participating in what organizers dubbed "The Porter Hill Bean Encounter."

The idea began when Chuck and Joanene Falk and their neighbors on Tio Diego heard about the dire need for beans and rice in marginalized areas of Tijuana through Mil Generaciones (Thousand Generations) a non-profit Christian organization. Because of high number of COVID cases and unemployment in the area, beans and rice were a necessity. Eight pounds of beans and rice are needed to feed a family of five for a week. With that information, the goal became to gather a ton of beans and rice — enough to feed 250 families.

Flyers were delivered to the neighbors inviting them to be a part of the "Bean Encounter." The humorous flyer stated participants could be a "preteen or nineteen;" "tired of the routine

and want to be seen;" or "have/had COVID-19 or the vaccine."

To collect the beans from the neighbors, a red "bean mobile" decorated with green, red and white balloons went through the streets playing John Phillip Sousa's march music. The neighbors knew the bean collectors were on the way, and most of them had their beans and rice on their porches, but many greeted the walkers personally with their donations.

There were bags of beans and rice in all sizes — from one to 50 pounds, financial donations, plus an abundance of pasta and tuna. The goal of a ton of beans and rice was reached: 2,051 pounds!

The neighbors in Porter Hill are proud of their community and by working on this project they discovered they were even better together.

—Submitted by Chuck and Joanene Falk

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## New Chief

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

"I've always been opinionated and people know me coming into this," he said. "The employees that work here know that I will change things if we need to change things to move forward — because we have to. So there's really no hesitation about me seeing a new picture — the picture has been painted."

Chief Sweeney attributes his ability to be self-critical of his police department to reading lots of books and cited Adam Grant's "Think Again," which he said "really makes you take that deep look."

"Are we doing things right? Why are we doing it this way? Does it make sense? Can we change and do it a better way? So to be able to take a critical look, not only at me as a leader, but this agency as a department and what we're bringing to the community, is critical," he added.

Those changes and a better way to police La Mesa are built into Chief Sweeney's Six-Step Action Plan, which focuses on a variety of new policies, practices and goals to bolster community

trust and involvement with LMPD.

The first step of the plan is to work in partnership with the newly-formed CPOB, an 11-member, all-volunteer group of residents who will review police practices, policies and in a limited capacity address complaints against the department.

"There's nothing wrong with having an extra set of eyes on what we do. I've always been a big believer of that. If you can come in and tell me, 'Hey, have you ever thought about doing it this way?' That's a great conversation to have, in my opinion," Sweeney said, adding: "The CPOB is not there to hurt [the department]. They're there to help."

The second step of the plan is a "trust campaign" that will include a series of community conversations and other outreach efforts.

"That's the piece we've been missing for a while — not only due to COVID, but just a lot of things that have been going on in the city of La Mesa," Sweeney said.

The conversations events could begin as soon as August, once locations are secured in each of the city's four geographical patrol beats. The events are intended to

be in-person conversations where residents and business owners can ask questions.

"I want to listen to the community," Sweeney said. "What are they seeing from the police department? What are their needs? What can we do? And then on the other piece of the conversation, I'll show them what we're doing and give them the roadmap moving forward, which is the six-step action plan and some of the things we've done since the Hillard-Hines report."

The third step of the plan is a goal to "increase, improve and monitor" fair and unbiased policing and cultural awareness in the department. Reaching the goal will take a mix of policy and training, Sweeney said. The training will also include an emphasis on de-escalation.

"It's in our use of force policy: It's a 'shall,' not a 'should,'" Sweeney emphasized. "So we want that, because it's a safer outcome no matter how you look at it. If we can use de-escalation — and de-escalation is a two-way street — but if we can be successful in using de-escalation and not get an officer injured or anyone else injured, that's a win for everyone."

### CHIEF SWEENEY'S SIX-STEP ACTION PLAN

**1. Community Police Oversight Board (CPOB):** Maintain an excellent working partnership with the CPOB based on collaboration and cooperation.

**2. Public trust:** Strengthen public trust in all aspects of the LMPD; hosting strategic listening/ planning sessions within all demographic regions of our community to evaluate and develop outreach strategies and increase communication.

**3. Fair and unbiased policing, being culturally aware and de-escalation:** Increase, improve and monitor (for effectiveness) training aimed at

fair and unbiased policing, being culturally aware and de-escalation.

**4. Diversity in recruiting and retention:** Continue to develop diversity within the La Mesa Police Department, aimed at the recruitment and retention to better serve our diverse and growing community.

**5. Police review:** Develop a LMPD Policy Review Team to work with the community and CPOB.

**6. Emergency preparedness:** Provide mandatory, biannual critical response training based upon current industry standard best practices.

For a more detailed version of the plan, visit [bit.ly/3r57KTA](http://bit.ly/3r57KTA).

Another part of de-escalation is the movement to have police respond to less issues, which Sweeney said "is already here" and pointed to La Mesa's HOME program's success in tackling homelessness.

"They're able to house people because they can build that rapport. Sometimes you walk up with a badge and people don't want to talk to you and we have to understand that," he said.

Sweeney also pointed out that the county's Psychiatric Emergency Response Team has been around for over 20 years and it "continues to get better," as well as the county's new Mobile Crisis Response Team.

"That's the piece where it's all civilians. So clinicians would go out to those calls. I can't wait to see that happen. And I can tell

SEE NEW CHIEF, Page 9




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# New Chief

CONTINUED FROM Page 8

you the officers here that I talk to, same thing,” Sweeney said, adding that police officers often want to help victims and respond to crime but the mental health and homeless call volume is very high. “If we take that off our plate or a portion of that off our plate, it will allow us to be able to do what we’re supposed to be doing.”

To monitor potential biases in the department, LMPD will be instituting changes to how officers report their interactions with the public, as outlined in the state’s Racial Identity and Profiling Act (RIPA). By 2022, La Mesa will be mandated to start collecting racial identity information for all stops, and by July 2023 the city will have to report the information to the Department of Justice. As a smaller department, LMPD is one of the last cities in the region required to adopt the changes.

“So we’re going to implement that,” Sweeney said. “But what I really want, we’ve looked at a program that gets more than the general information.

“I don’t [just] want to take a look at who was stopped, why they were stopped, if they were searched. ... That’s all critical information, but I also want a more empirical, in-depth look at what brought us to that stop,” he continued. “Was this a radio call that we got? Was this somebody who matched the description of

somebody at a crime that just happened? Was it just a proactive officer going out and making a traffic stop for minor traffic violation? Those are all critical pieces to statistics. I want to make sure the community has a full picture.”

Sweeney’s fourth step to his plan is to make the department more diverse through hiring and retention practices.

“La Mesa is 60-plus thousand [residents] and we’re growing. You see all the apartments going up — it’s a lot and that brings in a diverse group of people. So we have to mirror that,” he said. “I would love to have a large group of police officers that are completely diverse — and we’re doing pretty good. We have a good mix of police officers that are diverse and represent our city, but I want more.”

The fifth step in the plan is to develop a Policy Review Team in the department to assess how the new plan’s policies and programs are working. The review process will be successful because it will involve the CPOB to give its own assessment of how the six-point plan is working.

Also, LMPD is in need of continued policy review because legislation is always changing, Sweeney said, so the department has adopted use of an electronic service that looks for updates to policies at state or federal level to make sure it is always in compliance.

“The transition to move all of our policies and add policies and do all that into this platform is

about one year ... and that’s why I say these extra set of eyes [of the CPOB] will be extremely helpful,” he added.

The final step is an update to the city’s emergency preparedness — especially crowd control issues. Sweeney described emergency preparedness as “multi-faceted,” but pointed out that the Hillard-Hines report showed LMPD needed a new approach to crowd control.

“We put together a mobile field force since then which is a group of 12 officers with two sergeants that are trained specifically in that,” he said. “We’ve also trained our entire department — once again — on mobile field force tactics, crowd control. I think you see the protests we had post-May 30, you see a big difference.”

Although not officially part of the six-step plan, Sweeney added that the attitudes of police officers also make a big difference:

“I tell my officers, ‘Treat everyone like they’re your best friend, your brother, your sister.’ Treat them all like that because if people can walk away from an experience with police — and not everyone wants police around, but sometimes we’re required to go — if we can make that experience still pleasant where they walk away and say, ‘Yeah, I had to go to jail just because, but the police officer still treated me with respect,’ — that’s what we want.”

—Reach editor Jeff Clemetson at [jeff@sdnews.com](mailto:jeff@sdnews.com).

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# New ownership, new hope for 2021

By ROBIN DOHRN-SIMPSON

Mario's de La Mesa, located on the edge of La Mesa Village, has a new owner, Juan Vasquez. His is the classic American dream story.



Mario's sign

"I started working here 16 years ago as a dishwasher, then transitioned to cook, next server and now I'm the new owner. I've only owned the restaurant for one month," Vasquez said.

Although his ascension to owner is a change at the top of Mario's' business, Vasquez assured that the recipes customers of the long-time La Mesa staple will remain the same. Even Chef Javier stayed on, he added.

The cuisine at Mario's is a fusion of Sonora, which is the state that borders Arizona and New Mexico, and has been influenced by the U.S.A. and Sinaloa, the state that includes Mazatlán, where they specialize in seafood such as

aguachile and ceviche as well as the traditional pork, shrimp, tenderloin of beef, and shredded beef.

"In the end, it's all about the sauces," explained Vasquez. "Chef Javier ably demonstrates his skill with sauces such as chocolate almond mole sauce, AuGratin sauce, and creamy chipotle sauce."

In addition, living next to Baja California and enjoying a variety of Mexican cuisines, San Diegans are connoisseurs of salsa. Both the red salsa and the salsa verde at Mario's are excellent. Just the right mixture of spice and chunkiness.

"We are well-known for our carne asada plate, our fish tacos



Juan Vasquez (far right) and the Mario's staff (Photos by Robin Dohrn-Simpson)

and fajitas," Vasquez said. "Our breakfast is very popular also. We offer chilaquiles with a mole, verde or chipotle sauce, huevos rancheros, tamale and eggs, carne asada with eggs. We also have a popular shrimp enchilada."

The sauces have two levels of heat — creamy, which is less spicy, and regular.

Shrimp is prominently featured on the menu, ranging from shrimp fajitas to shrimp chipotle

SEE MARIO'S, Page 11

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# Mario's

CONTINUED FROM Page 10

made with chipotle sauce, sautéed mushrooms, onions and bell peppers with Chef Javier's creamy chipotle sauce. Shrimp "Don Gallo" Style is made with roasted green chiles with AuGratin



Mario's exterior (Photos by Robin Dohrn-Simpson)

sauce, sautéed with onions, bell peppers and fresh mushrooms, served with salsa verde.

The entire staff is excited to be open and have a new owner, one whom they've worked with for years, after

being closed for months, reopened for take-out, then re-closed, then opened on the outdoor patio. Dining is currently back to normal with both indoor and outdoor seating.

Enjoy Sunday brunch, lunch or dinner at Don Mario's. For a full menu go to [mariosdelamea.com](http://mariosdelamea.com).

—Robin Dohrn-Simpson is a San Diego-based food and travel writer. Reach her at [dohrnsimpson@hotmail.com](mailto:dohrnsimpson@hotmail.com) or visit [robin-dohrnsimpson.com](http://robin-dohrnsimpson.com).



Chicken in mole sauce

## BEST TUNA SANDWICHES EVER



What's Cooking with Julie

By JULIE WHITE

I don't know if you agree, but a good tuna sandwich is delicious! This particular sandwich recipe is a bit more work to put together, but worth the time.



### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 5-ounce cans Albacore tuna packed in olive oil
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup sweet pickle relish
- Zest and juice of 1/2 of a lemon
- 2 stalks of celery, chopped to a fine mince

- 1/4 cup each: finely chopped dill, mint, parsley
- Pinch of black pepper
- Piece of crisp lettuce
- Toast or bread

### DIRECTIONS:

Mix well and add more mayonnaise if needed. Spread on your favorite bread or toast (delicious on an egg hamburger roll or other soft bread) and add the lettuce.

—August is a gentle reminder that you haven't done a single thing on your January resolutions for seven months and hoping for the best the next five months!

# Featured Artist: Joan Merrick



By BONNIE OWEN

Joan Merrick has been an artist her entire life. She received her B.A. in Art Education from Cal State L.A., and took graduate studies in Art History and Textiles at San Diego State University.

Merrick taught art in Los Angeles middle schools and high schools, and textile design at Grossmont College. Her experience also includes years of managing a store that specialized in fabrics for the home.

Additionally, Merrick has studied with Joan Austin, Skip Lawrence, Robert Burrige, Marie Wordell and Annette Lotuso Paquette. These experiences contribute to her lavish use of color and pattern in her painting, and

the use of patterned, textured collage papers in the work. She even creates her own handmade batik papers.

The female figure is Merrick's favorite subject.

She is a signature member of San Diego Watercolor Society, and a member of Foothills Gallery in La Mesa and her work



"Fisherwoman" (Images courtesy of Joan Merrick)

can be seen on their websites: [dws.org](http://dws.org) and [foothillsartassociation.com](http://foothillsartassociation.com) respectively.



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# Celebrity cookbook round-up!



By HALEY ZAMORA

Although it may be too hot to turn on the oven, readers can live vicariously through these five fun cookbooks penned by celebrity authors:

Best known for his role in the film *Machete* as the title character, actor Danny Trejo released his first cookbook: “Trejo’s Tacos: Recipes and Stories from L.A.: A Cookbook” in 2020. Focusing on Mexican cuisine, his San Fernando Valley upbringing, and his journey into becoming a restaurateur, Trejo has created a surprisingly wonderful book that is five parts recipes, two parts autobiography, and one part history of Los Angeles. Trejo offers something for everyone — from carnivores to vegans — with recipes like award-winning vegan cauliflower tacos to a sweet and

spicy brisket. Highly recommended for those trying to up their Taco Tuesday game.

“Antoni in the Kitchen” is the first cookbook by food and wine expert, Antoni Porowski — one of the stars of Netflix’s “Queer Eye.” Porowski’s cookbook features

create an amazing meal for that special someone.

Snoop Dogg released his first cookbook “From Crook to Cook” in 2018. The forward was written by his BFF (and cook to crook and back again) Martha Stewart. This cookbook features down-to-

and those who are not currently on a diet.

Did you know actor Stanley Tucci is also a writer and accomplished cook? No? Me either! Tucci and his wife, Felicity Blunt, have created a wonderful cookbook entitled “The Tucci Table: Cooking with Family and Friends.” Tucci’s fare features Italian, British, and American-influenced recipes that are down

wings and much more. For those who want to share their love for friends and family through food — this cookbook is a must.

Celebrated singer and New York Times best-selling author, Patti LaBelle, has focused on the sweet life in her 2017 cookbook “Desserts LaBelle: Soulful Sweets to Sing About.” LaBelle is an old-school baker and her recipes for puddings, pies, and other treats are straight-forward and delicious. LaBelle shares personal stories and family recipes and is highly recommended for anyone with a sweet tooth.

All these titles and the latest library news can be found at SDCL.org. We are also offering our Summer Learning Program online with easy registration and participation for all ages no matter where you are this summer. Sign up at sdcl.org/summer to see how we can help you read, learn, and create!

—Haley Zamora is a librarian at the La Mesa branch of the San Diego County Library.



quasi-healthy, beautifully presented recipes that make great use of five ingredients or less. Readers can expect delicious recipes like “Malaysian Chili Shrimp” or “Salty Lemon Squares.” Perfect for those looking to impress guests or

earth recipes like “Tha Thickness Gravy” and “Spaghetti de la Hood” with Snoop-curated song lists that accompany the recipes, clear directions, and purely entertaining commentary. Highly recommended for Snoop fans, beginner chefs,

to earth and delicious. With more than 100 mouthwatering photographs, home chefs will be clamoring to make recipes like pasta alla bottarga, mushroom-stuffed trout, pork chops with onions and mustard sauce, barbeque chicken



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# Grossmont High School spring sports successes



## Foothiller Footsteps

By CONNIE AND LYNN BAER

In a school year filled with seemingly unprecedented challenges, this spring Grossmont High School sports teams were able to take the field and the court and achieve amazing successes despite the abbreviated seasons and the social distancing and mask mandates. Some athletes were even able to play two sports at once, thanks to supportive coaching staffs.

### LEAGUE AND CIF TEAMS

Several teams were league champions, including four Hills League Champions: boys water

polo, boys lacrosse, girls basketball and baseball. The girls water polo team was Valley League Champions.

Five teams were in CIF competition — four of them in the Open Division as one of the top 10 teams in the county: baseball, boys lacrosse, boys water polo and girls water polo, with baseball finishing second in the Open Division CIF final game.

Several Foothillers were selected for San Diego County Wide Honors. The All-San Diego Section Teams honorees included Boys Water Polo First Team, senior Ty Case; Girls Water Polo Second Team, junior Kathie O'Laughlin; and Boys Lacrosse Second Team, juniors Bryce Scurlock and Ziggy Ianessa.

The San Diego County Wide Baseball Pitcher of the Year was Evan Vasiliou and along with Evan several teammates were First Team selections: outfielder Austin Smith, infielder senior Caleb Hommel, and catcher senior Isaiah Gomez. Coach Jordan Abruzzo was



2016 Sweetwater-GHS Bucket Trophy Bailey Wilcox, Savannah Baird, Chase Karlo, Connor Selander, Alyssa Chong, Kaeli Thompson



Sister Golfers Junior Carissa Freeman and Freshman Erica Freeman

selected All-San Diego Section Baseball Coach of the Year.

Also, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* honored football and baseball athlete Justin Brown as the San Diego County Boy Athlete of the Year. Playing two sports at once, Justin was quarterback for the football team, completing 60.7 percent of his 49 throws with only four interceptions; in baseball, first baseman Justin hit .363 with multiple RBI games.

### A UNIQUE GOLFING DUO

The Freeman sisters, junior Carissa and freshman Erica, were selected for the Grossmont

All-League 1st Team for ladies golf and were later selected for the Grossmont All-Conference Team. In early June, Carissa made the top 110 girls in San Diego County to be invited to play the first round for CIF, then was one of the top 28 invited to play in the CIF final round at La Costa Resort in Carlsbad. This is the third year in a row that Carissa has qualified for CIF representing Grossmont High School. Next year bodes well for the lady Foothiller golfers with the Freeman sisters on the team.

### 101ST ANNIVERSARY FOOTBALL GAME VS SWEETWATER

The first Foothiller sports date to circle on your calendar for next school year is the GHS vs. Sweetwater High School football game on Friday, Aug. 20. This game marks the 101st anniversary of the first football game

played between Sweetwater and Grossmont on Oct. 1, 1920.

That first year, Grossmont's 13 member football team, led by Coach Becker, played four games against National City, Coronado, Army and Navy, and Escondido; despite losing all four games, the yearbook states, "Grossmont is due to have a winning team, when she battles on the Gridiron again."

Grossmont students were bused to the games in National City as they eagerly cheered for their team as they played the "Sweeties" as they were known at Grossmont.

That first game began a fierce yearly rivalry from 1920-1960, which is documented on the perpetual trophy we call the "Bucket Trophy." In 1923 and 1924, the two schools played twice each year with Sweetwater winning all four games. Over the years,

SEE FOOTHILLER FOOTSTEPS, Page 19



2021 Varsity Baseball Hills League Champions

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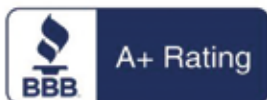


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# Summertime activities in swing at Helix High School



## Helix Highlights

By JENNIFER OSBORN

It's summer, but you wouldn't know it by looking at the Helix campus. Traditionally quiet months at school, June and July have been a time for plenty of opportunities for Helix students to come on campus for educational and enrichment activities, as well as meeting with their Grade Level Teams (GLT) to prepare for the 2021-22 school year.

In June, Helix students and their families participated in summer registration meetings. Last summer, registration was done all online, but the in-person meetings have resumed this summer, allowing families to meet with a

member of their GLT to talk about class schedules, long-term goals, and other important information to help students be successful.

At Helix, each student's schedule is custom-built — they are able to choose which period they will take each class, as well as choose their teacher, and whether they are interested in college prep, honors, advanced placement, or dual-enrollment (college) courses. During these meetings, the GLT also discusses the student's goals and makes sure their course selections are in line with those goals.

During June and July, Helix offered both summer school, focusing on academic courses, and ASPIRE camp, focusing on enrichment and athletic opportunities. After more than a year of online courses, students were able to take summer school classes in person to strengthen their skills in social studies, English, math, PE, technology, science, and special education. More than 600 students

participated in courses, some taking as many as four classes.

Summer school was divided into four sessions, supported by 32 teachers and 22 staff members. According to Grade Level Principal Paula Ann Trevino, students and staff were very happy to be back on campus. Safety protocols were followed, and everyone was excited to be learning in a classroom setting once again.

ASPIRE camp offered additional opportunities for students to get involved. ASPIRE is the Helix after school program that offers academic support, as well as enrichment and athletic opportunities during the school year. The ASPIRE summer camp was developed this year because a large number of students have never actually attended school on campus.

"So many students have not had the opportunity to actively participate and engage in our amazing Helix culture," said ASPIRE coordinator Katie Pipes.

ASPIRE camp took place over three, two-week camps, and each camp offered two sessions — one morning and one afternoon. Students were able to register for up to six different activities over the three camps, with 15-20 different activities offered each session. More than 500 students participated, and almost 40 staff members offered activities, with baking and indoor volleyball being among the most popular options.

"This has been a really great experience for students on multiple levels," Pipes said. "They are familiarizing themselves with our campus, they can re-connect with other students, and they have the opportunity to build rapport and positive mentor-student relationships with Helix staff. All around, this is a win-win for our school."

Students will return on Aug. 4 to begin the 2021-22 school



Students in a Helix summer ASPIRE program baking class (Courtesy photo)

year, which will be offered in person, five days a week. Families have also been offered the option to participate in the Helix Virtual Academy, which is a distance-learning option, open to any Helix student who does not wish to attend in person for any reason. We look forward to welcoming the Helix community back to campus for a great 2021-22 school year.

—Jennifer Osborn writes on behalf of Helix Charter High School.



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## Topping out ceremony held for Cuyamaca Student Services building

On July 13, a ceremonial topping out has held for a three-story Student Services Building under construction at Cuyamaca College, a milestone representing nearly a decade's effort to centralize student support at the campus.

The topping out marks that construction has reached its highest point. The public event included an opportunity for members of the college community to sign a construction beam before I was lifted by a crane, along with an American flag and an evergreen tree, atop the frame of the 36,000-square-foot center. The tree is a construction practice that symbolizes good luck for the future occupants, continued growth, and a safe jobsite.

At a groundbreaking ceremony in February, President Julianna Barnes described the center as a welcoming campus gateway and a long-awaited hub for students to engage and receive support services, such as counseling, financial aid, admissions, Extended Opportunities Programs and Services and CalWORKS.

The estimated \$34.2 million construction project will include new sustainable landscaping and the reconstruction of pathways to meet ADA accessibility standards.



An architectural rendering of the new Student Services building at Cuyamaca College (Courtesy GCCCD)

### PROP. V FUNDING

Construction, which is expected to continue through summer 2022, is funded by Proposition V, a \$398 million bond approved by East County voters in 2012. Bond funds have enabled the district to continue the work on the college campuses that began after the 2002 passage of Prop. R, which resulted in the construction or renovation of 13 major facilities.

Recently completed Prop. V projects include a \$4.2 million Student Center and Veterans Services renovation, and \$17 million renovation currently

underway of the Ornamental Horticulture Complex and Building M at Cuyamaca College and a \$44 million Performing and Visual Arts Center and \$13.2 million Phase 1 of the Science Math and Career Technology complex at Grossmont College.

Cuyamaca College, located at 900 Rancho San Diego Parkway in El Cajon, has served the community since 1978 and currently enrolls more than 9,000 students annually.

For more information about the colleges and the district, go to gccd.edu.

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Lamplighters

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

“We turned off the air conditioning, water coolers, heater — anything we could think of to save energy for electric bills and things. Anything we could do, we did,” Ericson said. “And then we ended up being very lucky in that our landlord was willing to support the theater and help us get through it — that was the key. That’s why we’re here.”

Robert M. Honn, landlord of the building at 5915 Severin Drive that houses the Lamplighters Theatre, will soon be honored with “a very nice plaque” for his generous patronage to the theater, Ericson said.

And although that plaque is not adorning the lobby walls just yet, theatergoers can experience some of the improvements to the Lamplighters stage and stands starting July 23 with a grand

reopening production of “The Last Five Years.”

Some of those improvements made to the Lamplighters space during the pandemic include new lobby and hallway décor and improvements to the seating.

“We had some patrons complain that the seats were too low last year, so we actually had a crew in here and raised them all,” Ericson said. “We found some ways to stay busy and improve some things at the theater while we were waiting to get things started.”

Another project the Lamplighters did during the pandemic, it what would be the only production during its 82nd season, was to perform a play for online streaming.

“The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey” by James Lecesne was a one-man show starring actor James Steinberg who played all eight characters and was directed and edited by O.P. Hadlock. The play was filmed on the

Lamplighters stage in black box and was streamed online using an outside service.

“As a production it was successful,” Ericson said. “O.P. did a great job, the actor did a great job. It just wasn’t a financial success.”

“People want to go to theater to see theater,” added Pam Stompoly, producer for “The Last Five



(l to r) Christopher and Keri Miller (Photo by Adriana Zuniga-Williams)



(l to r) Paul Ericson, Pam Stompoly and Bob Eisele (Photo by Jeff Clemetson)

Years.” “I find it very difficult to watch a play on my computer or a TV. I think some of the excitement of theater is experiencing it with everybody around you at the same time. It’s a group experience.”

When “The Last Five Years” opens on July 23, audiences will not only not miss out on the group experience, they will witness a Lamplighters Theatre first — a musical with a live band. “The Last Five Years,” written by Tony Award winner Jason Robert Brown in 2001, is a poignant and smart contemporary musical of five years in the relationship of an ambitious young writer, Jamie, and his struggling actress wife, Cathy, played by real-life married couple Christopher and Keri Miller and is directed by Teri Brown and Jonathan Sturch.

The story explores Jamie and Cathy’s five-year relationship and is presented in a form of storytelling in which Jamie’s story is told in chronological order (starting just after the couple have first met) and Cathy’s story is told in

reverse chronological order (beginning the show at the end of the marriage). The characters do not directly interact except for a wedding song in the middle as their timelines intersect.

“We decided to do this first show ‘The Last 5 Years’ as an add in show because it only has two actors and we felt it was a safe choice — from an audience relationship standpoint — to put up something with a small cast to start with,” Ericson said.

A small cast production was also a necessity, Stompoly said, because after a year and half away from the stage, assembling a large cast and production team would have been a “challenge.”

“There’s some people who lost a bunch of people during COVID, so they’re staying away for a while. There are some people who just want to give it another year just because. But the majority of folks are ready to go,” she said.

Even with most theater professionals “ready to go,” Stompoly is not taking chances with casting

for Lamplighter Theatre’s return season by holding auditions right away and all at once, now that the productions have all been chosen.

“So that’s part of what I’m trying to do, trying to arrange auditions, trying to make sure we have all of our directors covered, and also looking to establish new relationships with new people who have not been here before — bring new blood in,” she said.

The Lamplighters Community Theatre 2021-22 season schedule will include six plays and a Christmas special, starting with the production of “The Last Five Years,” which opens July 23 and runs through Aug. 15. Shows are at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. on Sundays. Tickets are \$26 for general admission and \$23 for students, seniors, and military. Group rates also available. For reservations, call 619-303-5092 or visit lamplighterslamesa.com.

—Reach editor Jeff Clemetson at jeff@sdnews.com.



Cristopher Miller as ‘Jaimie’ (Photo by Adriana Zuniga-Williams)

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# Summer home safety tips for seniors

By DR. ROSS COLT

The world is opening back up. There's a sense of relief in the air, but also anxiety. If you're caring for an aging spouse, family member, friend or neighbor while also transitioning back to the office or your normal activities, you may be nervous about leaving them at home alone more often. If you're an older adult living alone, your grown children may even have some of these concerns about you!

Thankfully, there are a number of resources you can use to make your home as safe as possible—including many offered by Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) centers, such as the Gary & Mary West PACE in San Marcos.

Here's how you can help your loved one maintain their independence this summer, or help yourself successfully age in place.

## PREVENTING FALLS

For elderly individuals, falls can cause severe injuries with huge medical bills and even precipitate physical declines, forcing a move into a care facility. But there are many simple, low-cost modifications you can make to prevent falls at home. According to the AARP, these include:

- Textured, no-slip strips in the bath or shower;
- Applying non-slip wax to floors;
- Placing a waterproof seat or chair in the shower;

- Non-skid treads on steps or stairs;
- Removing throw rugs;
- Replacing round standard door knobs with lever handles;
- Using rubber-backed bath mats;
- Keeping pets (and their toys) in a separate area from high-traffic parts of your home.

More permanent additions can include adding grab bars to stairways and bathrooms; installing a raised or high-profile toilet; remodeling a shower with a step-in entry to make it walk-in; creating zero-threshold or zero-step doorways; moving light switches so that they're easily reachable from a wheelchair or bed; and widening doors and hallways. Consult

with an occupational therapist or certified aging-in-place (CAPS) specialist to learn what your home needs.

## BEAT THE HEAT

According to the CDC, people aged 65 and older are more prone to heat-related health problems. To keep yourself and your older loved one safe this summer, follow common-sense tips including:

- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of cool water;
- Read the labels on medications, and keep them stored at the proper temperature;
- Limit outdoor activities when the sun is strongest, 10am-4pm;
- Run the air conditioning. To stay comfortable and save on your energy bill, the U.S. Department of Energy recommends keeping your thermostat at 78 degrees.

If you or your loved one have a routine that involves outdoor activities like gardening or a daily walk, establish a way to check in with them or for others to check in with you. Have an emergency contact list of family members and doctors easily available.

## MAKE A PLAN

It's a good idea for you and your loved one to have a plan in case of a health issue, natural disaster or power outage. Use this Personal Disaster Plan guide from the County of San Diego Office of Emergency Services to help arrange everything needed to smoothly handle unexpected events.

No matter your care needs or if you are on fixed income, PACE programs are here to help you or

SEE **SAFETY TIPS**, Page 19



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## Foothiller Footsteps

CONTINUED FROM Page 14

of the 41 games, Grossmont won 22, with Sweetwater winning 18, with one tie in 1929.

Amazingly, Sweetwater High School is also celebrating its 101st anniversary in 2021. Please join us as we relive some historic memories. Before the game, former Foothiller and Sweetwater High School football players from any year will be acknowledged.

The GHS Museum will be open Saturday, Aug. 14, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Check our website for more information about visiting hours at [foothillermuseum.com](http://foothillermuseum.com) or contact us at [ghsmuseum@guhsd.net](mailto:ghsmuseum@guhsd.net) and 619-668-6140.

—Connie and Lynn Baer write on behalf of the Grossmont High School Museum.

## Safety tips

CONTINUED FROM Page 18

your loved one safely age in place at home. Consult with in-house occupational therapists and care coordinators to help you figure out how to make your home safer. PACE care coordinators can also arrange for wellness checks, in-home assistance and other support for you and your loved one as temperatures rise.

—Dr. Ross Colt is the Medical Director for the Gary and Mary West PACE in San Marcos, CA. He is a family physician with more than two decades of full spectrum clinical practice experience, including a deep background in academic medicine and leadership in managed care environments at the regional and national level. A decorated war veteran, Dr. Colt served two combat tours in Iraq and retired after 24 years as an Army Colonel. He currently lives in the Rancho Bernardo area of San Diego with his wife and two teenage children.

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