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A Monthly Community Newspaper

MAY 2024



Photos by Tony Richards



L.A. Dodger and former El Modena High Vanguard Freddie Freeman, his wife Chelsea and sons, stand before the new baseball clubhouse made possible by his \$500,000 donation to his alma mater. Freeman, right, told the crowd at the opening ceremony, April 7, that he wanted to give ballplayers a place to hang out and be a family together. See Dodger, page 7.

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Orange operating budget faces deficit; reserve funds available for capital improvements

By Carrie Graham

The City of Orange is facing a \$19 million operating budget deficit, and at the current rate, that number is expected to grow to \$34 million by 2029.

The deficit isn't new. Back in 2011, the city anticipated a nearly \$8 million shortfall over a five-year period.

Revenue from property and sales tax, the city's main form of supporting infrastructure, has not kept up with the rising costs of maintenance and upkeep, causing the deficit to grow.

Since 2008, the city has made a number of efforts to slow the growth. Hiring freezes and furloughs have been implemented, with around 40 positions remaining vacant to date, while other positions have been eliminated entirely. The city has also reduced library hours and maintenance on parks and other city facilities.

Well running dry

Although those measures have slowed the deficit's expansion, they haven't eliminated it. If the city can't find a solution to close the gap, it faces a 13% cut to all

departments, which will likely mean a reduction in quality-of-life services for residents.

Roughly \$30 million worth of maintenance across community facilities, parks, and emergency services has been deferred since 2017, including \$13 million for fire trucks and police vehicles.

While departments are expected to have a reserve fund for instances where their needs exceed their current budget, borrowing from them long-term isn't a sustainable solution. Many departments are already tapping into those funds, and the city expects them to be completely used up within two years.

At an April 16 city council budget study session, members were presented with a list of projects the Public Works and Community Services Departments would both be able to complete, as well as defer.

"This is the first budget study session we've ever done that council has been shown the deferrals," noted City Manager Tom Kisela.

See "Orange budget" continued on page 5

OUSD board elects new officers, plans to fill vacant seats

By Tina Richards

Following the successful recall of Orange Unified School District trustees Rick Ledesma and Madison Miner, the now five-member board's first order of business at its April 11 meeting was to elect new officers.

Trustees Kris Erickson and Andrea Yamasaki called for a reorganization of the board, which boiled down to removing John Ortega as president.

Erickson thanked the community for "working for a better OUSD," and noted that the vote to unseat those trustees was a call for better governance. "We believe we can do better than we've done in the last year," she said, "starting with new leadership on the board." She nominated Ana Page for the position.

It's go time

A handful of public speakers agreed with the ouster of Ortega. Scott Resnick pointed out that Ortega has received two cease and desist letters from the First Amendment Coalition for silencing speakers. "He has consistently violated our rights," Resnick said. "He's threatened legal action and threatened speakers."

"It's imperative that we elect

a new president," Michelle Weisenberg advised. "Ortega is not engaged in the job, shows disdain for other board members and the audience. He doesn't engage with any of the schools."

Alex Brewsbaugh added that, "Ortega has used his position to have things his way. We need someone who prioritizes our district, whose heart is in it."

Yamasaki seconded the motion to nominate Page; the vote was 3-2, with Angie Rumsey and John Ortega opposed. Ortega said, for the record, that everything he did was legally binding and was approved by an OUSD attorney.

Angie Rumsey had been elected vice president in December. Yamasaki motioned to keep her in that position because "the board needs to be unified, so we can focus on academics and students and move forward." Rumsey retained her position, 5-0.

Kris Erickson was elected clerk of the board (replacing Miner), 4-1, with Ortega opposed.

Replenish the board?

The two empty seats left the board with several options. It could appoint new board members who will serve until the November General Election; leave the seats vacant and call a special election for November 5; or take no action, which would require the county superintendent to call a special election. The special election was summarily dismissed due to the costs of holding one. Leaving the seats vacant would deprive district Areas 4 and 7 of representation for the rest of the year.

It was clear to the majority of the audience and board members that filling the seats with appointees was the best option, as long as the process was open and transparent.

OUSD constituent Soren Wilaims encouraged the board to move forward with appointments. "You need to provide representa-

See "OUSD board" continued on page 5



Photo by Tony Richards

Mayor Pro Tem Arianna Barrios was delighted to turn on the rehabilitated Orange Plaza Fountain, April 17, to let the waters flow once again. See Restored, page 16.

Fate of Sully-Miller property open for lopsided discussion

By Tina Richards

East Orange residents were hopeful, but measured, when they learned that Milan Capital, owner of the eyesore Sully-Miller property on Santiago Canyon Road, was willing to negotiate with the city over potential mutually agreeable uses for the land.

Milan had twice attempted to build houses on the 109-acre site, projects that would have required the city to change the property's zoning. The developer was thwarted first when the planning commission and city council rejected the plan, and second by a voter referendum that overturned the city's approval of a zone change.

Milan spent the next several years stockpiling dirt and construction debris on the land, creating 40-ft.-tall mounds of unrecorded waste.

Last year, new state legislation encouraged Milan to file two housing project proposals: one for the Sully-Miller site; the other for the horse arena property across the street, which is zoned for housing on one acre lots. SB330 gave developers latitude to override local land-use laws and left cities with few options to preserve local zoning.

Housing on hold

In February, the Orange City Council approved an agreement with the landowner to put the housing project applications on hold for six months to allow the

parties to evaluate non-residential uses of the property. The council named Mayor Dan Slater and Councilmembers Gutierrez and John Gyllenhammer to represent the city in those negotiations. It also allowed the negotiations be held in public.

The first meeting, April 17, was largely a disappointment to the two dozen residents who attended. The named committee members were there, as was City Manager Tom Kisela and City Attorney Mike Vigliotta. Milan sent its consultants Frank Elfend and Carmen Morinello, but none of the principals attended.

Noting the number of residents in the room, Slater said this first meeting would be a forum for his colleagues and community members to express their "vision for the site." "The goal," he said, "is that both sites would not be developed. So how do we get there?"

No surprises

Gutierrez advocated for open space, a nature park, an extension of Santiago Oaks Park. "We have to remember the General Plan and overlay plans call for open

space," she said.

Gyllenhammer agreed that passive open space should be prioritized, but he was open to recreational use – pickleball, tennis courts, tot lots – as a compromise.

Slater acknowledged that in a perfect world, the site would be restored as a natural area, but the city also needs recreational opportunities, so he would consider a hybrid approach.

"We're putting the cart before the horse," OPA resident John Reina pointed out. "We need to hear from Milan about its plans. We want this area cleaned up, and we can't decide what we want to do until it is." Reina was referring to the environmental testing of the mounds mandated by the Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) and the clean-up that will be required once the composition of the buried materials is determined.

Landowner silence

Several other residents also noted that, "You can't dream about someone else's property," and that it was imperative to understand what Milan is willing to do. Does it plan to clean up the

property? Does it want to sell the property? To who? If so, at what price? If not, then what will the company accept as a compromise?

Asked to provide some insight, Elfend reported that, "We're not here to speak. Just to take notes."

The ensuing one-way conversation was far from the "negotiations" the residents attending the meeting expected. "This meeting is for dialogue and discussion," Kisela had confirmed at the onset. "We don't expect to solve it today."

"Dialogue and discussion," however, suggested more than a monologue, with residents repeating what they've been saying for a decade: open space, deference to specific plans, protections for Santiago Creek, a wildlife corridor. And, the more recent refrain: Milan made the mess, it has to clean it up. The city, county or taxpayers should not be expected to bail out the builder.

The specter of those applications for SB330 housing loomed large in the background. Kisela, at one point, told the audience, "It's either those applications, or some other option."

A never-ending story

Or not. Resident Kim Plein reminded the council that SB330 does not apply to the Sully-Miller property because it is still under the jurisdiction of LEA/CalRecycle. "Milan is testing that site based on a recreational use," she said. "A housing development requires a different set of testing standards. They can't build on it until CalRecycle says they can. It's a moot point."

Adrienne Gladson appreciated the opportunity to speak about the site, but, "What I want is irrelevant. You are the council members who will decide what happens on that property, but voters have already told you what they want. Don't lose sight of the 2020 referendum. They want open space. You guys need to figure it out with the property owner."

"We need to hear from Milan," Gyllenhammer said, "but compromise could include some sort of recreation along with a passive use."

"What is Milan willing to do," Gutierrez asked, "what are they proposing?"

A subsequent meeting will be scheduled "as soon as possible."



The Women's Club of Orange reports its 85th annual Flower Show, held April 4, was a blooming success, raising close to \$10,000 for the organization's philanthropies. The competition attracted 223 entries and over 500 visitors. Two professional master gardeners, not associated with the Women's Club, served as judges. They awarded Best Rose to Jennifer Chen; Best in Show to Sandy Georgi; and Best Theme Arrangement to Darlene Maeda. The Club President's Choice went to Paul Todd; Judges' Choice to Luvi Velasco; and Best in Junior Division to Emersyn Keil.



Elk Tim Smith helped deliver 170 Easter baskets given to the children at Esplanade and Palmyra Elementary Schools by the Orange Elks Emblem Club. Emblem Club members read with the children and help with the after-school library program.

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Fairgrounds boarders not horsing around about fee hikes

By Stephanie Tilhof

Equestrians, fearful they will not be able to find a place for their horses, packed an April 12 meeting called by OC Fairgrounds Board Director Tanya Bilezikjian.

Horse boarders are outraged over the fair board's March 28 decision to nearly double boarding fees at the stables that have been part of the fairgrounds for decades. The board voted 3-2 to accept staff's recommendation for a phased-in plan to raise the monthly rate for 100 horse stalls over the next nine months. Costs will climb from \$644 per month for a 12 x 12-ft. stall to \$1,130 by January 2025. Bilezikjian was one of the two who voted against the rate hikes. "I called this meeting because I recognize this is a very important issue for you," Bilezikjian said. "What can we do to get closer together on these issues?"

The former operator, the Hanson family, ran the public boarding stable for two decades at a profit. However, when the fair staff took over in 2023, they awarded the contract to the sole bidder, Lopez Works, Inc., a street sweeping company. Instead of expanding their search, the fair board went forward with what equestrians call a "bloated" \$1.8 million contract. Now staff claims the center is losing more than \$1 million per year. With current revenues estimated at \$1.4 million, staff says the rate hikes will help cover the center's \$2.7 million annual expenditures.

"You're being taken advantage of," said Joy Gould, who operates a similar equestrian center called Whittier Narrows. "It costs me \$143/horse/month for feeding and cleaning. You're paying \$465/horse/month." Gould said staff set up a meeting with her, but never showed. That's why she attended this meeting. "You need a professional," urged Gould, whose resume includes 37 years of horse management expertise.

What you don't know

Longtime horse owner Theresa Sears agreed. Sears was asked by staff to provide guidance, but felt her input was ignored. She claims she was blindsided by what she called an "egregious" staff report. Sears based her research on current boarding fees at similar Orange County facilities. The monthly stall rates at public stables ranged from \$444 at Serrano Creek in Lake Forest to \$650 at Peacock Hill in Orange. Sears says the planned rate hikes would make the Fairgrounds Equestrian Center the most expensive in Southern California. "They are over-staffed," claimed Sears. Her report shows that, if managed correctly, the current income more than covers expenses, leaving a profit of more than \$300,000 per year.

OC Fair CEO Michele Richards co-chaired the meeting with Bilezikjian. Richards had said previously that staff planned to offer free equine therapy programs, school and public tours with hands-on experiences and

small regional horse shows. At the March 28 board meeting, Richards said that horses for those programs would be leased, but could not provide any further details.

Horse sense

For many years, trainers, who also board horses at the center, have offered low-cost public programs such as Changing Strides Therapy, U.S. Pony Club, and OC Vaulting. Horse trainers say they also offer riding lessons to children who cannot afford lessons at private facilities. "It may not be urgent for you, but it is for us," said UC Irvine student and riding instructor Angela Howe. "It's hard to move a horse with a month's notice," said Howe. "I'm a broke college student. I train kids, and I only make enough to pay for my rent, my horse's board and some ramen."

Several lawmakers questioned whether it's appropriate for a state-run facility to force out trainers who are already offering programs to the public. In a letter to the board, California Senator Josh Newman said, "The Equestrian Center, which unquestionably serves a public purpose, has firmly established itself as an invaluable asset for a wide range of groups ... I strongly encourage the board to work collaboratively with the equestrian community to allow the RFP process for a new operator to move forward."

Assembly Member Diane B. Dixon also wrote, "This is a public facility, and agreeing to in-



Boarders at the Fairgrounds stables protest the rent hike.

creases more than twice what is comparable at a private facility is cause for concern. As a state-run facility, the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center should make every effort to keep costs down so all residents – no matter economic background – have the opportunity to enjoy an equestrian experience."

Blinders on

Horse boarders at the meeting questioned why there was only one bidder who responded to the Invitation for Bid, after a previous one was cancelled. "We saw multiple interested bidders walking the property," said one woman. "Why was the request for proposals (RFP) cancelled?" Richards responded, "I can't answer why the board cancelled the other RFP."

Richards said she was offended by accusations at the last board meeting of "fiscal irresponsibility." She blamed the state's prevailing wages requirement for the large size of the contract. However, several, including Aileen Anderson, dismissed that claim. Anderson, a UC Irvine professor who boards a horse at the center, said, "Prevailing wage is not the issue. The hours are overstated."

I am here, and I see how long it takes to feed the horses."

Boarders have long complained about deteriorating conditions at the facility. "It's getting dangerous to ride here," warned Anderson. "Multiple horses have fallen. For years it was being maintained. There was money being reinvested."

Ask the experts

Sears recommended that the center form a committee of equine experts to discuss other options. According to Richards, that would require a recommendation from the Facilities Committee, which Bilezikjian serves on. Several equestrians noted that the current contract contains a 30-day cancellation clause. "Your RFP reads: 'we may do an audit of the costs.' Have you done an audit?" asked a woman, who introduced herself as "Kelly."

"I'm sorry," said horse boarder Kari Friedman, choking back tears, "I have three horses here, but come June 15, if that's what we have to pay, I am not here. Take the panic away. Can we delay the decision to raise rates?"

The first of the fee hikes is set to take effect June 15.



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Guest Commentary

Orange faces a moment of truth

By Arianna Barrios

Last year, I called upon my fellow council members to support a request for a comprehensive forensic audit of city finances and accounting systems. While my reason for requesting this type of deep dive audit was based on a simple hunch that neither the Council nor our residents had been getting a complete picture, little did any of us know how sobering the truth would be.

Within weeks of that initial request, the carefully curated façade of fiscal health would be laid bare.

When we began preparing the 2023-2024 budget, we grappled with a \$6 million deficit. While we found short-term solutions to cover the immediate gap, our budget discussions continued throughout the year and, the more we investigated, the worse it got. Orange's new finance director

has uncovered the gravity of our structural deficiencies, currently estimated at \$19 million, and presented truly alarming five-, ten-, and 20-year financial forecasts.

These discoveries tell us two things. First, that the city's past fiscal practices have left us woefully underfunded. And second, that if we do not quickly implement wholesale change in our operations and find new revenue streams, within a decade Orange will be facing a gaping economic chasm for which there will be little remedy outside of mass layoffs, loss of critical services and possible municipal bankruptcy.

The entire city council is determined to prevent such a scenario and motivated to protect all that we love most about our beloved city.

Getting to this point didn't happen overnight. The dire economic straits Orange currently finds itself in is the product of years of

inadequate fiscal management. The painful truth of these failures is compounded by past practices that kicked the can of accountability down the road to maintain the appearance that all was well. Sadly, we cannot fix the past and the simple fact of the matter is, this problem is now ours to navigate.

We are taking extraordinary steps to ensure new operating procedures are put into place and organizational accountability is restored. It is also essential that we be completely honest with Orange residents and responsible to our taxpayers.

I give a lot of credit to our new City Manager Tom Kisela, and the administration he has built at city hall. While not a traditional candidate for the position, as Orange's former chief of police, Kisela is a leader with a willingness to question past practices and fearlessly assess our strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, he does not shy away from sharing harsh realities with his team, the council, or our residents so we can make sound decisions. In addition, new departmental leaders from outside Orange have brought with them new energy, ideas, and best practices from other agencies.

The transformed executive team is assessing our departments for efficiency, standard practice adherence, fiscal controls, and accountability. But it will take time that sadly our city does not have to right the ship entirely.

For our residents and business owners, much of this news will come as a complete surprise and shock. We are moving quickly to remedy this with the launch of a comprehensive education program to draw back the curtain and, with full transparency, share how we got here and clearly explain what our options are going forward. Our residents need to

know and voice their opinions in an honest dialogue with city leaders. Visit protectorange.com to learn more or request a presentation for your group or neighborhood.

This is a critical moment for Orange. These problems will not be resolved quickly, nor will any of the potential solutions be easy. We must be intentional about the changes we adopt and completely open with our residents and businesses about the consequences of each possibility. Most importantly, we need the input from our community as we do the hard work to get the city on a strong fiscal footing.

We are in this together, and together is how we will find solutions to protect Orange for generations to come.

Arianna Barrios is Mayor Pro Tem of the City of Orange and represents District 1.

LETTERS to the EDITOR



What's the plan?

Dear Editor:

The owners of the 11.1-acre property across the street from Arroyo School in North Tustin has requested cancellation of an agricultural use contract, known as the Williamson Act Contract, by the OC Board of Supervisors. This contract results in lower property taxes and prohibits development of the property. Why would the owners request cancel-

lation of the contract and incur an increase in property taxes? The obvious answer is that they plan to sell to a developer. Under county law, the contractor could then build residential housing like the surrounding homes. But, recent state laws override local laws and permit a wider range of developments, all of which are higher density.

To receive the cancellation of the agricultural contract, the owner must state what the plan for the property will be. The owner has not stated what the plan is. The ruse may be to have the cancellation approved with the condition that the use will be provided at a later date. What happens at a later date, when the public is not watching?

Every city and county is required by the state to have a housing element plan to meet new mandated housing quotas. If the county or city plan is found unacceptable, builders can come and build literally anything supported by the land. Orange County does not have an accepted plan. Could the developer's goal be to acquire the property and wait to see if the county's plan will be found unacceptable? This would be very lucrative. If this does not happen, they could try for higher density like the Racquet Club project.

The Foothill Communities Association believes the county should not cancel the agricultural contract until the plans of the owner and developer are known.

Richard Nelson, president
Foothill Communities Assn.
North Tustin

Dear Editor:

The owners of an 11.1-acre open space agricultural property has applied to the Orange County Board of Supervisors to change the property zoning from agricultural to residential. The property is at 11091 Coronel Road, North Tustin. It is across the street from Arroyo Elementary School and surrounded by single family homes.

The property is undeveloped and has thousands of trees and wildlife. If the Board of Supervisors allows the change

to residential, it will likely be a prelude to the land being sold to a developer who intends to construct high-density multiple residential units. Homeowners in the area are gathering information to resist development that is inconsistent with North Tustin's Specific Plan.

We are appealing to other residents to be involved. If development of the property is left unchecked, it could lead to the destruction of our beautiful community, removal of the trees and the total displacement of abundant wildlife. Further, the small streets around Arroyo Elementary School, which are already congested, will be overburdened with cars and people, creating an unsafe and hectic environment.

Joanne Schwartz
North Tustin

Ed. note: The Board of Supervisors declined to vote on a status change for this property on April 23. The Williamson Act expires in five years and will remain in effect until then.

Site unseen

Dear Editor:

A letter from the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians was delivered to the members of the Orange City Council regarding the proposed Orange Heights development. The letter asks the council to request a new and updated Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that recognizes changes that have taken place both legally and culturally since 2005 (when the original EIR was done), as well as a Traditional Cultural Property study, from The Irvine Company before proceeding with the approval of plans and permits.

The Orange Heights development area comprises almost 400 acres between Irvine Regional Park and Peters Canyon Regional Park, considered a crucial wildlife corridor as well as a culturally sensitive area for both pre-contact and post-European arrival -- cultural resources important to the Gabrieleno/Tongva.

As a part of the cultural resources study completed for the 2005 EIR, testing confirmed the site was potentially eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources. Therefore, the proposed development site is

considered a unique archaeological resource for the purposes of California Environmental Quality Act.

In its letter, the Tribe stated its disagreement with the mitigation measures put forth in the original EIR because it did not mitigate for impacts to Native American values. In 2005, the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians advised the City of Orange of the cultural sensitivity of this area. At that time, AB52, which provides guidelines for government-to-government consultation between interested Native American individuals and groups, had not yet been enacted. The Tribe does not consider that a consultation between the Tribe and the City of Orange for this project has been completed in good faith.

As the City of Orange has grown, it has impacted the traditional lands of the Gabrieleno/Tongva and there is a high likelihood that unrecorded resources have been destroyed. Both The Irvine Company and the Orange City Council are silent on the subject of protecting tribal resources in our area. Mayor Dan Slater and City Council members, when will you choose to do right by our local indigenous groups?

Heather Westenhofer
Orange

No appointment necessary

Dear Editor:

Understanding that political factors may be an attribute to the OUSD board's decision on how to replace the vacancies in trustee area seats four and seven, it is imperative that this board majority puts the community first.

For nearly a year, the OUSD community has been plagued with political polarization through the divisive recall of Trustees Rick Ledesma and Madison Miner. By placing provisional appointments, such polarization would only continue.

Considering the current board composition, appointments of provisional trustees would guarantee an unelected supermajority for a certain faction on the board of education. To be delegated such powers without the approval of voters serves contrary to the ideals in which this nation was founded upon.

Moreover, the appointment of

politically selected provisional trustees would allow them to claim incumbency in a November special election. This would extend the political longevity of a union-backed board majority through the advantage of incumbency, despite voters having little to no say in the first place.

It would certainly be judicious to question whether placing provisional trustees would be within the best interests of this community. It would be wise for the board to leave these seats vacant, while maintaining deference to the need for stability within the OUSD community.

Alexander Tran
OUSD student board member

OUSD adopts student Bill of Rights

A student Bills of Rights was adopted by the Orange Unified Board of Education in a unanimous vote, April 11.

The Bill of Rights, put together by student board members Nancy Albano, Orange High School; Emma Hoffman, El Modena; Jiya Patel, Canyon; Davehna Ramirez, Richland; and Alex Tran, Villa Park, supersedes a previous rights document generated in 1988.

Student board members surveyed their classmates to determine their current wants and needs, received over 1,500 responses and, advised by Trustees Ana Page and Angie Rumsey, created the final Bill of Rights, as follows.

The right to state standard curriculum and to learn at a level and pace appropriate to each student's ability. The right to excel with the support of the school community. The right to gain skills that will enable students to be college- and career-ready. The right to retain individuality within the limitations and boundaries of the school policies. The right to be treated with dignity. The right to embrace one's ethnic, cultural and social background. The right to a safe environment. The right to participate in additional educational opportunities and the right to provide feedback through student voice platforms.

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"Orange budget"
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Deep cuts looming

One of the most notable is the replacement of fire stations two, three, four and five. All built in the 1960s, these stations have met or exceeded their intended lifespan. But with a cost of \$7-8 million to replace each one, the city's firefighters will have to continue to make do. In addition to the out-of-date fire facilities, other services citywide may also be reduced or eliminated entirely.

Resources for property crime prevention, homelessness intervention, neighborhood patrols and code enforcement could all see reductions. With a lack of equipment and staffing for city emergency services, response times may increase and the quality of service may decline. Services for youths and seniors, as well as the city's long-standing Treats in the Streets, 3rd of July, and Tree Lighting celebrations could be cut out entirely.

Mayor Pro Tem Arianna Barrios noted that the deferment of projects makes the budget look less imperiled than it really is, and stressed the importance of making it clear that the city is not on sturdy financial footing.

Reserve funds available

It wasn't all bad news though. The city has reserve funding (separate from the general fund) that can only be used on specific capital improvements. An enterprise fund, for example, must be used for water and sewer. Special revenue funds must be spent on parks, libraries and public safety.

Using that reserve funding, Community Services will be improving several parks, including the installation of safety netting

on baseball fields in El Camino Real and Steve Ambriz Parks and protective fencing to prevent unauthorized vehicles in Serrano Park.

A new park is also slated for West Orange, but due to a current water department project, those plans are still in development and will not be finalized until sometime next year. El Camino Real Park is also expected to receive exercise equipment; however, this will be funded through a grant and will have no impact on the city's budget.

In the works

Public Works will be continuing a number of annual upkeep and maintenance projects as well as the 2025 completion of a new well and pocket park currently under construction. Sewer line maintenance and replacement, annual maintenance of pavement and concrete, and the replacement of water pipelines will continue through this year.

The Santiago Bike Trail Project is also expected to move on to phase four, pending a nearly \$5 million grant through OCTA.

In an effort to inform residents of the financial situation facing Orange, the city has launched an informational webpage, Protect Orange.org. The page provides basics about the budget crisis, contact information for the city manager, and a schedule of upcoming in-person community meetings to update those interested in the city's finances, as well as what options are currently under consideration to protect the city's long-term financial future.

The next meeting will take place May 16 at 5 p.m. at El Camino Park. Residents and business owners are encouraged to attend.

"OUSD board"
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tion to Areas 4 and 7," he said. "They haven't been represented for the last 15 months. We need involved, rational people who are involved in the schools and the district."

Jon Sanks agreed that it was "critical that vacancies are filled," emphasizing an "honest dialogue" with candidates who have experience with an OUSD school, advocate for the OUSD community and will bring no surprises or political stunts to board meetings. "Let's make OUSD board meetings boring again," he said.

Connie Concepcion noted that she wanted to see the vacancies

filled, that the open trustee Area represents large numbers of Latinos and that the previous board members "didn't hear us."

The board voted 4-1 (Ortega dissenting) to move forward with the appointment process. Applications for the seats were accepted as of April 12. The openings were advertised on the OUSD website and local media.

Candidates will be interviewed by the board during a public meeting, tentatively announced for May 2. Depending on the number of applicants, a second interview meeting might be necessary. The board assured all OUSD stakeholders that "deliberations will be in public."

The appointments must be made by May 21.

Orange police chief reports a decrease in citywide crime

The Orange Police Department's 2023 Annual Report indicates that the number of robberies, assaults and residential burglaries was lower than in 2022. However, in his March 26 presentation to the city council, Chief Don Adams advised that comparing those two years statistically is difficult because the FBI changed the reporting format.

"What used to be one robbery with 10 victims, is now considered 10 robberies," Adams explained. "If we had one person committing three crimes, we would have reported only the most serious one; now we must report all three. And, a death resulting from a DUI is now considered a homicide."

Despite those reporting changes, Adams assured the audience that there were 319 fewer crime victims in 2023 and no "disturbing trends" on the horizon.

Community focus

The police department has initiated a "crime reduction" model, wherein incidents are mapped weekly and additional resources are allocated to areas with higher activity. A new crime reduction unit, consisting of patrol and undercover officers, has, according to Adams, "truly put a dent in crime," with 300 arrests made by just four individuals.

The department received 97,679 calls for service in 2023. The average response time was four minutes for an emergency and 11 minutes for non-emergencies. In some cases, Adams reports, officers arrived at the scene while staff were still on the phone with the caller.

Two dedicated homeless outreach workers were added to the force in 2023, resulting in 6,132 contacts, with 165 placed in shelters and 134 mental health referrals. That may not sound like a lot, Adams acknowledged, but it is. Orange was number two in placements at the Buena Park homeless shelter. Overall, there are 100 to 120 homeless people living in the city, with no increases reported by the HEART (Homeless Engagement, Assistance and Resource Team).

A community engagement bureau, headed by Lt. Phil McMullen, has, the chief says, "... put outreach at an all-time high." McMullen's team has joined the Chamber of Commerce, increased participation with local organizations and held 46 neighborhood watch meetings in the last year.

Last year's crime statistics total five homicides, nine sexual assaults, 97 robberies and 206 aggravated assaults. Commercial burglaries numbered 350;

residential burglaries, 168; theft from vehicles, 501; and stolen vehicles, 372.

Integrated crime fighting

In a separate action, the city council approved a two-year lease of 43 Flock safety cameras, 13 live-stream video cameras and software to combat organized retail crime and improve investigative resources. The Flock cameras read license plates and store the information in a database to provide alerts and intelligence.

All data and video can be assessed through a single platform, integrated with third-party camera systems and be shared with other jurisdictions. The system essentially combines citywide surveillance, including non-Flock camera streams, into one platform.

The Orange Police Department plans to mount the Flock devices at city entry and exit points, targeting areas "where there are problems." While the system can recognize license plates and vehicles, it does not identify people.

The contractor, Insight Public Sector, will install and maintain the cameras. The two-year lease will cost \$411,980, including equipment, installation and integration. The money is drawn from a city capital bond fund earmarked for safety expenditures.



From left, Orange Mayor Dan Slater and AO partners Hugh Rose, Jack Selman, RC Alley, Ken Smith and Steve Gaffney

Architects Orange celebrates 50th anniversary

The Orange-based architecture firm AO (Architects Orange) was honored by the city and Mayor Dan Slater, who proclaimed March 27 as "AO Day" to celebrate the firm's 50th anniversary and recognize its contributions to the community.

Founded by Orange High graduate, Jack Selman, Architects Orange opened its first office in Old Towne Orange in 1974. He later

purchased the building at 144 N. Orange Street where the firm is headquartered today. It was rebranded as AO in 2019.

Mayor Slater presented the proclamation to AO partners and managing partners before community members including one of their philanthropic partners, Friendly Center.

Over the past 50 years, AO has made a significant impact as the

firm designed numerous iconic buildings: 1,600-plus apartment units and over 100,000 sq. ft. of commercial space in Orange alone. It has grown to become one of the largest architecture firms in OC and one of the major employers in the City of Orange.

AO also expanded its footprint nationally and internationally, with projects from Boston to Toronto to Jakarta.

Young Women of the Month feted

The Tustin Area Woman's Club named Payton Thatcher and Leilah Patel its Young Women of the Month for April.

Payton Thatcher from Foothill High participates in girls varsity lacrosse, which has won consecutive Division 1 championships over the last three years. She is currently the Associated Student Body secretary and has served as publications commissioner and Inter Club Council vice president. Thatcher is a member of the National Honor Society, the California Scholarship Federation and is currently pursuing her level 10 Piano Certificate of Merit. She founded the Solar 4 Salvador project, raising over \$11,000 to provide solar panels to families living in poverty. She plans to major in political science and anthropology and ultimately attend law school.

Tustin High School's Leilah Patel is a student member of the



Payton Thatcher



Leilah Patel

District Board of Education. Last summer she participated in the American Legion Auxiliary's first ever co-ed "Girls and Boys State." She has been a varsity wrestler for four years, as well as the girls' team captain for two years. In the future, Patel hopes to continue her

athletic passions in college while also pursuing a career as either a psychiatrist or a sports psychologist.

Jolene Chou, from Beckman High and Amani Shezad from Legacy High were also honored in April

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CANYON BEAT *by Scott Breeden*

Spring summer concert

The bands Sky Island Ramblers (“cosmic acoustic”) and Hillbilly Crutch (“outlaw country”) will kick off Silverado’s 2024 summer concert series on Saturday, May 18.

Monthly concerts through September will feature everything from “jams for the masses” to “rarely heard big hits,” “biggest, baddest hits of the 70s,” “acoustic Dead tunes,” “original rock & gold,” and “music of Paul Simon.” (After the “all types of music” band, presumably now you’ve heard everything.) See smpd.org for more information.

Concerts begin at 6 p.m. at the Silverado Fairgrounds (“community center”). There is no admission charge (“free”), though donation of a can of food for charity is encouraged. The Silverado-Modjeska Recreation and Park District (“SMRPD”) will sell BBQ hamburger plates (“food”) from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. SMRPD will also provide ice cream sundaes (“desserts”) for free, but any tips will help keep these events going.

Choose your own art adventure

May 18 is also the date of the 2024 Spring Canyon Artists Stu-

dio Tour. Visit 20 or so studios in any order between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., where paintings, sculptures, prints, jewelry and other creations will be on display and for sale. Pick up a map at the Silverado Canyon Market or at any studio. View example artwork at canyon-artists.net.

Home sweet home

Finally, on May 18, OC Parks will host an open house at the historic Modjeska House and Gardens. Enjoy a Shakespeare performance or music between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Admission is free, but reservations are required. Visit ocparks.com or email heritage-hill@ocparks.com.

Mother Nature

The Environmental Nature Center will have native plants for sale on Mother’s Day, May 12, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary in Modjeska.

Friendship and Franship

Friends of the Library will sponsor a June luncheon to honor former committee chair Fran Williams, and to raise money for programs at the Library of the Canyons. Chili at the home of Geoff and Sarah Sarkissian will be fol-

lowed by an auction of homemade desserts baked by local pastry chefs.

Time: Sunday, June 2, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Place: 28592 Markuson Road, Modjeska Canyon. Please bring a \$25 per person tax-deductible contribution for the Inter-Canyon League.

To attend, volunteer, or donate a dessert, contact FoL Chair Andrew Tonkovich at atankovi@uci.edu or (949) 235-8193.

GSOB story

If gold spotted oak borers (GSOBs) have attacked oak trees on or near your property, now is the time to have them sprayed.

Particularly worrisome is Mike Boeck’s report that the Cleveland National Forest apparently has no plan to treat its infested trees that aren’t near a road. Besides potentially wiping out the forest and throwing the rangers out of work, could this also make the government liable for damage to oaks on neighboring private land?

Fire and rain

One of the canyon Easter morning traditions in both Silverado and Modjeska is a community pancake breakfast served by the local volunteer firefighters.

The Silverado breakfast takes place at the community center because there is not enough room at the fire station. The Modjeska breakfast takes place at the fire station because there is not enough room at the community

center.

This year, cooks in Silverado worked outdoors while the crowd ate indoors. But in Modjeska, the threat of rain led to cancellation of the entire event. Ironically, the too-small Modjeska community center used to be the fire station.

Silverado originally held Easter breakfasts at its fire station, too. Technically, though, that was a different station, destroyed by a fatal mudslide in 1969. Caused by rain.

A wort to the wise

A California figwort plant consists of a spindly stalk up to six feet tall, supporting tiny maroon flowers at the top and toothy triangular leaves below. It is native to several areas of California, including our local coastal sage scrub and chaparral.

The small (quarter-inch) California figwort flowers attract small native bees. Native people formerly used the plant to treat fever and infections. Today, some people use plants in the figwort family for skin conditions like eczema, itching, hemorrhoids, and acne, although “there is no good scientific evidence to support these uses” according to webmd.com.

Hemorrhoids, though, are where the word “figwort” comes from: “Wort” is Middle English for “plant” or “root,” and hemorrhoids were once called “figs.”

If you’d rather not think about that, you can call California fig-

wort by its other common name: bee plant.

Note: The particular plant in the photo no longer exists because someone in Silverado could not tell the difference between a wildflower and a weed. More sensitive gardeners can avoid this mishap by downloading a smartphone app like the free one at plantnet.org, enabling you to identify many plants just by taking their picture.

Technology can be impressive, but choose wisely. Gardening with a Weed Wacker is like fishing with a machine gun.



California figwort



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The Orange Elks Lodge 1475 donated \$2,800 to help Handy Elementary School purchase much-needed supplied and office equipment. Left to right, Orange Elks Exalted Ruler JC Cortez, Handy Elementary Office Manager Nicole Rostom, Handy Principal Erika Krohn, Elks Kelley Martinez, Tom Wilkerson and Steve Cearley



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Dodger slugger's gift to El Modena High celebrated



Photo by Tony Richards

El Modena Vanguard baseball players check out their new Freddie Freeman clubhouse.

By Hana Brake

A new clubhouse for the El Modena High baseball team was made possible by a \$500,000 donation from Los Angeles Dodger batting champ and former El Modena Vanguard Freddie Freeman. The Freddie Freeman Clubhouse officially opened April 7, following a ceremony commemorating the new facility and its eponym.

The opening was attended by four generations of the Freeman family, past and present El Modena Vanguard baseball coaches, players and their families, OUSD administrators and community members.

"When I was able to be blessed enough to have the resources to do something like this, that's what I wanted to create," Freeman told the audience. "The relationships, the bonds, the stories—everything you share in that clubhouse is special. That's what's going to last forever. That's what it's all about for me."

"It would be so easy with your career and family commitments to move on and forget about your past," former EMHS Head Baseball Coach Steve Bernard said, "but you are rooted to this school, and you chose to embrace it for the benefit of every Vanguard after you who will enjoy what you provided and will hopefully be inspired to provide for others, as you have. In all, Freddie Free-

man is so much more than a great ballplayer – he is a great man. May we all be inspired to make a difference, to show how we care about the well-being and happiness of others as much as Freddie has shown us."

Staff collaborated with Fred Freeman, Sr. and ElMo Varsity Baseball Head Coach Joshua Kliner on the scope of work that Freddie and his wife Chelsea's charitable donation made possible, including the purchase and installation of a new 1,440-sq.-ft. modular baseball clubhouse; new extended batting cages; and required code upgrades. The Freeman family visited EMHS to personally provide the ceremonial check to El Modena's excited and grateful baseball players, coaches and administrators last March.

"El Modena is a wonderful place to be, and we're honored that you look back at your time as a Vanguard positively, and not only come back, but give back to your community," said Kliner. "We thank you for everything that you've given us. We're so proud of you, everything that you've done, and everything that you continue to do."

The Freemans' donation to the Freddie Freeman Clubhouse is the most generous donation the district has received from a private donor to date. The OUSD Board of Education officially approved the new facility's name at its April 11 meeting.

Public restroom coming to El Modena Basin

By Tina Richards

A groundbreaking ceremony for a long-awaited public restroom serving the El Modena Basin was held April 4 at the site of the new facility adjacent to the El Modena Library.

The El Modena Basin is public open space located across the street from El Modena Park on Hewes Street. A fenced lake on the grounds is an Irvine Ranch Water District natural water treatment site; the surrounding acreage features picnic areas, picnic tables, benches and a walking path, but no permanent restroom.

El Modena residents, championed by Councilwoman Ana Gutierrez and community member Sammy Rodriguez, tried for several years to convince the City of Orange to use federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to build a restroom on the basin property. CDBG funds are primarily intended for improvements to low-income areas, identified by demographic census maps and other criteria, but can be applied to other projects if they offer a "community benefit."

Historically, the city tended to use most of its CDBG funding for "community benefit" and not the El Modena area, which had long qualified for federal funds. Rodriguez notes that, in the last two decades, the city has spent only \$11,000 of CDBG money in El Modena. That was used for street

repair on Chapman Avenue.

Two years ago, Rodriguez asked Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which assigns CDBG funds, to investigate the city's use of that money. After a lengthy letter-writing campaign, HUD representatives met with the city manager and city staff in May 2023. Gutierrez, whose district includes El Modena, was not advised of that meeting until it was over. Incensed, she insisted that HUD come back for another meeting that included her. The agency returned to meet with her.

A short time after that, the city announced that it was spending \$300,000 of CDBG money on a restroom in the El Modena Basin. Ironically, the demographic census map used to identify CDBG-qualified areas now indicates that El Modena is no longer a low-to moderate-income locale (due to a

steady influx of higher income neighbors in the hills above the barrio) and does not qualify for HUD block grant funding. The city considers the El Modena basin restroom to be a "community benefit."

Although El Modena residents are pleased with the coming restroom, many, like Sammy Rodriguez, see it as a gesture to pacify the community, and not a sincere effort to invest in the area. "CDBG funds are supposed to be used to attack poverty," he says.

"The El Modena Barrio has been excluded from CDBG money for decades. I complained; there was an investigation; we got \$300,000 for a restroom, but now we're told we don't qualify for funding. All we're asking the city for is dignity and respect."



Photos by Tony Richards

City Manager Tom Kisela (right) addresses the gathering at the site of the future El Modena restroom. Ready to break ground are, from left, Orange Councilman Jon Dumitru, Sammy Rodriguez, Carlos Valenzuela, policy advisor for Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento and Ana Gutierrez, Orange councilwoman.



Attendees at the El Modena Basin groundbreaking gathered for a group photo to commemorate the occasion.



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Friendly Center celebrates its centennial



Photos by Tony Richards

Volunteers, community members and Friendly Center staff welcomed the next 100 years with a group photo.

By Tina Richards

The Friendly Center celebrated its 100th anniversary, April 8, with the City of Orange naming that day after the long-lived nonprofit.

Friendly Center Day was feted at the organization's headquarters by center board members, staff, volunteers, elected officials and community supporters. Speakers highlighted the center's century of service, the resilience and dedication of those who came before, and acknowledged the "cosmic gift" of a solar eclipse that occurred earlier in the day. Representatives from the Gabrieleno and Juaneno Tribes blessed the land, as has been the custom for hundreds of years. Recently named CEO Kenia Cueto spoke of plans for the next 100 years.

The Friendly Center began on April 8, 1924 by a Bible study group who wanted to assist strug-

gling farm workers with food and resources. That purpose continues to this day, with services offered to all low-income families in the area.

"Our mission," said Cueto, "is food and family support, education and workforce development." That includes meeting basic needs, rent/utility assistance, domestic violence intervention, mental health counseling and parenting classes. "Our focus for the new era," Cueto stressed, "is to break the cycle of generational poverty by emphasizing job training."

To that end, the center is kicking off its first summer boot camp to train high school students with up-to-date job skills. The initial program, conducted in partnership with a local college, focuses on drones. The bootcamp will feature classroom instruction covering drone safe-



CEO Kenia Cueto

ty, operation and current laws, plus hands-on flight experience. This four-day program will run for three to four hours each day and will be hosted at the Family Resource Center's classroom facility, with flight sessions conducted in the nearby park fields.

The primary target audience for this program is students from Richland High School, which is located adjacent to the Resource Center. Participation is also open to other high school students and young adults from the community.

"Our aim," said Operations Director Steve Getman, "is to attract these students and their parents to our center, particularly those who may benefit from our additional services. The Education to Workforce pipeline will put them on the path to the jobs of today and tomorrow and allow families to escape poverty."



The Woman's Club of Orange honored the Katella Avenue Home Depot for giving its 100-year-old clubhouse an upgraded ladies' room. The Woman's Club now has a lovely restroom with new flooring, paint and a new vanity, thanks to a \$20,000 grant from Home Depot. At the club's April luncheon, the store was given a proclamation in thanks for its ongoing support. From left, WCO Director of House Pat Hamilton, First Vice President Carol Allen, Home Depot Store Manager Melissa Coronado and Specialty Sales Assistant Store Manager Alicia Torres. Home Depot also donates gift baskets for the monthly raffles at the Woman's Club of Orange.

Tustin Historical Society offers Vintage Home and Garden Tour



A historic home decked out for a previous year's tour represents what the 2024 event will offer.

By Guy Ball

The Tustin Area Historical Society will host its 25th annual Old Town Tustin Home and Garden Tour, "Silver Jubilee Edition" on Saturday, May 18 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Highly regarded as a storied event full of lovely sights and sounds, the tour celebrates a bygone era. Participants will enjoy a stroll through Tustin's Old Town area and view how homeowners have turned their vintage homes and gardens into modern living spaces, while maintaining the charm of yesteryear. Each home has a unique story, interesting décor, and artifacts collected by their owners.

This year's architectural styles include an 1875 Italianate Victorian (Tustin's third-oldest standing structure); a 1924 California Bungalow (similar, but then more affordable, to a Craftsman); a 1924 Colonial Tudor Revival, as well as a 1930 English Tudor Revival with fairy tale architecture; and another bungalow boasting a large, open front porch from which to enjoy the quiet street.

The full-day event also features activities such as Maypole dancing, live musical entertainment, a "Tree Walk" with landscape architect Guy Stivers, a Concessionaire's Garden of craft vendors, various speakers on gardening and history, quilt and weaving displays, plein-air painting, vintage vehicles, and demonstrations at the Tustin Area Museum. Two horse-drawn trolleys will provide extra ambiance and transportation between most homes.

Tickets on the day of the event are \$45; discounted pre-sale tickets, at \$40, are available until May 16. For more information or to order tickets online, visit TustinHistory.com or call (714) 731-5701. The tour will begin at the Tustin Presbyterian Church, 225 W. Main St. A festive opening ceremony will commence at 9:40 a.m., with the homes opening at 10 a.m.

The tour benefits the Tustin Area Historical Society to support the Tustin Area Museum and the Society's other programs, including "History in a Box" for school children and a wide variety of historical activities.



Providence St. Joseph Hospital Orange is celebrating the grand opening of the Helen Caloggero Women's and Family Center. The four-story, 137,000-sq.-ft. facility will provide improved access to vital women's health services, benefits and resources for Orange County residents. The new center is located at 363 S. Main St. and provides a new hub to access a wide array of services, including obstetrics and gynecology, a maternity wellness center, maternal mental health services, pelvic health and rehab. The space also features La Amistad, a federally qualified health clinic, with OB-GYN and pediatric services for underserved members of the community.

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Elks host GRIP soccer camp



Left to right in front, Elks Mike Cash, Larry Saunders, Kathy Cole, Paloma Cortez, Rachael Schultz and Mike Duff; back row, from left, Kevin Wagner, Exalted Ruler JC Cortez and Bill Neessen

The Gang Reduction Intervention Partnership (GRIP) Soccer Camp is held annually during the Orange Unified School District spring break.

GRIP is a program for students between 8 and 12 years old, pre-selected to participate in the program as they may be determined to be at-risk of gang involvement and drug use during a time when they have very little adult supervision.

The kids that attended the soccer camp had to earn their way to the

camp by their actions and achievements. Once in the program, the kids make and set goals, and must show improvement to stay in the program. This soccer camp helps them to do that!

The Elks Drug Awareness Team cooked and served tacos, rice, beans, chips, water and candy to 50 kids and staff at the GRIP Soccer Camp.

The Elks Soccer Shoot Committee donated two new soccer balls from the Soccer Shoot to be given as prizes.

Assistance League embraced Orange



Assistance League member Vikki Murphy, Ambassador Gaddi Vasquez and former Orange Mayor Mark Murphy

The Assistance League of Orange community shared the "Spirit of Giving" at the Embrace Orange Gala, held at the Balboa Bay Club on April 14. The 2024 Community Circle Award was presented to Ambassador Gaddi Vasquez to thank him for his service to the Orange community and to the United States.

The event, coordinated by numerous member-volunteers, in-

cluded silent and live auctions, a dinner with premium wines and live music. Assistance League of Orange thanks its many generous donors. Without their help, the league would not be able to serve the community of Orange as extensively as it does, with over 13 philanthropic programs, benefiting students, veterans, seniors and the disadvantaged. For information, see alorange.org.

Sweets and greets offered at OC Central Dems meeting

The OC Central Dems will have sweet offerings for its Wednesday, May 22 meeting, with an ice cream social at 6 p.m. The meeting begins at 7 p.m., with a deep dive into the youth vote by hearing from youth voters.

A Brookings Institute analysis of the 2022 midterm election exit polls underscored that young voters, especially young women, drove the Democratic advantage in 2022. In preparation for the November election, the group is engaging with young voters to learn

about the interests that drive them to vote; what are the talking points they relate to; what do they want Dems to know?; to do?

At this meeting, attendees will hear from young Dems from around the county. Central OC Dems includes Tustin, Tustin Hills, Orange, Villa Park and surrounding communities. Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month at St. Paul's Episcopal Church at 1221 Wass St. Central OC Dems is not affiliated with St. Paul's. See OCDems.com.

Villa Park cleans up for Earth Day

By Jill Kuli

Villa Park residents had a couple of days head start on restoring our planet with several Earth Day activities on April 20.

The City of Villa Park and Republic Services partnered to offer a free compost giveaway at Villa Park High. At the same time, many students were involved with clean-up and restoration projects for their Campus Care Day.

The Villa Park Community Services Foundation organized free paper shredding and electronics recycling in front of city hall. Thanks to a generous financial sponsorship by Kathy McCarthy of First Team Real Estate, boxes of confidential paper documents were destroyed on-site by Total Shredding. Much gratitude goes to Joe Sandoval, as hundreds of

dysfunctional electronics filled his Junkluggers truck. Items such as TVs, laptops, printers, and LCD screens will be restored or discarded after any confidential info is professionally erased.

The VPCS Foundation encouraged everyone to pick up trash on the walkways and trails during the day. Free grabber tools were provided.

Many thanks go to the students from the VP High Interact Club and the Orange/Villa Park National Charity League who scoured the Villa Park Town Center and disposed of trash, as well as helped with lugging documents and electronics from citizen's vehicles for destruction.

Residents were given free fold-up cloth shopping bags and free seed packets from the foundation to grow their own vegetables. Tomatoes were popular, but beans,

onions, and cucumbers were also favorites. And, kids loved the free Earth Day stickers.

City events such as Earth Day could not come together without the hard work and dedication of our superhero maintenance man, Mike Knowles. His pre/post efforts for Earth Day were very much appreciated, but his daily efforts to preserve "Hidden Jewel" are truly remarkable.

Want to know more about the VPCS Foundation and support its many free community activities? See vpcsfoundation.org.



Nominations announced for 2023 Tustin Man and Woman of the Year

By Mark Eliot

The committee for the 2023 Tustin Area Man and Woman of the Year (TAMWY) announced that five men and six women have been nominated for the honor by local nonprofit groups.

The nominees for Tustin Area Man of the Year are Roger Carlson, Tustin-Santa Ana Rotary Club; Jef Maddock, Tustin Chamber of Commerce; Jeff Meyers, Tustin Area Council for Fine Arts; Tim O'Donoghue, Tustin Kiwanis Club; and Ed Reynolds, Tustin Community Foundation.

The nominees for Tustin Woman of the Year are Sheryl Franke, Tustin Area Woman's Club; Christine Gregg, Soroptimists International, Santa Ana-Tustin; Sharon Hirahara, Tustin Cham-

ber of Commerce; Erin Kociela, Tustin-Santa Rotary Club; Kelly Meyers, Tustin Area Council for Fine Arts; and Lisa Telles, Assistance League of Tustin.

The TAMWY program has been held for more than 60 years. Tustin-area individuals are recognized for their dedicated work, leadership and outstanding volunteerism in the community. Nominations for the award come from local nonprofit organizations or previous winners.

The annual awards dinner will be held on Friday, May 31, at 6 p.m. at the Santa Ana Elks Lodge, 1751 S. Elk Lane. Dinner tickets can be purchased via TustinCommunityFoundation.org. Sponsorships are also available.

Additionally, the TAMWY committee will recognize an

outstanding high school senior from the Tustin Unified School District. Student musicians from Beckman High School will perform at the event.

The Tustin Man and Woman of the Year will become lifetime members of the TAMWY organization. They will receive special awards, pins, and city and county proclamations at the dinner. They will ride in the Tustin Tiller Days Parade as guests of honor in October, and have their names permanently etched on a brick walkway in the plaza between the Tustin Library and Clifton C. Miller Community Center at the Tustin Civic Center.

For more information, contact Kim DeBenedetto at knowers22@gmail.com or Mark Eliot at markeliot86@gmail.com.

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OPAWL to host tea

Orange Park Acres Women's League will host a tea party fundraiser on Saturday, May 18 from 3 to 5 p.m. at Morning Lavender Café in Tustin. Scones, finger sandwiches and pastries will be served with teas; champagne and wine will be available for an ad-

ditional charge. Proceeds will help support Precious Life Shelter, which provides residential and supportive services for homeless pregnant women and their children.

See opawomen.org or email opawomen@gmail.com.

Covenant to explore "Women of the Civil War"

Covenant's Women's Fellowship will feature Karen Frey, speaking on "Women of the Civil War" at its monthly luncheon, on Thursday, May 16.

In this dramatic performance, Frey will explain the very important roles women played during the war years. She will focus on two women in particular, one from the North and one from the South.

Frey, a retired elementary school teacher, has been involved with Civil War re-enacting since 2001. In her talks about the roles women played in the Civil War, she wants people to know that the war wasn't only about battles, generals and soldiers. Women played a large part, but sadly, little is said about their contributions as spies, nurses and messengers.

The luncheon is open to men

and women in the community, and will be held in St. Andrew's Hall on the church campus, 1855 N. Orange-Olive Road.

Doors open at 11 a.m.; the program begins at 11:30 a.m.

A catered lunch is \$15 per person, payable in advance. Reservations are required by Saturday, May 11, by calling Linda at (951) 237-9888.

Reservations are also required to attend the program only at 12:30 p.m.; the cost is \$5, payable at the door.



Karen Frey re-enacting a Civil War-era woman.

Fairhaven observes Memorial Day

Fairhaven Memorial Park invites the public to its 32nd annual Memorial Day service, Monday, May 27 at 10:30 a.m. The event features military speakers, live

music, a memorial flyover, honor guard detail, dove release, antique cars and complimentary hot dogs. Fairhaven is located at 1702 Fairhaven Ave., Santa Ana.

Smiling face at SWD to retire

The Serrano Water District (SWD) Board of Directors announced that Laura Heflin, the smiling face in the front office, will be retiring after 19 years of service to the District as its Administrative Assistant. The Board of Directors, General Manager Jerry Vilander, and staff wish Laura and her husband, Chris, well in their future endeavors, and are grateful for her many years of dedicated service and contributions over the years. Laura and her husband are relocating to the South and are looking forward to their big adventure with their Schnoodle, Max!

Jennifer Westrum will be replacing Laura as the new Administrative Assistant and brings many years of expertise in the

financial, as well as administrative, field. She will be working alongside Laura until her departure at the end of May. The Board

of Directors and General Manager Vilander welcome Jennifer to her new position at the District. Please stop by to say hello.



Laura Heflin and Max

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She was super cool
She lived through the Spanish flu
And also World War 2
And lived to 102
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I wish I knew her more
But I can still cherish her forever
ever more!
I love you great-grandma Mor-
row
I hope you had an amazing life!
From your great-granddaughter,
Ava R., age 10

**The “outraged teen” to speak
at CPOC meeting**

Teenage social media commentator Max Bonilla will speak at the Thursday, May 16 meeting of the Conservative Patriots of Orange County.

Bonilla, the “outraged teen,” has over 28,000 followers on Instagram. He is speaking at the meeting to encourage young people to join the group. Conservatives age 14-25 will be given an opportunity to meet and talk with Bonilla during a “no adults allowed” meet and greet.

The April meeting recognized 2nd Amendment Day with a talk on the right to bear arms and a firearms training tutorial. CPOC member Roseann DiCostanzo demonstrated five different ways

to defend yourself with a cane. Betts Rivet, was presented with a Hold the Line award for bringing Conservative Americanism to every meeting.

The May meeting will be held at the Santa Ana Elks Lodge, 1751 Elk Street. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. for a buffet dinner. Tickets are \$30 per person.

Young people with student I.D. are \$20, and may bring a buddy for an additional \$10. Attendees under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

For reservations, contact conservativepatriotsofoc.org or Peggy Baranyay, (714) 828-1289/ swtmthr@sbcglobal.net. Tickets at the door are \$30 members/\$35 non-members.



Mark Kuli, left, was named Volunteer of the Year by Robert Frackelton and Ed Carter, president of Villa Park Community Service Foundation. Kuli was recognized for his efforts to increase membership, donations and community outreach. The award was presented March 23 at a dinner at Sunrise of Orange. The 2024 membership drive is still rolling. Visit vpcsfoundation.org.

**Orange Art Association features
pastel artist**

The Orange Art Association will feature Mike Major demonstrating work with pastels at its Monday, May 13 meeting.

The Art Association meets at the Community of Christ Church, 395

So. Tustin Avenue. Monthly competitions begin at 7 p.m., and the artist demonstrations at 7:30 p.m.

OAA welcomes new members. Yearly dues are \$35. For information, call Pat at (714) 538-8069.

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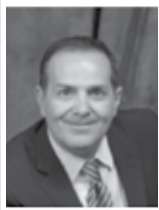
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Members of the Woman's Club of Orange cleaned out their closets to donate their gently used clothing to Working Wardrobes, a nonprofit that provides appropriate clothing for people interviewing for employment. Event organizers included, from left, Debbie Todd, Paul Todd, Carol Allen and Susan Moore.

Orange High JROTC program flourishes



The Orange High School JROTC first place team



The JROTC presented the colors at Anaheim Ducks Military Appreciation Night.

Elks recognize cadet's achievements



The Orange Elks Lodge 1475 presented its Youth Achievement Awards to Cadet Captain Sean Perez and Cadet 1st Lieutenant Ashley Sanchez of the Orange High School Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps Program (JROTC). They were selected by program head Colonel Mark Tull, because they overcame obstacles to excel in the classroom, participate in athletics and are key members of the JROTC. From left, Elks Exalted Ruler JC Cortez, Cadet Captain Sean Perez, Cadet 1st Lieutenant Ashley Sanchez and Colonel Mark Tull

New officers named for Greenway Alliance



From left, Ron Newcomb, Addison Adams, Pamela Galera, Marilyn Moore, Jay Morookian, Peter Wetzel

The Santiago Creek Greenway Alliance recently elected officers and directors for 2024.

They are: Pamela Galera, president; Addison Adams, vice president; Peter Wetzel, secretary; Marilyn Moore, treasurer; and Jay Morookian and Ron Newcomb, directors at large.

The Greenway Alliance has worked to improve the ecology of and public access to Santiago Creek since 1991.

It currently oversees monthly volunteer cleanups at various spots along the creek. For more information, see Santiagogreenway.org.

RoboPlay competition coming

The second annual RoboPlay Challenge Competition will be held on May 31 at the El Modena High School cafeteria.

Over 100 students from grades 3-12, in 24 teams, will be challenged to use math, programming and problem-solving skills to develop and deploy a robot to solve a real-world problem. The event is sponsored by UC Davis C-STEM Center. For information, see c-stem.ucdavis.edu/roboplay/challenge.

OUSD graduation ceremonies slated

The OUSD Class of 2024 will hold graduation ceremonies at Fred Kelly Stadium on the following dates: Richland High and Parkside, on Wed., June 5 at 4 p.m. and Orange High, at 7 p.m.. On Thurs., June 6, El Modena ceremonies are at 1 p.m.; Canyon High is at 4 p.m.; and Villa Park High is at 7 p.m.

Promotions from middle school will be held at the respective campuses, as follows: El Rancho Charter School, Wed., June 5 at 6 p.m.; Portola Middle School, June 6 at 8 a.m.; McPherson Magnet Middle School, 8:30 a.m., June 6; Cerro Villa Middle School, 9 a.m. on June 6; Yorba Middle School, 9 a.m. on June 6; and Santiago Charter Middle School, June 7 at 9 a.m.

Creek riparian area, spearheaded by the Orange Rotary Club and Orange Mayor Dan Slater.

The group presented the colors at the Anaheim Ducks game for Military Appreciation Night; a contingent of 20 cadets in dress blues led the Veteran's Day ceremonies for the Orange County Vietnam Veterans Association. They also participated in the City of Orange "Fields of Valor," where they presented the colors and put up/took down over 2,500 flags in memory of the nation's veterans.

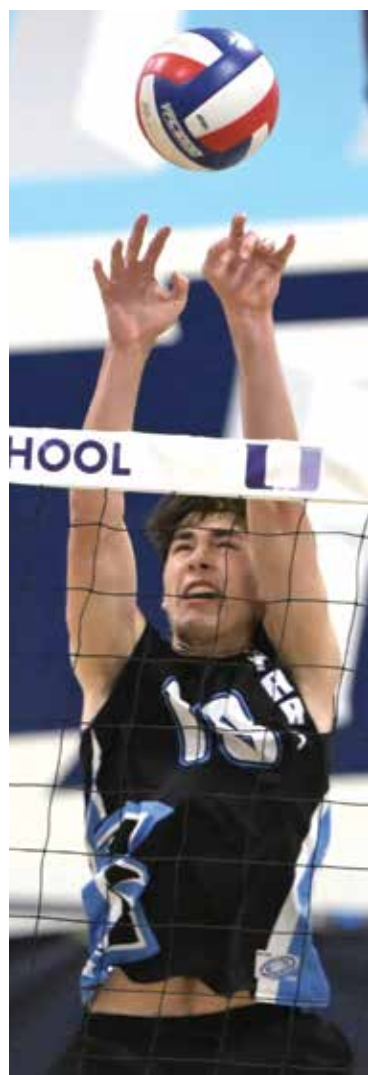
At the Cadet Raider Competition that took place at the Cal State Fullerton Military Expo, the OHS JROTC team took 1st place, and were rewarded with a ride on a Army National Guard helicopter.

The cadets also held a blood drive on behalf of the American Red Cross; the cadets and their Marine Corps instructors led the way with donations of nearly 40 pints of blood.

Many cadets report that the program genuinely changes lives for the better and has a positive impact on them and the community. For information, see ohsmcjrotc.org.

COMMUNITY SPORTS

BY CLIFF ROBBINS AND CHAD CLINE



David Castillo from Villa Park High blocks a shot against University High School.



Julian Peraza from Villa Park High digs out a serve in the University game.



VPHS Spartan Ben Coty scores, despite the block attempt.

All CIF-SS presented by the LA84 Foundation

Selected by the Southern California Soccer Coaches Association to the boys 2024 Division 1 team from Canyon High School was Tyson Smith, Sr.; from Orange Lutheran, Ethan Phillips, Sr., Xavier Alcantar, Sr., Alexander Vasquez, Sr. In boys Division 2 from Foothill High School were Tyler Valdez, Sr., and Tyler Reid, Sr.

The only 2023-24 girl selected was Vanessa Paredes, Fr., in Division 3 from Foothill High School.

In girls water polo, the Southern California Water Polo Coaches' Association selected Jai Lynn Robinson, Jr. as Open Division Player of the Year and Brenda Villa, Orange Lutheran, as Coach of the Year.

Allison Cohen, Soph., and Sofia Umeda, Sr., both from Orange Lutheran, were selected to the Open Division team. Deirdre Murphy, Sr., and Kirra Pantaleon, Soph., both from Foothill, were also selected for the Open Division team.

sion team.

Selected in Division 3 All-CIF was Anika Carcich, Soph., from Villa Park High. In Division 6 from El Modena High were Sam Simmons, Jr., Ariana Kang, Jr., and Zulema Andrade, Soph.

Selected by the Southern California Basketball Coaches' Association in girls Division 1: Princess Cassell, Sr., from Orange Lutheran. In Division 3A, Bailey Roczey, Soph., from Villa Park. In Division 4AA, Justine Prajtno, Sr., from Canyon was selected as Player of the Year and Sara Brown, Canyon, was Coach of the Year. Canyon High player Jasmine Prajtno, Sr., was selected for the CIF-SS team.

Those selected for the 2024 All CIF-SS Traditional Competitive Cheer, Division 1, were Canyon High athletes Isabella Rocha, Sr., and Ally Villiacin, Sr. In Division 4, coed, those selected were Isabella Toledo, Sr., and Sierra Antuna, Sr., from Tustin High.



ElMo's George Lopez advances the ball into Dana Hills High territory.



Brandon Flint from El Modena High takes the faceoff up field.



Jenna Cardeno, from Foothill High, scoops up a goal shot against San Clemente. Foothill dropped the non-league game, 6-2.



Ava Pistone, Foothill High, sets up for a shot against San Clemente. Foothill ranks No. 1, a good position going into the Division 1 playoffs.



Foothill's Elle Vickers (left) scores a second-half goal against San Clemente High School.

Orange Empire All-Conference

Selected to the first team All-OEC was former Villa Park athlete, playing for Santiago Canyon College mens basketball team, Damien Parker, Soph., a guard; and teammate Joey Longo, Soph., a guard. Selected to the second team All-OEC were Chico Lopez, Fr, a center; Eli Arthurton, Fr, a forward; and Tony Colley, Fr, a guard. Honorable mention from Santiago Canyon College was Trevor Manning, a freshman guard.



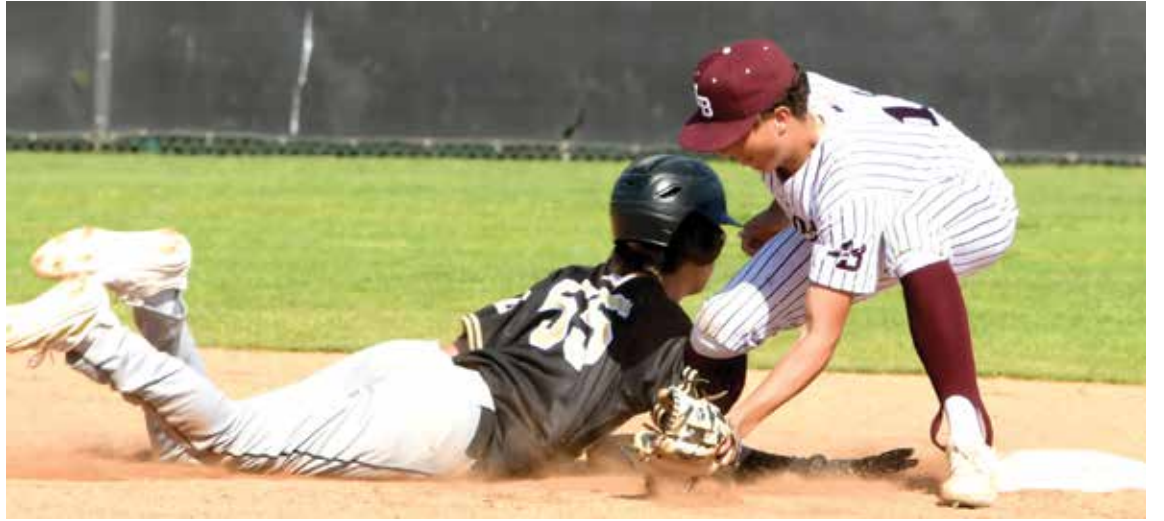
Carlos Diaz, goalkeeper for El Modena High, stops a shot mid-flight against Dana Hills High School.

COMMUNITY SPORTS

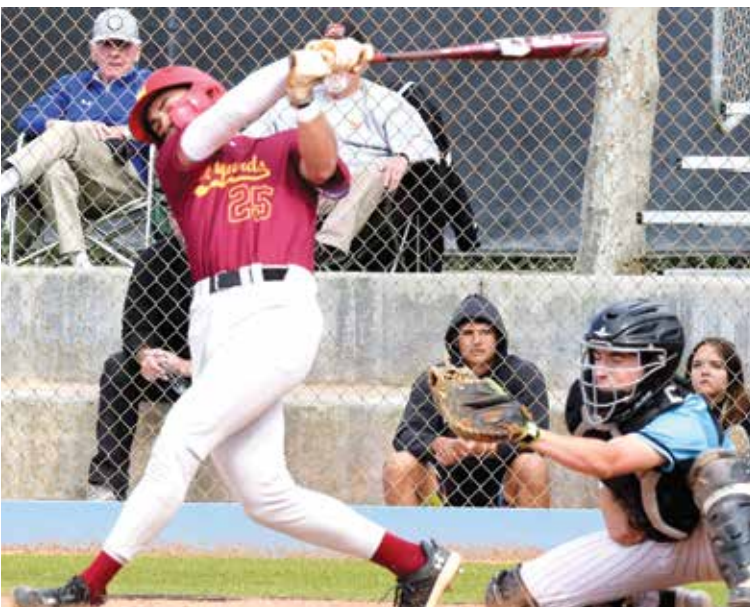
BY CLIFF ROBBINS AND CHAD CLINE



Luke Pico, catcher from Canyon High School, cuts down a Laguna Beach runner at the plate.



Canyon's Matt Frometa gets under the tag on the pickoff attempt.



Lukus Alvarado from El Modena High School singles up the middle against Villa Park.



Pitcher Alex Cloverly, a Canyon Comanche, came on in relief against Laguna High School. Canyon lost the non-league game, 3-1.

CIF-SS Ford Academic Awards honor high school athletes

The 36th annual CIF-SS Ford Academic individual and team awards, recognizing athletes and teams that excelled academically, were presented April 22 at pre-game ceremonies at Angel Stadium. Team awards are based on a cumulative grade point average, with 2,533 teams from 28 schools in 27 sports.

Individual awardees from each school were: from El Modena High, Thantam (Nathan) Tran (4.00 GPA, swimming and diving) and Katherine Slay (3.98, traditional competitive cheer); Foothill High, Madeline Posner (4.00, tennis) and William Griswold (4.00, swimming and diving, water polo); Orange Lutheran, Cassidy Driscoll (4.00, basketball, flag football, lacrosse) and Tusitala Ili (4.00, football, wrestling); Orange High, Kimberly Limon (4.00, basketball,

flag football, track and field) and Sean Perez (4.00, basketball); Tustin High, Genesis Guzman (3.83, track and field, volleyball) and Wander Seth (3.50, baseball, football); Villa Park High, Jason Trinh (4.00, tennis) and Morgan Shaffer (4.00, tennis).

In team sports, Villa Park took first place in football (3.573 GPA) and boys golf (3.914); second place in baseball (3.726); third place, boys swimming and diving (3.807), boys tennis (3.912), boys track and field (3.701) and girls track and field (3.811). Honorable mentions were earned for the following sports, including boys basketball (3.349); girls basketball (3.562); boys cross country (3.500); girls cross country (3.380); girls golf (3.720); boys soccer (3.539); girls soccer (3.718); softball (3.688); girls swimming and diving (3.681);

girls tennis (3.578); traditional competitive cheer (3.430); boys volleyball (3.571); girls volleyball (3.714); boys water polo (3.705); girls water polo (3.809); boys wrestling (3.094); girls wrestling (3.032).

Canyon High athletes took third place in softball (3.824) and boys golf (3.850), and honorable mention in all of the following, including baseball (3.699); boys basketball (3.306); girls basketball (3.533); boys cross country (3.666); girls golf (3.806); boys lacrosse (3.487); boys soccer (3.616); girls soccer (3.696); boys swimming and diving (3.794); girls swimming and diving (3.770); boys tennis (3.685); girls tennis (3.848); boys track and field (3.392); traditional competitive cheer (3.504); boys volleyball (3.446); girls volleyball (3.717); boys water polo (3.650);

girls water polo (3.781); boys wrestling (3.044); girls wrestling (3.067).

Foothill High teams were awarded honorable mentions in football, (3.266) and baseball (3.602).

Orange High School teams took honorable mention in baseball (3.521); boys basketball (3.313); girls basketball (3.445); boys cross country (3.404); girls cross country (3.666); girls golf (3.421); boys soccer (3.043); girls swimming and diving (3.484); boys tennis (3.492); girls tennis (3.406); boys track and field (3.272); girls track and field (3.406); traditional competitive cheer (3.130); boys volleyball (3.060); girls volleyball (3.387); boys water polo (3.020); girls water polo (3.474).

El Modena High teams took home honorable mention in base-

ball (3.433); girls cross country (3.853); boys swimming and diving (3.555); traditional competitive cheer (3.571); boys volleyball (3.410).

Orange Lutheran athletes took third place in boys wrestling (3.532); and honorable mentions in football (3.186); baseball (3.405); boys basketball (3.615); girls basketball (3.505); girls beach volleyball (3.602); boys cross country (3.413); girls cross country (3.836); boys golf (3.385); girls golf (3.573); girls lacrosse (3.657) (3.650); boys soccer (3.390) (3.374); girls soccer (3.637); boys volleyball (3.444); girls volleyball (3.681); boys water polo (3.388); and girls tennis (3.700).

Tustin High teams scored honorable mentions in girls tennis (3.777); girls volleyball (3.722); and girls wrestling (3.619).

Restored Orange Plaza Fountain flows again

A painstaking 13-month effort to restore the historic plaza fountain after a speeding motorist plowed into it, concluded with a

ceremonial flip of the "on" switch, April 17. The restoration work had to meet historic standards and involved a preservation consultant,

a specialty ceramics company and a conservation construction firm. The company that installed the original tile returned to do it again.



Board of Supervisor's Chairman Don Wagner (3rd District), left, and Vicente Sarmiento (2nd District), right, accept souvenir tiles from the fountain's restoration from Mayor Pro Tem Arianna Barrios. Wagner's office donated \$200,000 and Sarmiento's \$25,000 for the fountain's repair.



Mayor Dan Slater with tile setter Mark McCandless, the grandson of Charles McCandless, who installed the original tiles in the 1930s. The third generation artisan removed the damaged tiles, grout and setting bed and set the new historically matched (color and glaze) tiles to conform to the original pattern.



City Council members, from left, Ana Gutierrez, Jon Dumitru, John Gyllenhammer, Kathy Tavoularis, Mayor Dan Slater and Community Services Director Leslie Hardy toss the first good luck coins into the fountain.

REAL ESTATE
with David Silva



MARKET SNAPSHOT
TUSTIN, CA
MARCH 2024
Single Family

\$1.62M Avg. Sales Price ↑ 2%	\$2.22M Avg. List Price ↑ 11%	20 No. of Prop. Sold ↑ 30%	15 Avg. Days on Market ↓ 69%	\$727 Avg. Sales Price per Sqft. ↑ 6%
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MARKET SNAPSHOT
ORANGE, CA
MARCH 2024
Single Family

\$1.35M Avg. Sales Price ↑ 11%	\$1.70M Avg. List Price ↑ 9%	41 No. of Prop. Sold ↑ 8%	29 Avg. Days on Market ↓ 32%	\$638 Avg. Sales Price per Sqft. ↓ 1%
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MARKET SNAPSHOT
VILLA PARK, CA
MARCH 2024
Single Family

\$2.20M Avg. Sales Price ↑ 9%	\$3.31M Avg. List Price ↑ 7%	5 No. of Prop. Sold ↑ 25%	44 Avg. Days on Market ↑ 113%	\$667 Avg. Sales Price per Sqft. ↓ 3%
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