

# THE TOWNE LOCAL

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## Chula Vista



### Is Pickleball taking over the courts?

SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERVISOR  
Meet Paloma Aguirre

ART THROUGH THE GLASS  
Bringing Art to the Community

CHULA VISTA ANIMAL SHELTER  
Celebrating 102 Years

OCT 2025 ISSUE 2



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Meet the South Bay's Paloma Aguirre



*Photo by Yanelli Zavina Robles*

*The Heart & Soul of the*  
**SOUTH BAY**

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## WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR

# A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH



**JEFF BETTGER**  
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

Welcome and THANK YOU for the warm reception we received for last month's Issue #1 of The Towne Local Chula Vista. We are thrilled to have provided something interesting to a wide range of readers--young and old, East and West, born in Chula Vista and new to the area.

We want to thank the elected officials who attended our inaugural launch party for recognizing the importance of our efforts to celebrate the people, places, and history of Chula Vista and the adjacent South Bay communities.

Thank you, among others, to former County Supervisor Greg Cox and former Mayor Cheryl Cox, Jarred Cole representing Councilmember Carolina Chavez, and Marcy Weaver CEO of the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce.

You may be also interested in our companion magazine [www.TheTowneLocalBonita.com](http://www.TheTowneLocalBonita.com) which is celebrating its one year anniversary this month. Check out our monthly adventure story *Tails of Time* written by Ella Aldridge and Dr. Max Branscomb. In this cliffhanger serial, siblings Dulce and Miguel travel back in time to important dates in the history of the Sweetwater Valley.

Do you have an idea for a future story? Please feel free to contact me at [Jeff@TheTowneLocal.com](mailto:Jeff@TheTowneLocal.com)

## MEET THE TEAM



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*Ernesto Castaneda representing State Assemblymember David Alveraz*



*Paulina Castillo and Ardyel Lim representing State Senator Steve Padilla*



# MORE THAN A WALK THROUGH A MALL

*By Blanca Esthela Castaneda Garcia*

Feeling engaged while strolling through a mall is a sentiment that cannot be replicated by online shopping. As you gather needed items, entering and exiting large sliding doors, you are immersed with the scent of expensive perfumes or the buttery goodness of a pretzel savored by a shopper rummaging through the

synthetic fabrics of a discounted rack of shirts. Enjoyment of this familiar environment typically begins in childhood and continues to be the perfect getaway for anyone wanting to engage with their community. However, given the alarming recent trend of shopping centers being shut down, it is imperative to highlight the relevance that gathering

spaces, such as malls, play in our community. In the case of Chula Vista, we will discuss the cornerstone shopping center inhabiting the corner of Broadway and H Street.

Amongst the most iconic elements one encounters while wandering through the carefully designed shopping trails of a mall are the large display windows. The aesthetic







*Your chance to meet artists such as Karina Velasco*

experience is so vital in a world dominated by commerce that the curation behind these creative arrangements is often taken for granted. The intended storytelling not only promotes a product but also affects the spectator at a deeper level.

Honoring one's nostalgia comes in facets. The experience of being young in southern San Diego today, and in the past, comes with many similarities, such as dropping by the Chula Vista Center that has graced our community for decades. As past fond memories resurface and new memories are made, one inevitably reflects on the past and present.

One consequence of time is the coming and going of businesses in the mall. During these times of transition, the large display windows are barren or covered with heavy brown paper. Art Through the Glass is a grassroots public art initiative that seeks to bring art to the southern region of the county. With approval from the mall owners, Art Through the Glass has filled the empty windows with diverse art from local artists. Each exhibition is curated around a theme and remains on display for several months. A recent exhibition, REWIND, is the fourth such exhibit, and explores nostalgia and storytelling by unveiling the work of more than twenty artists. An opening reception for each new exhibition includes music, food, poetry and access to the artists whose work is on display.

Art Through the Glass is produced and curated by Julio Martha and Yvette Roman. Notably, this initiative forms part of the larger Envision Broadway Revitalization Plan (which will be the topic of Part 2 of this series next month). Mr. Martha, Chair of the Beautification Committee, explains that through more green landscaping, improved lighting, and increased public art along the Broadway

corridor, this plan aims to transform Broadway Avenue into a prominent multi-cultural hub for business while providing its residents with the highest sense of community pride.

Julio is also an artist. His display of childhood photographs surrounded by representations of his younger and current self is the poignant moment that Julio shares with the public. He reflects on honoring one's true disposition via the perspective change that time and distance create. The moment is imparted through a letter to himself, composed of sentences written in his first language,



*Yvette Roman's tribute to young artists.*

and the feeling of the fabric of a shirt worn in his youth. "Growing up, I was always kind of told that being an artist wasn't going to feed me. Being told about the many struggles, I choose to go



in a different direction," he pauses, "but all of a sudden I was pulled back into art and in the end, I became what I was always meant to be."

Another artist whose work is on display is Aaron "Boree" Reeves. Boree explains that discovering one's own taste when a teenager is tricky, yet those choices often remain favorites into adulthood. Certain favorite colors, for example, remain in the choice of clothing, bedroom wall décor and other areas of everyday life. "I realized that my 16-year-old daughter had no decoration on her bedroom walls, so I let her know that I could make something for her. She accepted and we went to the park where she mixed this cool gradient of orange and pink that really sparked the inspiration for the whole piece," Boree explained about the smiley face sculptures he created alongside his daughters Analeigh and Eva. The piece was made with reclaimed materials, including foams, leftover spray cans, and mortar tiles, and showcases a gradient of fiery yellows to electric purple, and represents the artist and his family well. "I grew up around graffiti and artists, so I always gravitated to themes of



*Themed exhibits display the diverse work of local artists.*

having a nice day and smiley faces. I always saw it as a kind of funny ironic mockery to people that still resonates today." Boree finalizes his explanation by highlighting the importance of repurposing materials and reintroducing items that would otherwise end up in the landfill, "I believe that we should leave this planet better than when we found it."

Continuing to the next exhibit, visitors find a vibrant mixed media installation infused on a cerulean gradient covered by typical Mexican children's toys along with acrylic paintings. Gerardo Meza, a Tijuana native muralist, presents a celebration of childhood innocence. "In one of the sections of my piece, there's a little girl playing with a mouse, depicting my daughter, when she was little. I once saw her playing with a live mouse. I was and still am afraid of mice, but the memory of the event brings me nostalgia and happiness," he reminisces. Quite aptly, the title of his work is, "The Joy When Toys Come Alive."

Getting the chance to explore someone else's nostalgia reinforces the value of community and shared memories. As locals stroll the mall, contemplating these displays, portions of Chula Vista's essence are preserved



*Julio Martha showcases memories from his youth*





*Art Through the Glass exhibit at the Chula Vista Art Fest*

"When we started Art Through The Glass, we understood that there was a need for art and furthermore, a need for art exhibitions that occur in non-traditional spaces," Yvette Roman, co-founder, artistic curator, and educator comments on the project, "With funding for the arts decreasing, artists must be clever and work in such a way as to create a lot out of a little." For her exhibit, Yvette presents "What Was Once Color," a grayscale painting based on the lessons taught by her students. When emerging as artists, children create without fear of making mistakes, until others judge their art and they begin to judge their own art.

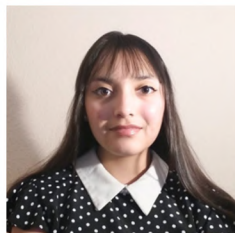
The importance of Art Through the Glass cannot be understated. The dedicated efforts of the organizers, artists and mall owners have created something wonderful. The speeding sounds of cars driving past the shopping center fade into the background as the excited sound of young and old shoppers' voices discuss the artistic window displays inside the mall. Having access to an inviting space comes as a perk of belonging to a community. During the opening

and closing receptions, dialogue is sparked between organizers, artists and viewers. Meeting and interacting with the artists can increase one's enjoyment and understanding of their art, much of which is available for sale. "We want to make sure that art is accessible to all," Julio says. "As with all new projects, we have pressed on through challenges and are now seeing the benefits of our work. Art is a universal language."

In the next issue, Part 2 of this series entitled "A New Beginning for Historic Broadway" will explore the current plan to revitalize the Broadway corridor and the new mallART program which allows mall patrons the free opportunity to create art themselves under the guidance of an instructor.

"If you would like to support this wonderful community project financially, please get in touch with us at [attgsandiego@gmail.com](mailto:attgsandiego@gmail.com), Since the program is sustained through grants and entirely produced by the artists who manage it, every bit of support truly makes a difference." Please find us on Instagram: [@attgsd](https://www.instagram.com/attgsd)

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Blanca Esthela Castañeda García is a writer born in National City and raised in Chula Vista. She obtained her Associate's Degree at Southwestern College.

While at SWC, she served as Arts Editor for the school's newspaper *The Sun* and was awarded first place from the Society of Professional Journalists in Arts & Entertainment College Media. She is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in Communication Studies at San Diego State University.



# LIFE CAPTURED THROUGH A LENS

## Spotlight on Yanelli Zavina Robles

There are many different forms of art and expression. One form we see often in our daily lives is photography. We are thrilled that photographer Yanelli Zavina Robles has shared some of her favorite photographs with us and some of her insights into what it takes to become a photographer. In addition to being an award-winning photographer, Yanelli is a mother, actress, and the 2025-2026 Editor-in-Chief of the national award-winning Sun newspaper at Southwestern College.

### WHY DID YOU PICK PHOTOGRAPHY:

I believe that photography picked me. I'm so grateful it found me, because it's given me a reason to develop another form of artistry. Photography is an art. It's the art of being able to tell a story without needing words. Photography is the art of being able to capture a variety of moments that have meaning to someone, even if it's one person. My interest was always there, but it wasn't until I joined The Southwestern College Sun that I would say my relationship with photography became cemented forever.

### WHEN DID YOU START:

Officially in Fall 2023 when I joined the college newspaper to become a staff writer. To my surprise, the Editor-in-Chief and our faculty advisor Dr. Max Branscomb had another plan for me. They promoted me to Assistant Photo Editor, then shortly after, promoted me again to Photo Editor; a position that allowed me to immerse myself in a world of visual communication.





I began taking photos of campus sporting events, faculty protesting at Governing Board meetings, community events such as Chicano Park Day, and the first annual Pow Wow at Southwestern College. As I became more comfortable with the camera, I further developed my skills. Friends and family started booking me for maternity shoots, engagement shoots, graduation milestones, and family portraits... allowing me to tell different stories and capture memorable moments.

### **WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE PHOTO AND WHY:**

This question was one I couldn't answer without picking 2 favorite photos. The first photo is one of the first times I got published in The Sun. In the Spring of 2024, I covered a protest at a Southwestern College Board meeting. The protest was regarding the college employee union seeking a sizable wage increase because the state issued a 8.22 percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) to community colleges. In this photo, I captured three employees sitting next to one another, each one holding up a sign that read "COLA!". This photo is my favorite because this was a photo that only needed to be accompanied by a small caption. I realized that the picture was worth a thousand words. The other photo is the current front-page photo of Southwestern College's El Sol magazine. The photo is of a Chicana Aztec dancer at this year's Chicano Park Day. That photo was part of The Sun's special section on the Chicanas of Chicano Park. In the photo, a modern-day Chicana, dressed in Aztec regalia, is dancing to the beats of her ancestral roots. The woman embodies resilience, power, courage, and cultural pride as a Chicana woman! This photo represents Chicanas accurately, which is so important to an underrepresented community.



*Employees protesting for a Cost of Living Adjustment*

### **WHAT MAKES A PHOTO GREAT:**

I believe the answer to this is the artist behind the lens. As photographers put in time and effort developing their skills, they are able to capture those perfect moments. Photographers must take the time to research areas, look for different points of view, and find the perspective that fits their vision and style.

### **WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR NEW PHOTOGRAPHERS:**

A piece of advice I can give is that photography isn't something that will come fast and easy. It is an art that develops with time and practice. Take your camera to different places and familiarize yourself with the settings so you learn to pick the best spots and angles. Start adjusting the lighting, the focus, and adjust how you capture motion. Putting in quality time with your camera is the only way to evolve as an artist. Don't be afraid to be creative with lighting and aperture. Don't be afraid to ask questions or seek mentors that can help you develop your skill. Most importantly, have fun. IG @yanellizphotography



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# Discovering Pickleball: What's the Hype All About?

BY CATRICE CHAN

## PADDLE UP!

Pickleball is surging in popularity, but it wasn't until recent years when it became the fastest-growing sport in America. There has been some debate about the origins of pickleball, but most believe it started in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, Washington. Three dads - Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, and Barney McCallum - decided to entertain their kids by improvising with the equipment they had on hand. Legend

goes that the name "pickleball" was named after their dog, Pickles, who chased after the ball!

The physical, social, and inclusive aspects of the game are creating a steadfast love and appreciation from thousands around the world. As pickleball continues to stake its claim on the courts, we wonder - has tennis seen its glory days?



## WHAT IS PICKLEBALL?

Imagine stepping onto a court about a quarter of the size of a tennis court. Everywhere you turn, people of all ages, skill sets, and occupations are running around, chatting, laughing, and having fun. You swing your paddle at the hollow, perforated plastic ball, and it flies over the net. The sweet sound of the ball as it hits your paddle creates instant joy and excitement. Even though you are new to the game, you learn how to play quickly. You wait for the ball to bounce once before returning it, and occasionally, you decide to volley (hit the ball while in the air). When you volley inside of the red area located directly in front of the net, your opponent gives you a friendly smile and explains that this area is called the “kitchen,” which is the no-volley zone.

The game continues until one of you reaches at least 11 points, with a lead of two points. You now realize why you had so much fun - the low cost, minimal gear, and the social nature of the game make pickleball attractive to a wide range of participants. It's simple to play. No reservations are typically needed.

You just show up, put your paddle down in line, and wait your turn. You don't even need to bring a partner!

In Chula Vista, the courts are filled with players of diverse backgrounds and walks of life. For this article, I interviewed a group of local players to find out why they are enthusiastic about pickleball.

## MORE THAN JUST A GAME

Pickleball is known universally as a social sport that brings people together and can provide a form of therapy. Off the court, activities range from dinners, potlucks, parties, and even trips. Jackie Metcalf, a real estate agent, shared that pickleball is a great way to exercise, meet new people, and find a sense of belonging. Mike Lawson shared a similar sentiment for the sport. As a retired deputy sheriff and current wellness coordinator for the Chula Vista Police Department, he especially enjoys “seeing [his new friends] a couple times a week, seeing how they're doing, and checking up on what they're up to.”

*Randy, his son Niko, and friend Mike have fun at a pickleball party.*





The exciting aspect of pickleball lies in its inclusivity for players across all ages, including a favorite player, Roy, who was 98! Roy, as well as several other players, serve as an inspiration and a reminder that no matter your age, you can still exercise and have fun. Mike, for instance, recalled a time when he played with a partner who was in his mid-70s, and the two of them beat all of their opponents. "It was amazing," he said, "It's really fun to see older people still out there playing and trying to stay active. And to be honest, they're probably going to live longer because of it."

Gregory Harden, who works for cybersecurity, added that pickleball is a great mental break to relieve stress. "I enjoy going out on the pickleball court and not thinking about computers or anything related to cybersecurity, and just going out and having fun," he shared gratefully. Ruth Reyes, a real estate agent, turned to pickleball after receiving a kidney transplant and also grieving the loss of two close friends. Pickleball grew to become a source of healing - not just physically but more importantly, mentally and emotionally. Unexpectedly, it even led her to reconnect with friends from high school - friends that she hadn't talked to in over 40 years.

## ONE SPORT TO ANOTHER

Many pickleball players come from different sports backgrounds like tennis and basketball. Randy, for example, used to play tennis, which gave him an advantage when learning to play pickleball. He stated, "It's the same kind of sport but now your racket - paddle - is a little lighter. No matter how hard you hit the ball, they can still return it." Laura C., a current tennis and pickleball player, agreed. "If you have a tennis background," she said, "picking up pickleball is not too difficult. There are similar skill sets that are required for both

sports, including hand-eye coordination and lateral movement."

Players like Dwain Woodley, the assistant district attorney for San Diego County, and Michael Nelson, a retired fireman, were lifelong basketball players before they switched to pickleball. When the gyms closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dwain Woodley traded basketball for pickleball. "I took lessons and kept working at it," he shared proudly, "and now, people look at me as one of the better players. It's rewarding." Michael Nelson, on the other hand, decided to try cycling after a surgery prevented him from continuing to play basketball. His cycling days eventually came to an end when he spotted Dwain out on the courts playing pickleball. Reflecting, he added appreciatively, "I'm really grateful for pickleball. It has come around for me at this age where I can't play basketball anymore, to the level that I would like to play."

## PURSuing A PICKLEBALL DREAM WITH GRANDPA BY HIS SIDE

At just 18 years old, Will Wimbish is currently aspiring to go pro. Recently, he won an impressive first place with his friend, Ethan, in a 5.0 rated tournament at the Barnes Tennis Center.



*Michael Nelson dinking at the net*





*Pickleball is a fun way to exercise*

The incredible part of Will's journey is playing with and getting coached by his beloved grandpa, Barney D. Reed. Barney was a lifelong table tennis player, former international table tennis coach, and member on the Board of Directors for USA Table Tennis. He coached tens of thousands of kids before switching to pickleball, but it wasn't until years later when he finally did. "Now all of my table tennis friends are upset that I switched over!" Barney laughed.

Will expressed, "Getting to play with someone like my grandpa - 70 years old, running around the pickleball court - it's very inspiring." For Barney, mentoring and watching his grandson chase after his dreams has been very rewarding. "It's like reliving life," he said cheerfully, "It's a lot of fun." One of Barney's favorite memories was playing alongside Will in the 19+ division in the Golden Ticket Qualifier tournament. The pair made it all the way to the finals, where they competed against two young teenagers! "That will stand the test of time for a while," Barney affirmed proudly, jokingly adding, "it's a stupid ball and a stupid paddle but one of the best games ever created."

## **MACKENZIE CREEK PARK: WHERE IT ALL STARTED**

Mackenzie Creek Park has become one of the main pickleball hubs in Chula Vista, home to a welcoming, vibrant, family-like community. But it wasn't always that way. Originally, Mackenzie Creek only had tennis courts.

In just three months, that changed. Jackie Metcalf, along with Pat McElroy and a committed group of original players at Mackenzie Creek, raised over \$30,000 to successfully convert two tennis courts into pickleball courts. The group also added benches, picnic tables, and shades. "Our Mayor John McCann was very supportive of our project," Jackie shared, "That was huge." Thanks to their efforts, Mackenzie Creek is now home to the first permanent, dedicated pickleball courts in the city.

Today, the park attracts players from across the country, including snowbirds from Florida and Arizona, who travel to Mackenzie Creek to play. It is no surprise why players are drawn to these courts. The environment is built on support, encouragement, and mutual respect. "We all remember when we weren't very good," Dwain Woodley said, "so we all treat each other with respect and with the understanding that we're not all professionals."

## **THE FUTURE OF PICKLEBALL IN CHULA VISTA**

The growth of pickleball in Chula Vista has been extraordinary. Five years ago, Chula Vista had 20 tennis courts and zero pickleball courts. Today, there are 23 tennis courts and 19 pickleball courts, eight of which are at Mackenzie Creek. According to Gil Contreras, Principal Recreation Manager of the City of Chula Vista, the city plans to add four more pickleball courts at



Eucalyptus Park in 2026.

When asked about the future of pickleball, players agreed on one thing: more pickleball courts are needed. The game is attracting a large, fast-growing crowd of enthusiastic players, especially among the younger generation. This growth makes it challenging for players to find available courts. One popular solution is to convert more tennis courts into pickleball courts. However, Laura C., who plays both tennis and pickleball, is concerned about the possibility of pickleball courts taking over tennis courts. "It should not be a war between the two sports," she pointed out. The best solution, she suggested, would be to build new pickleball courts while leaving the current tennis courts for tennis players.

Jackie hopes the city will investigate the growth of pickleball seriously. "Our mayor is looking for input from our residents as to a professional sports complex. I have heard mention of a tennis stadium, but not pickleball," she said. Given that pickleball's popularity is growing faster than tennis in the U.S., Jackie hopes that at the very least, a shared stadium for both sports will be considered.

Barney also emphasized the critical need to take action. "Our community here in Chula Vista has had opportunities to capitalize on a big pickleball venue. They need to do it ASAP because the growth of pickleball is not stopping. It's just continuing to grow."

Whether you are new to the sport, pursuing a professional career, or simply playing to have a good time, there is a place for you on the pickleball court. As Mike summed it up: "Pickleball is literally for everyone." That said, there is no doubt that pickleball is here to stay.

We want to thank the pickleball

enthusiasts who took the time to be interviewed for this article. We were impressed by how one game seems to fulfill the physical, mental, and social needs of so many. City Recreation Departments throughout the country will need to find solutions for preserving current tennis courts while providing more pickleball spaces in the future.

## NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS COMING TO SAN DIEGO

The 2025 USA Pickleball National Championships will take place at Barnes Tennis Center in San Diego: November 15-23, 2025. This is your chance to witness some of the top players from across the nation compete for top honors! Go support the local Chula Vista pickleball players who will be participating! For more information, visit <https://usapickleballnationals.com/>



*Barney Reed and grandson Will Wimbish*



# Staying Involved

## Southwestern College Alumni Association

The staff at The Towne Local Chula Vista are BIG fans of our local educational treasure--Southwestern College. We have marveled at students' outstanding national awards, the new Performing Arts Center and Botanical Gardens, and the new on campus partnerships with four-year universities. In this issue, we highlight an important part of the SWC family, the Alumni Association. The marvelous achievements of current students, new academic programs, and new facilities are filling alumni with pride—Jaguar Pride! Find out the many benefits of joining the Southwestern College Alumni Assoc. today!



*Staying connected with college friends and current administrators*

## HISTORY

The desire for an alumni association at Southwestern College has been around for more than a decade, but it wasn't until roughly 2017 that the ball really got rolling. The Southwestern College Foundation Director at the time, Zaneta Encarnacion, sent out a survey to SWC alums to gauge interest and tap into their collective creativity. The survey was followed by a focus group in 2018 where interested alumni got together on campus and ultimately established a steering committee with the goal of establishing an Alumni Association.

The committee helped plan a kick-off event in the fall of 2019. The SWC Family Reunion and Football Invitational took place, featuring food trucks, SWC cheerleaders, raffle prizes, music, and a

student drumline. The event was a success, but the onset of COVID-19 just a few short months later brought most of the world to a screeching halt, including the SWC Alumni initiatives.

Once back on campus, Alumni efforts resumed in the form of Then & Now featurettes on SWC Foundation social media. Alums were highlighted using "then" photos with details about what they studied while attending the college, awards received, clubs they were members of, etc., and "now" photos accompanied by their current position, accomplishments, and passions.

Early efforts consisted primarily of steering committee meetings working to establish the direction of alumni efforts on campus. There were a few

early mixers held as well; the first in July 2022 at Novo Brazil Brewing, and then in March of 2023 at Jamul Casino.

Progress continued, but with no one able to devote their full attention to Alumni development, momentum was slow. That changed, however, in 2023 when the new Foundation Director, Sofia Salgado Robitaille, partnered with SWC's Strong Workforce team and secured funding to hire a part-time Alumni Developer.

Irma Velasco joined the Foundation team in the new position, and this is when things really began to come together for SWC Alums. A new committee was established with passionate alums, and in less than a year, the official kick-off event to establish the SWC Alumni Association was



alums, and in less than a year, the official kick-off event to establish the SWC Alumni Association was held in March 2024. Today the Alumni Association has over 100 members and is growing quickly! The Alumni Association works closely with the SWC Foundation, now directed by Erica Johnson.

## EVENTS AND MEMBERSHIP

In the past two years, the Alumni Association has hosted a holiday soiree as their signature event and will be doing so once again this December! Hosted by Sammy's at Seven Mile Casino, we will be gathering on December 11<sup>th</sup> for good food, good cheer, and the opportunity to help students who are food insecure.

Other plans include arts presentations, social mixers, and special invitations to campus events. Did you attend the grand opening of the new Botanical Garden? Or the outstanding performance of the musical *On Your Feet*? Have you used the state-of-the-art athletic facilities? Have you notice the newly opened Student Center and Instructional & Discovery Complex? If not, SWC continues to grow and update to provide students with the best

opportunity for success, and Alumni Association members get a front row seat to all the latest and greatest.

Joining the alumni association is about staying connected to your alma mater. SWC is where your educational and career goals began. It's a way to give back, by sharing career experiences, or contributing to scholarships and student support programs. Members also enjoy exclusive networking opportunities, events, and updates about what is happening on campus. Most importantly, being part of the association keeps alumni rooted in a community that helped shape who you are—and lets you be part of its continued growth and success.

If you've ever taken a class at Southwestern College, you are a part of the SWC Family and we consider you an alum! How can you join the Alumni Association:

- **Annual Membership** – Enjoy year-round access to alumni events, networking, and exclusive resources.
- **New Student Membership** – Recent SWC grads are gifted a FREE YEAR of membership for the Alumni Association
- **Affiliate Membership** – Not an SWC alum? No problem! Our Affiliate Membership welcomes friends, family, and supporters who want to stay connected and make a difference.

As the Alumni Association grows, so does its role in supporting current students both financially and through personal connections. Association members have collective aspirations to provide scholarships, contribute to Cares emergency grants, and support other opportunities that directly benefit students. In addition, alumni can volunteer their time for career panels, offer internships to current students, and participate in networking events. Helping students gain real-world insight and professional opportunities is a key part of their career journey. The goal of the association is to provide a strong support system for students that extends beyond the classroom. Join us.

For more information, please contact Irma Velasco at [ivelasco@swccd.edu](mailto:ivelasco@swccd.edu) or visit the webpage at: <https://www.swccd.edu/swc-community/swc-foundation/>



The poster features the Southwestern College Alumni Association logo at the top, which includes a jaguar head silhouette. Below the logo, the text "JAGUARS UNITE!" is written in large, bold, red letters. To the right of the text is a circular inset photo of three students. Below the main text, there is a paragraph: "Join us in paying it forward – Make a difference alongside your fellow alumni in shaping the leaders of tomorrow. Alumni can empower and inspire the next generation of Jaguars to thrive." At the bottom left is the SWC logo, and at the bottom right is a red banner with white text: "Join the movement. Join the Legacy. Join us in making a lasting impact." Below the banner is the website address "www.swccd.edu/Alumni".



# OUR BASKETBALL JOURNEY

By Catrice Chan

I first picked up a basketball in 2020, not knowing just how incredibly it would change my life. That was also the year when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the world started to fall apart. Humanity was being tested in every possible way, and it was only a matter of time before nearly everything - from schools to stores to restaurants - shut down completely.



*Siblings Catrice, Jarika, and Ryson Chan enjoying early morning basketball at Monteville Park*

For many, the pandemic was a period of isolation and uncertainty. For me, it was a golden opportunity, a time when I developed a passion for the sport that would shape me into the person I am today.

At first, basketball was just a fun activity that fueled my happiness and kept me motivated - especially during the pandemic, when I spent most of my time cooped up inside the house. To my surprise, it quickly became more than just a source of entertainment; it was an outlet that broke the monotony of my days, a silver lining amid the chaos of the outside world.

Soon enough, basketball became a routine. The sweet satisfaction of hearing and watching the ball swish perfectly through the net had me hooked. I watched YouTube videos, practiced new moves, and developed

a desire to constantly improve. I relished the opportunity to play, have fun, and simply be myself.

The fact that I wasn't alone when I first learned to play basketball makes my story so much more memorable. My younger sister, Jarika, and brother, Ryson, stood beside me every single day of the pandemic, shining a light in the darkness.

Every morning at exactly 7:30, my siblings and I would play basketball together at Monteville Park in Chula Vista. At this hour, the courts would be empty and dead silent, enveloped in a gloomy darkness of loneliness. But then my siblings and I would dash onto the courts like racecars, bringing an exuberant spark of hope and brightness that cast away the shadows of the pandemic. We would laugh, practice new skills, and, of course, as

all siblings do, fight.

But despite the constant sibling rivalry, we grew up together on those outdoor courts. It didn't matter that the courts were rusty, cracked, and slippery. It didn't matter that the nets were broken chains. It didn't matter if the weather was hot or rainy, or if we were too sleepy. Every morning you could find us out on the courts. It became a part of our routine and a part of our lifestyle. Our passion for the game continued to grow as our skills improved every day.

At that time, we were just playing around and having fun, not thinking about where basketball might take us in the future. I remember feeling pure satisfaction and happiness when faking my brother out with a killer crossover or blocking my sister's shot. Small moments like those



were not just ego boosters but also early childhood memories that I will cherish forever.

Looking back now, those early mornings at Monteville Park weren't just the start of my basketball journey; they laid the foundation for the strong, unbreakable bond that I have with my siblings today. Having a shared competitive spirit and common interests with my siblings is what makes my basketball journey all the more meaningful.

Starting high school was when things began to shift. Tryouts for the school team, long hours of practices, and late-night games revealed the more competitive side of basketball. What had started off as a fun activity quickly grew to become more intense and more structured. The fun part of basketball was still there, but so was the pressure to perform well and the new expectations that I set for myself. It became a constant battle that challenged my passion for the game. Every season tested my ability to persevere and fight through setbacks.

Through the challenges came moments that went beyond the physical part of the game. There were times when I wanted to quit, to disappear, to shut myself out. One season in particular left me mentally and emotionally drained. The way the coach

interacted with the team made me question my own values and self-worth. Such is the enormous positive and negative influence a high school coach possesses.

But somewhere amidst the pain, the doubts, and the hopelessness, I found my voice. Quiet but resilient, I had to step outside my comfort zone in ways I never expected. I learned how to stay firm with my values and how to fight for what is right. The path became an emotional rollercoaster that tested my determination and loyalty for my teammates. Through the struggles, I emerged with a new perspective, centered on selflessness, compassion, and empathy.

That experience set me out on a new road towards new beginnings, new goals, and personal growth. Playing basketball in a toxic environment taught me that life is so much more than just basketball. I learned to stay true to myself and to be there for others when they need support.

Transferring to a new school the following year gave me the opportunity to rekindle my passion for basketball and continue growing, both as a person and as a basketball player. That year, my sister and I thrived in a supportive and caring environment. Together, we made it all the

way to the State Championship game. Never did we think our morning fun would lead us so far. Being on the same team with my sister is what truly made the journey unforgettable.

Today, Monteville Park doesn't look the same as it had during the pandemic. The outdoor courts have since been resurfaced and painted a bright blue. New chained nets have replaced the rusty old chains. No more slipping and falling! The courts have changed for the better - and so have I.

In the time since I first picked up a basketball, I have grown in ways I never could have imagined. And through the triumphs, the pain, and the sacrifices, my siblings have been by my side every step of the way.

Monteville's outdoor courts are more than ordinary courts to us. They're where we grew up together and created lasting memories. And no matter where life leads us or which courts we play on, Monteville Park in Chula Vista will always be our home court.



*Catrice and Jarika at the State Championship*



# Kindness IS CATCHING ON

by Elizabeth Cox

Imagine what our community would feel like if kindness spread as quickly as the morning news. This November, Bonita and Chula Vista will join communities around the world to celebrate World Kindness Day on November 13, and Kindness Week Worldwide from November 8-15. Please consider being part of this global movement that celebrates compassion, connection, and community spirit!

Locally, The Kindness Club is leading the celebration with school activities, art projects, and community events. Service clubs, schools, businesses, and community groups are making plans to spread goodwill in all kinds of creative ways. Whether it's sharing a treat or compliments, donating books or food, or simply saying "hello," every act adds up to a stronger, kinder community.

Here are just a few of the activities that will share kindness throughout our communities:

- **Caught Being Kind:** Throughout Kindness Week, Chula Vista Police officers will be on the lookout for residents being kind. Kindness citations will be issued and recipients will be rewarded with a voucher for lunch and a tour at the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center.
- **Kindness Pop-up Community Connection:** Saturday, November 8, is the first day of Kindness Week Worldwide. Pop by the trail between the Chula Vista Golf Course and Bonita Library between 8 and 11 a.m. to visit with the Altrusa Club of Chula Vista and Brain Balance. Coffee and cocoa will be available from The Kindness Club, apples and bananas from Sprouts, and kids can pledge an act of kindness to receive a free book. The Bonita-Sunnyside Fire crew will stop by with their fire engine, too!

- **Chalk Up Some Kindness:** The Bonita Optimist Club will again host their popular chalk art activity for kids to decorate their own square of sidewalk on Saturday, November 15, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Popsicles will also be served from their tent in Rohr Park, behind the Provence House.

## Local Businesses Participation

- Neighborhood National Bank will deliver warm winter gloves and kindness treat bags to 200 seniors in low-income housing.
- Chick-fil-A will join the Altrusa Club and Interact Clubs to provide lunch and engage with seniors at the Veterans Home.
- WishWell will share how kindness can be sweet! Participate in their "Take One, Leave One" kindness note activity from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on November 13 at Tus Chefs Favoritas Bakery.
- South Bay Community Farm will host Southwestern College students in the ASTRA Club to turn compost and harvest produce to be donated.
- Sprouts will sell Grab & Give bags to benefit the JAG Kitchen pantries that support community college students facing food insecurity.
- The South Bay Family YMCA will engage youth to recognize the value of kindness and the power of small, thoughtful actions at all before- and after-school programs at campuses in the Chula Vista Elementary School District.



- The Sweetwater Valley Civic Association will be hosting Spread S'more Kindness, Saturday, Nov. 8 from 1-3 pm in front of the Bonita Museum and Bonita Library. Meet by the flagpole.
- and more...join us!

## Kindness Matters

The biggest local project for Kindness Week 2025 will also be the most visible. The Kindness Club brought together several community partners and 15 local schools to design and paint a "sister sign" to the KINDNESS MATTERS display in North County. The large letters cut out from plywood are seen above. Stay tuned for the South Bay sign's unveiling in November and a project recap in the December issue of The Towne Local.

## Spread Kindness

Will you join the wave of kindness rippling through our community? Download free templates from [www.TheKindness.Club/splash](http://www.TheKindness.Club/splash) and deliver a "splash of kindness" to someone special, such as:

- Deliver a treat or token of appreciation to a local business, medical office, school, or other workplace where recognition is deserved
- Thank your mail delivery person, grocery store clerk, or restaurant staff
- Bring flowers or new non-slip socks or slippers to a senior care center
- Think of a way to connect with your neighbors and community members

Small gestures can have a big impact. Studies show that kindness boosts happiness, reduces stress, and benefits heart health. More than that, kindness connects us. In a time in which our country can feel so divided, kindness reminds us that we belong to something larger than ourselves.



A variety of at-home activities for kids are available on the [www.TheKindness.Club](http://www.TheKindness.Club) events page, including a "Kindness BINGO" card, word search, 100 kind acts log, kindness poem worksheet, and coloring sheet for kids to create their own kindness super-hero.

## Keep Kindness Flowing

Kindness Week isn't just about the events we host; it's about igniting a culture shift that makes kindness a way of life. When we look beyond labels and recognize the shared humanity in each other, we can all have better days, homes, workplaces, and communities.

Kindness is more than a feel-good concept; it's a catalyst for building stronger, more resilient communities. Kindness Week is an opportunity to celebrate what makes our community so special, how residents and businesses show up for others, not just when times are hard, but every day in small, quiet ways. As one volunteer put it, "Kindness doesn't cost a thing, it's the richest gift you can give."

For more information and to get involved, visit [www.TheKindness.Club](http://www.TheKindness.Club).



*Chalk Up Some Kindness event in Rohr Park, 2024*





# Celebrating 102 Years of Caring for Animals



In the year 2000, my family moved to Chula Vista into a house with a yard. Our eight-year-old daughter quickly reminded us that we had promised her a dog. She had been very patient while we lived in a town home with no yard. We jumped into our car and drove to the small building on Main Street. It didn't take long before a white terrier mix grabbed our hearts. My daughter could not have been happier. For fourteen years, he was our companion, protector from birds in the yard, and happy recipient of Abuelita's treats. The City of Chula Vista Animal Services has grown since then. I was eager to find out more, so I was lucky to interview Ashley Milo, Director of Animal Services and Viviana Castanos, Public Information Specialist for the City of Chula Vista Animal Services.





**Jeff Bettger:** I'd like to start with just a little background about you two.

**Ashley Milo:** I started in January of 2013 as an hourly animal care staff and through the years just worked my way up through the system as positions came available and here I am. I'm the classic, "all I knew is I wanted to work with animals." I've worked in a broad range of fields over the years and found that this is my home and this is what I want to do for the rest of it. My husband has a position at the San Diego Zoo. We both love animals.

**Viviana Castanos:** I started as a volunteer here. I came in to help volunteer with the dogs and then got a position doing front office work for a while and then started doing the marketing. I have had this position for about two years. I have always loved animals and started working in pet shops. I was born and raised in Chula Vista.

**Jeff:** Lets start with some basic information. How old is the shelter?

**Ashley:** So about 2001, 2002 is when it was opened. We were over on Main Street in a very small building. Our new location is 130 Beyer Way. We took on contracts for National City, Lemon

Grove, and periodically as well, Imperial Beach, so we have a lot of community to cover. We have been providing animal services in Chula Vista for 102 years. There has been a lot of change over the years, and we continue to grow and expand as well. Currently, we take in roughly 4,000 animals a year. And that's just animals coming in. We also offer a lot of other services. On average, we have approximately 130 dogs on site and keep 15 or 20 or so in foster homes. That's usually litters with their moms and then a few others that were trying to get out of the shelter and socialize and get them out of the stressful environment.

Cat-wise, it's been a lesser season than most.

We're still not seeing quite as many as we have in past years, which we attribute to TNR over the last few years.

TNR stands for trap, neuter, return. We have community cats that come in for spay, neuter, and vaccination. We may treat some basic things that they have, you know, scabies or ear mites or anything like that as well, and then put them back with the feeder in the community so they can continue their outdoor life, but be healthy and not contribute to further population.

**Jeff:** Do you take in animals besides cats and dogs?

**Ashley:** Yes we do if it is domestic. We'll have rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, birds, snakes, even livestock. Pigs and goats are also common. And spiders. We just had 50 tarantulas. If the animal is not domestic, we will end up transferring it to Project Wildlife.

**Jeff:** Tell me about the adoption process.

**Ashley:** We have a couple of different ways. A lot of people will just send in an application online who have a general interest. We invite them to come in and look around and work with staff to figure out what's the best fit for them. Our dogs go through what we call a





behavior evaluation, where essentially staff spend time with them in a yard or in a room, and we engage with them. Do they like to be petted? Do they play with toys? Do they like food? How do they do with other dogs? This way we can match dogs and potential owners the best we can. Some people want a dog that will hang out and watch Netflix while other people want a dog that's ready for a five-mile hike.

So from there, we let the person meet the dog or the cat, spend some time with them, have staff available to answer questions, and then if everything looks good, we can do adoption straight from there. Another option is for the person to take the animal home for two weeks as a foster before adopting it to see if it's a good fit. At the end of the two weeks or within that timeframe, they can adopt or return the animal anytime.

**Jeff:** If I am going to adopt a puppy, what kind of medical care can I assume you've provided, if any, or do I need to then go straight to the vet and do neutering and that kind of stuff?

**Ashley:** We cover all of that. When they come in, they get an initial exam and the base vaccines. For dogs, it's distemper, parvo vaccine, as well as a kennel cough vaccination. They get flea medications and dewormed, as well as an exam from veterinary staff. If it's dental, we may attempt to do a surgery as far as extracting damaged teeth.

Before they leave, and usually within a day or so of being available to the community for adoption, they've been spayed or neutered, microchipped, and received a rabies vaccination, as well as any other base treatments that they may need, such as ear infections.

**Jeff:** Do you have a veterinarian on staff?

**Ashley:** Yes, we have one full-time veterinarian and one who is here 30 hours a week. We have four RVT's (registered veterinary technicians) on staff, and then a handful of veterinary assistants to

provide almost all the medical care that is needed. We also have 27 full-time staff and 17-hourly staff. It's a big operation given the large area that we cover.

provide almost all the medical care that is needed. We also have 27 full-time staff and 17-hourly staff. It's a big operation given the large area that we cover.

**Jeff:** What is the proportion of puppies versus more mature dogs?

**Ashley:** The mass majority are adults, probably due to COVID. A lot of people had to move to a different home, the economy is different now, housing is different now. Many landlords will not allow pets. As far as cats, kittens are the mass majority we take in.

**Jeff:** Where do the animals come from?

Ashley: The animals that we take in are predominantly strays, meaning they got out of the house, roaming around the street, somebody found them, brought them in. We hold them for a stray hold to see if the family's looking for them and then if they don't reclaim them within the designated time, then we move towards adoption to find them a new home.





**Jeff:** If I cannot adopt a pet, but I want to help, is there something I can do?

**Ashley:** Yes, our new campaign is called Be a Shelter Hero. People can donate money, volunteer to take the dogs for walks, or even share an animal's story on social media. We've seen some long-term animals who are here just way too long get adopted solely because enough people shared their photos on social media and found the right home that way.

We have a couple of different options. Volunteers can come in and help with the day-to-day busy work. Some people like to do office work, because they know they'll get attached. Another option, which started about two years ago, is our dog walking program and socialization. Volunteers can take a dog into one of the yards, pet them, brush them, throw a toy around, or take them off property and go for a walk. Some volunteers even take them to parks so that they can sniff and explore and be in different environments.

**Jeff:** That's wonderful! Do you have any special events coming up soon?

**Viviana:** Yes, we have our open house event. It's our Halloween event, and it's also an adoption event. We will have activities for kids, vendors and all kinds of fun stuff. We want the community to come out and see what we're all about, learn about our services, and how they can help out, even in a small way. And it's Halloween themed, so that's extra fun for all the kids. It will be on Saturday, October 25th.

**Jeff:** That sounds like a great event! By the way, are you seeing any trends as to who's coming in and adopting?

**Viviana:** I would say we're still predominantly seeing people between the ages of 30 to 50. These people have a set schedule, or they have a home, and they have the time to adopt. We are also reaching out to young people via social media. Our goal is to reach high school students who haven't considered adopting a pet and showing them different ways to help, such as fostering and volunteering.



**Jeff:** I am curious, during floods or fires, do you provide any kind of emergency rescue or sheltering services?

**Ashley:** Yes, we are part of the City's Emergency Response Team. If we need to go out for floods, fires, or other emergencies, we are prepared to assist the community.

**Jeff:** To end this interview, what do you love the most about your jobs?

**Ashley:** One of the most rewarding things is the ability to help both the animals and the community. It's a mutual relationship with an incredible impact.

**Viviana:** I love being their voice, showcasing their true personality and watching them bloom once they find a home. One of our volunteers, Tonya Bow, said, "Any amount of time you can spare, it can save a life."

**Jeff:** Ashley and Viviana, you are both awesome! Thank you again for the important work that you do. I hope anybody interested will attend your big event on Saturday Oct. 25 and consider volunteering or adopting a pet. For more information, go to: [chulavistaca.gov/departments/animal-care](http://chulavistaca.gov/departments/animal-care)





# A New Voice for South San Diego

By Paloma Aguirre, Supervisor District 1

Hello, neighbors, I am honored to be able to speak to you through this publication and I hope to be able to do so every month. I want to use this important space to bring you behind the scenes of county government, highlight issues in our district, and share what your local offices are doing (or can do) to help. But first, I want to start by telling you a little bit about me, because I suspect many of you know me only as “the new Supervisor,” and I hope this gives you a better sense of who I am, what I care about, and why I’m here.

I grew up between two worlds. I was born in San Francisco to Mexican immigrant parents who worked hard to provide for our family, and when I was eight, we moved back to our roots in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where I finished high school. Those early years taught me two things: the strength of family sacrifice and the deep value of community. Coming back to the U.S. in 2001, I went to college at the University of San Diego (the first in my family to graduate college) where I got a BA in psychology and later a master’s in marine biodiversity and conservation at Scripps / UCSD.

My path into public service started early on when I worked for immigrant and low-income families in South San Diego helping them through foreclosure assistance and legal navigation. For over a decade I worked as a Director with the nonprofit WILDCOAST, focused on coastal and cross-border pollution, particularly the Tijuana River sewage crisis that has plagued our South Bay waters. I also served on the California

Coastal Commission, and I co-founded the Tijuana River Action Network. In these roles I saw firsthand how environmental justice, public health, and social equity are inseparable. Who has clean air and clean water — and who is burdened by pollution — often comes down to geography and power. That work shaped my convictions that government must act boldly in underserved communities, especially at our border.

In 2018 I ran for City Council in Imperial Beach and became the first Latina elected to that office. Later, in 2022, I became Imperial Beach’s first Latina mayor. Along the way I focused on tackling the sewage crisis, improving renter protections, and strengthening climate resilience. In July 2025 I was sworn in as San Diego County Supervisor for District 1, and now I serve nearly 650,000 residents across South Bay, San Ysidro, National City, Chula Vista, and adjacent areas. I ran for these positions not because I wanted to be in government, but because I understand that to create real change, you must have a seat at the table — especially when our communities have been left behind for far too long.

But enough on the resume — here’s a little about who I am outside of work.

My husband, Delio, had the privilege of swearing me in when I took office and I am the proud dog-mom to Dasha, and when I am not in the office serving my constituents, you can see me the water hopefully catching some waves.

I also love being out in the community, going to local community events, attending block parties, farmers markets, or just knocking on doors to hear what matters to you.

I hope that gives you a glimpse of who I am, of who is representing you and what guides my decision making.





Supervisor Paloma Aguirre represents the communities of incorporated cities Chula Vista, National City, and Imperial Beach, as well as the vibrant neighborhoods of San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, East Village, Golden Hill, Grant Hill, Lincoln Park, Memorial, Mount Hope, Mountain View, Nestor, Sherman Heights, Southcrest, and Stockton. Her district also includes unincorporated areas in South County, such as Bonita, Sunnyside, Lincoln Acres, East Otay Mesa, La Presa, and parts of Spring Valley. Together, these diverse communities form the heart of South County, reflecting a rich blend of cultures, industries, and histories that Supervisor Aguirre is proud to represent and advocate for.



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of each celebration.

They serve a wide variety of events, including: experience of each celebration. They serve a wide variety of events, including:

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- Weddings
- Corporate events
- Private home celebrations

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