

# THE TOWNE LOCAL

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## Chula Vista

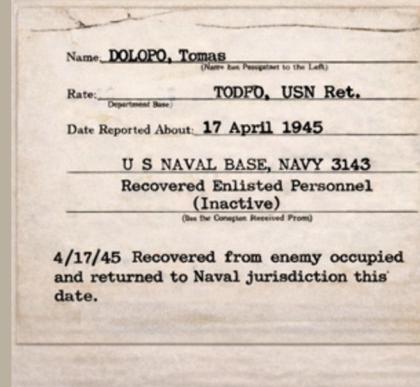
### TOMAS DOLOPO

The first Filipino to enlist in the United States Navy (1903).

First Class Machinist Mate.

Served with distinction across four decades, including  
World War I and World War 2.

Awarded multiple Good Conduct Medals and a Life Saving Medal.  
Honorable discharged.

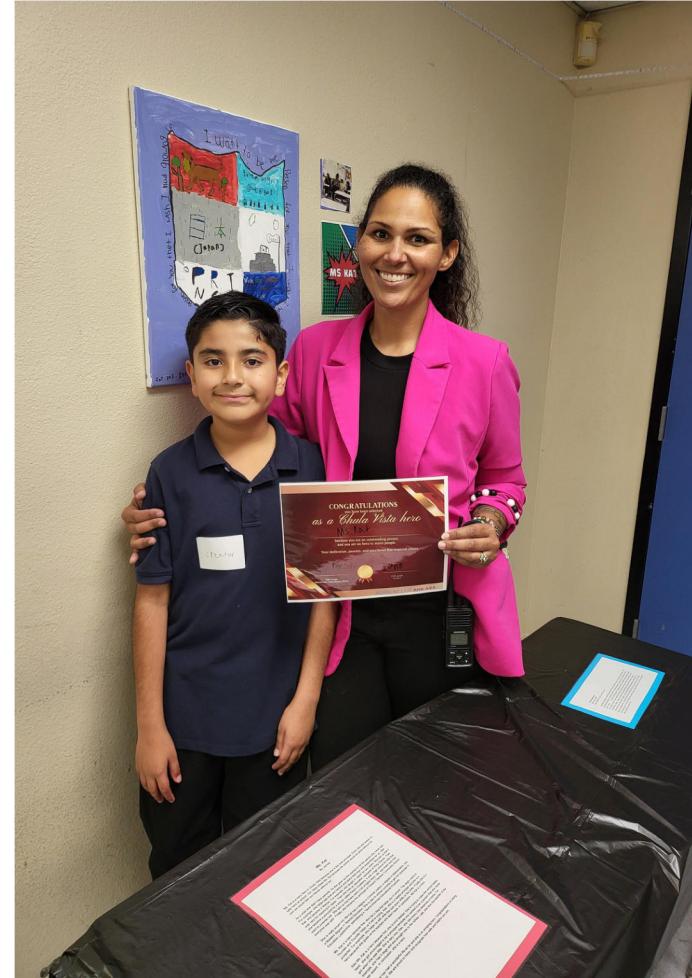


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### SCHOOL OF THE MONTH

This month we celebrate Howard Gardner Community School for two of their innovative programs.

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



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**JEFF BETTGER**  
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

2026 promises to be an amazing year for Chula Vista and the South Bay. The Towne Local Chula Vista magazine will be there every step of the way. We will continue to bring you the stories that need to be told regarding history, education, business, arts, civic leaders, and more. We promise to continue bringing you the highest quality content, photography, and design. We also promise that all content is produced by humans, not AI.

As we continuously work to improve our outreach, this year you can find additional video content on our social media platforms. Search for **Chula Vista Magazine** on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

You may be also interested in our companion magazine [www.TheTowneLocalBonita.com](http://www.TheTowneLocalBonita.com) which is celebrating its one year anniversary. 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)



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Bonita.com

Small, but mighty

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# The Anchored Hero of Chula Vista

## A LEGACY OF FAITH, FAMILY, AND SERVICE

By Aurora Marie Dolopo Zhivago — President, South Bay Historical Society

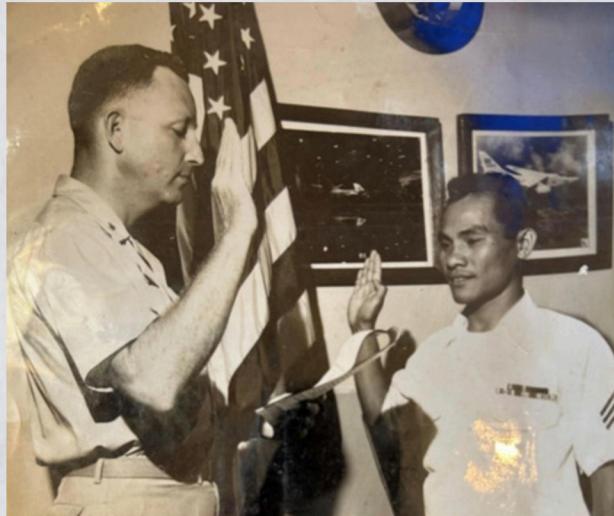
*Andrew L. Dolopo enlists during the Vietnam War*

When my father, Andrew L. Dolopo, came home from the Vietnam War, he carried more than medals and memories. He carried the legacy of my grandfather, Tomas Dolopo, who became the first Filipino to enlist in the United States Navy in 1903. Our family's story is woven through generations of sailors—across oceans, wars, and decades of service that anchored us here in Chula Vista.

My grandfather, Tomas Dolopo, was born in Iloilo, Philippines. He was a theology student in Manila when tragedy struck—his father was killed by a Spanish soldier for helping Filipino insurgents fighting to end colonial rule. Grieving and penniless, he left school and wandered from town to town. By 1903, he reached Olongapo, where the U.S. Navy was recruiting Filipinos.

For him, enlistment wasn't about adventure—it was about survival, dignity, and purpose. He began as a coal passer aboard ships like the USS Genesee and USS Pampanga, performing the hardest labor below deck. Over the years he rose through determination and skill to First-Class Machinist Mate, a rare rank for a Filipino sailor in that era. At first, men like him faced limited roles and harsh expectations, but his work ethic and courage earned the respect of his shipmates.

Once, when a barge carrying Marines caught fire, he risked his life to shut a burning fuel valve and stop an explosion. He was badly burned but survived, later receiving a medal for bravery. When Japan invaded Zambales in 1942, Tomas was already retired. Because of his service to America, the Kempeitai,



Japan's feared military police, arrested him. They tied him to a post under the blazing sun for hours, denying him food or water. By dusk, he was released—weak but alive. Some said pity saved him; others said his spirit was unbreakable.

He lived to the age of 87 and passed away in 1970. The Stars and Stripes Pacific newspaper honored him with the headline: "The First Filipino in the U.S. Navy Has Passed Away."

Following his father's path, my dad joined the Navy during the Vietnam War. He served with quiet strength and professionalism that earned him recognition as Sailor of the Year, one of the Navy's highest distinctions.

He also carried another title—U.S. Navy Light Featherweight Boxing Champion. "They said I was too old to box at thirty-one," he told me. "My opponent was twenty-four, taller and heavier, but experience has its own power. Before the third round ended, he quit—and I was declared the



*U.S. Navy Light Featherweight Boxing Champion*

winner. The real heroes were the men we brought home."

After returning from Vietnam, he settled in West Chula Vista with my mother, Aurora, and their three children. He built a life rooted in faith, family, and gratitude. His home became a harbor of peace—a place where the smell of polished medals mixed with the laughter of grandchildren.

He remained close to other veterans, receiving care through the VA San Diego Healthcare System and the Chula Vista VA Clinic. His story became part of the "Filipinos of South Bay Exhibit" (FOSBE) at the Chula Vista Civic Center Library. That exhibit continues to honor Filipino-American veterans whose service helped shape the identity of our region.

In October 2025, the Chula Vista City Council voted unanimously to name a new 5.5-acre park Filipino American Veterans Park—the first park in the United States dedicated specifically to Filipino-American military service. It honors more than a century of commitment from sailors like my grandfather Tomas (1903) to veterans like my father Andrew (Vietnam era).

Many of those who live here share similar stories. More than 35,000 Filipino-Americans currently serve in the U.S. Navy, and in

Chula Vista and the South Bay, over 200,000 residents trace their roots to the Philippines. The greatest wave of migration came during the 1970s and 1980s, when Navy base expansion and shipyard jobs brought Filipino families to San Diego in search of stability and opportunity.

As one Navy spokesperson once said: "Filipinos bring heart to the fleet—discipline, humility, and an unshakable sense of family." Those words reflect exactly who my father and grandfather were.

Their legacy now lives not only in our family but also through the work of Chula Vista artist and Navy veteran Joe Pisano, whose Liberty Station installation "Unsung Heroes" honors Filipino-American service members. Among those remembered is my grandfather, whose courage as a POW stands as a reminder of faith and endurance.

Through Pisano's art and through our city's commitment to remembrance, heroes like Tomas Dolopo will never fade into history—they live on in color, light, and story.

On January 26, 2025, my father passed away peacefully at home in Chula Vista, surrounded by family and faith. His wish was fulfilled—to rest where his heart had anchored.

Whenever I walk through our community, I see their legacy everywhere: in the faces of Navy families at church, in the flag that waves above the park that bears our story, and in the generations that continue to serve both America and the Philippines. My father and grandfather taught me that courage is not inherited by birth but by example—and that a single act of service can ripple across a century.

South Bay Historical Society — Preserving the Stories That Anchor Us

# BRINGING A UNIVERSITY TO THE SOUTH BAY

## An Interview with California Assemblymember David Alvarez



SDSU Nursing Program at the new Chula Vista Library at Milenia

**Jeff Bettger:** Thank you for your time Assemblymember Alvarez. We are in the middle of an education renaissance in the South Bay. In particular, so many exciting changes happening at Southwestern College! Can you explain what you have been able to do at the state level to open the door for these improvements?

**ASM Alvaraz:** At the state level, my focus has been on bringing resources to South San Diego and the South Bay. There is no better example of the work that we are doing than at Southwestern College. We are removing barriers and ensuring our community has a strong voice in every discussion about higher education.

Just weeks after taking office, I secured \$25 million to build a new Chula Vista library, the first since 1993. This modern facility will also house the Chula Vista Entertainment Complex and SDSU's School of Nursing beginning in fall 2026.

I have also fought for state investments that directly strengthen Southwestern College and our region's higher-education ecosystem. Because of these efforts, South Bay students will soon have access to eight bachelor's degree programs offered at Southwestern College.

Starting in Fall 2026, students can earn bachelor's degrees in:

- Nursing (SDSU)
- Business Administration (CSU San Marcos)
- Computer Information Systems (CSU San Marcos)
- Cybersecurity (CSU San Marcos)
- Industrial/Organizational Psychology (SDSU)
- Public Health (UC San Diego)

Starting in Fall 2027, additional programs will include:

- Bilingual Speech Pathology (CSU San Marcos)
- Human Development (CSU San Marcos)

These programs allow South Bay students to complete a



Asm Alvarez introducing his first bill

four-year degree without leaving home, a model shown to improve graduation rates and reduce barriers to completion.

Most recently, I authored AB 662, which established the state task force responsible for expanding public higher-education opportunities in South County. This work lays the foundation for a future Chula Vista University and ensures that public university systems, local governments, and local school districts come together to determine funding, governance, and the operational plan for a new public university campus.

**Jeff Bettger:** Why is an increase in higher-education options and opportunities important in the South Bay now?

**ASM Alvarez:** Increasing

higher-education options in the South Bay is essential right now because the demand for college enrollment across San Diego has never been higher and we have a need to produce high-skilled and prepared workers for the jobs of today and of the future. SDSU receives more than 100,000 applications each year, yet its acceptance rate is roughly 30 percent. That means tens of thousands of qualified students are looking for accessible pathways to earn a degree.

We know proximity matters. Studies consistently show that students who can attend college near where they live have higher graduation rates. For many South Bay families, traveling long distances or relocating for school simply is not realistic.

Expanding programs here ensures that opportunity is not determined by geography.

Chula Vista has also led one of the most robust community-input processes to identify which academic programs will lead to people earning a job in the industries that pay good wages and are in demand for workers. Through the University Now Initiative, residents, employers, and educators overwhelmingly emphasized fields that align with our regional workforce: nursing, cybersecurity, business, public health, education, and more. These are high-demand careers that strengthen local industries and support economic mobility for South Bay students.

By expanding higher-education options now, we are

*City of Chula Vista University Innovation District Proposed Site*



meeting the moment. We are responding to the surge in student demand, ensuring our community is not left behind, and building an education pipeline that connects South Bay residents directly to the jobs and opportunities growing in our own backyard.

**Jeff Bettger:** From an education perspective, what is unique about the South Bay compared to other areas in the state?

**ASM Alvarez:** The South Bay is the most binational, bilingual, and culturally diverse region in California. Many of our students are first-generation college students who balance family responsibilities, work obligations, and cross-border dynamics every single day. These lived realities shape the type of support students need to succeed.

We also know that demand for higher education across the county is incredibly strong. Enrollment at UC San Diego, CSU San Marcos, and SDSU has continued to grow, demonstrating that local students want to pursue a

degree and are actively seeking opportunities close to home. This makes it even more important to expand accessible, affordable four-year options in the South Bay so our students are not left behind simply because of geography.

In short, what makes the South Bay unique is that our students are deeply committed to pursuing higher education and are actively looking for opportunities close to home. The strong application and enrollment numbers at our local universities stand out compared to statewide trends, and that is momentum I want to continue supporting.

**Jeff Bettger:** How do you see the interaction of students, education programs, and workforce training across the South Bay and Tijuana areas?

**ASM Alvarez:** I see the South Bay and Tijuana as a single, interconnected talent corridor, and education is the link that brings it together. As the

University Now Initiative Committee (UNI), white paper report indicated, the region is already functioning as a shared educational ecosystem, with students moving between institutions, industries, and cultural spaces in ways that reflect the realities of a binational community. The UNI report highlights the growing demand for coordinated academic pathways, expanded baccalaureate options, and stronger alignment with priority sectors across the Cali-Baja region, particularly in healthcare, engineering, AI, public administration, and the arts. Additionally, their report indicated that 40% of South San Diego County residents expressed interest in enrolling in a bachelor's degree program within the next two years, compared to 27% in the rest of the county.

Students in this region grow up with an understanding of two cultures and two economies. When Southwestern College and institutions in Baja California collaborate, students gain



hands-on experience in industries that operate on both sides of the border. This includes manufacturing, culinary skills, nursing, teaching and more. Workforce training that is aligned across both regions gives our students a competitive advantage.

Employers value bilingualism, cultural competence, and familiarity with cross-border business. My role is to support state policies and funding that recognize the Cali-Baja region as an integrated economic and educational area.

**Jeff Bettger:** What is your vision for a Chula Vista University? How will it enhance what is currently offered at Southwestern College?

**ASM Alvarez:** My vision for Chula Vista University is a multi-institutional higher-education hub where universities work together in one coordinated system. It is not meant to replace Southwestern College. It is meant to expand opportunities that build on the college's strengths.

In this model, students could access bachelor's and graduate programs from CSU, UC, and other institutions without leaving South County. Shared facilities such as

laboratories, libraries, and student services would create a unified educational space. I have visited the Auraria Campus in Denver, CO who has had decades of success in operating this model. AB 662 was the starting point. It created the task force that will design this model and identify which university partners are ready to step in. My goal is a university presence in Chula Vista that enhances transfer pathways, expands access to high-demand degrees, and reflects the needs of our workforce.

**Jeff Bettger:** If you could look 10 years in the future, what do you hope to see regarding education in the South Bay?

**ASM Alvarez:** Ten years from now, I want to see a fully realized higher-education ecosystem in the South Bay. That includes a thriving Chula Vista University presence supported by multiple universities, all closely connected to Southwestern

College and our K-12 school districts.

I hope to see strong transfer and career programs, more student housing options, and services that make school accessible for working adults, parents, and returning students. I also expect deeper partnerships with institutions in Tijuana and Baja California, giving our students hands-on experience in a cross-border economy.

Most of all, I want college to feel attainable and expected for every student in the South Bay. When young people in San Ysidro, National City, Otay Mesa, or Chula Vista imagine their futures, I want them to see higher education as something available right here at home.

**Jeff Bettger:** Thank you Assemblymember Alvarez, Thank you for your vision and leadership in bringing more opportunities for higher education to the South Bay. This can be a game-changer for generations to come.



*Signing Ceremony for new Chula Vista/SDSU partnership*

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# PARADISE IZ

## It takes a village to raise a chief

### Tell the readers a little about your general background growing up, your family, current job etc.

I'm Iz Inocencio Jr., born in Agana, Guam and now a Southern California artist creating mixed-media work shaped by my Philippine heritage and my roots as a Southeast San Diego street artist. Influenced by culture, music, and community, I share my perspective as a second-generation Filipino American through art that aims to inspire, educate, and innovate.

From late '80s sketchbooks and spray paint to mentoring youth today, my work reflects the arc of my creative journey. After graduating from Morse High in 1993, I attended Southwestern College, later transferring to SDSU with the help of my dad's military benefits. I earned my teaching credential in 2000 and now work in the Chula Vista Elementary School District.

### How/when did you begin your interest in art?

I've been into art for as long as I can remember. One of the first drawings I was really proud of was from a giant robot anime called Voltes V when I was five. As I got older, my cousins and I were obsessed with drawing Marvel characters and anime like Robotech. I also got mega inspired by the graffiti artist in the movie Beat Street.

### How do art and poetry connect?

Art and poetry feel like cousins to me. They both take big feelings or ideas and turn them into something you can experience. Art uses color and shape; poetry uses words and rhythm. Both speak to the heart.

Psalm 96:1-2 captures this idea: "Sing to the Lord a new song... proclaim his salvation day after day." Like art and poetry, it's about expressing deep truth in a creative way.

### What makes you most proud of your work?

It's the feeling that I've successfully connected with someone. When someone looks at my art or reads my words and says, "I get that," or "I've felt that way too," that's the real win. It's that moment a private thought in my head becomes a shared feeling with someone else.

### How does your culture influence your creative work?

My culture is like background music in everything I create but always shaping the tone. It shows up in the colors I choose, the stories I tell, and the feelings I express. It's a God-given part of who I am, influencing the art I bring to my work and adding to the bigger picture we all create together.

### What advice do you have for young artists just starting to make art?

Don't trip out about being perfect. Just enjoy creating and embrace your unique style as well as the styles from others. Every child's an artist; the tricky part is staying one when you get up in them years.

### What is your dream for the future regarding your art?

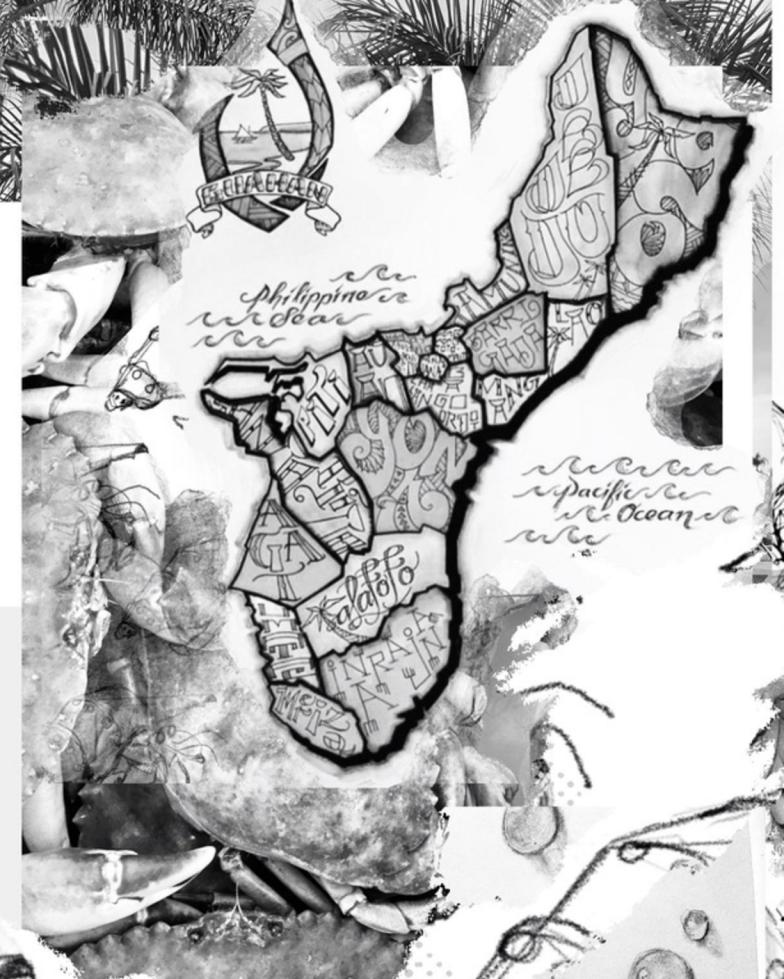
One of my dreams is to write and illustrate a children's book that helps kids feel seen and sparks their imagination. Beyond that, I want to keep using my art to inspire others and add a little more beauty to my community, whether through a public mural, a local exhibit (I'm currently displaying work at the Otay Ranch Mall Library and Pizza Kaiju in Logan Heights), or a piece that simply makes someone smile.

<https://paradiseiz.com>  
@junglevillagechief



BBQ at the beach  
A bucket of crabs sat next to the grill  
waiting for their turn  
Don't poke the crabs  
Mom warns and turns back around  
Laughing with the aunties  
I start with a twig  
Quick claws raised  
Eye bulbs glaring  
daring me to do it again  
I call his bluff  
pointer finger  
Tapping it on the top of its armored head  
and pulling back before it can lift its claws  
I do it again  
and again  
And...  
Mom calls out again  
A sharp pain shoots from up my arm  
The sound of my yell  
Electric panic  
I shake the crab off my crimson wet finger

-crab claw and rice for lunch



At recess our teacher  
Taught us how to play a game called over-under  
We'd form 2 lines and race  
To pass a  
coconut  
over our heads or under our legs  
You don't really have that type of p.e. Equipment on the mainland

## Philippines Vacation

Phamily welcomes with warm smiles and stories  
Phresh Phood and a side of sarsi soda in a plastic bag with a straw

Phun with cousins chasing chickens jumping over carabao cakes

Phumes of petro from the decorated tricycles and Jeepneys Drive pass giant Nara trees

Phlapping, splashing in the canal by the pharm

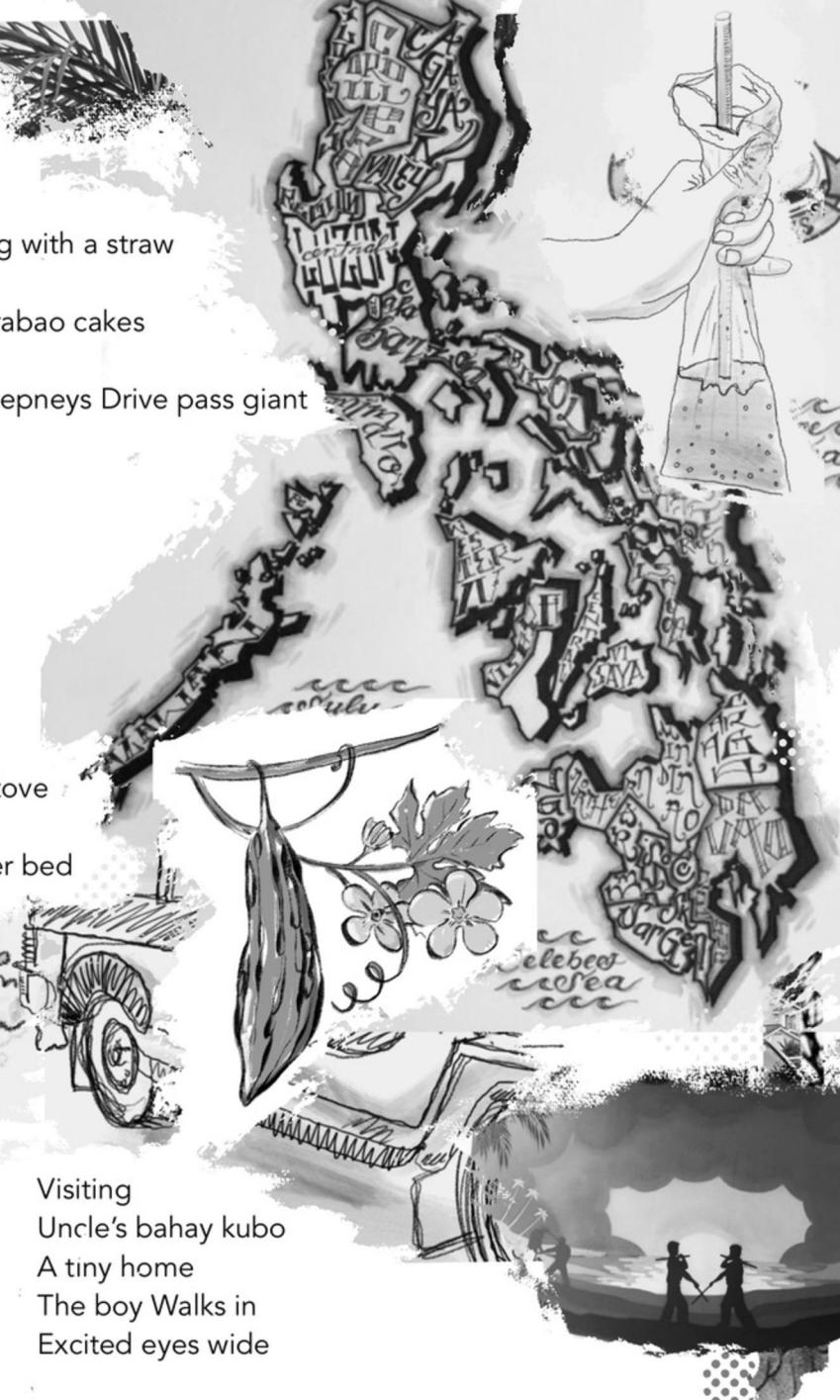
## Phighting roosters spar

Phrogs ribbet calling in pond across Apongs house

Phresh bucket bath with warm water boiled on the stove

Phlying Bugs can't reach me under mosquito net over bed

Phorever remember  
1981



Visiting  
Uncle's bahay kubo  
A tiny home  
The boy Walks in  
Excited eyes wide

"Where's the fridge, the bathroom, the..."

"Shhhh" his mother said  
Smiling, Not sure how to answer her sons questions without embarrassing the host

...the juice?" He yelled entitled

Uncle smiled and offered the boy a diced gold mango slice

Instant gratification was the only way to quiet the boys  
Curiosity





# NOT ALL HEROS WEAR CAPES STUDENTS MEET COMMUNITY HEROES

5th Grade students pay tribute to their heroes.

By Jeff Bettger and Julie Schneider

I receive many emails every day. They typically offer a new product or service, remind me of an upcoming event, or highlight a recent news story. However, on November 18th, I received a surprising email I will never forget. Two students from teacher Julie Schneider's fifth grade class at Howard Gardner Community School asked me to nominate two community heroes. This led to a heart-warming chain of events.

**Jeff Bettger:** Hello Ms. Schneider. What was your inspiration for the Community Heroes project?

**Julie Schneider:** I was inspired by our amazing city of Chula Vista. As a community school, we are always seeking to connect with our local community and the entire San Diego area. We already have had so many beautiful connections in the area with people genuinely wanting to engage with our students. For example, Suds N'

Pups donated supplies for our therapy dog's spa day, Kemi Pavlocak of Savage Bee-Ches came to teach the students about beekeeping, Carlo's Auto Detailing helped at our car wash fundraiser, and the Chula Vista fire department and police department came with their K-9 dogs and firetruck for our career week. I was thinking it would be cool for our students to celebrate members of our community and learn research and writing skills with a clear real-world purpose and connection. I knew if we asked for nominations, the community would tell us exactly who to celebrate. The students selected heroes from the nominations, contacted them and scheduled interviews, then celebrated them at our school project showcase with essays and personalized art pieces.

**Jeff Bettger:** I love that each student was given a specific job, such as public relations. What other job titles did you assign?

**Julie Schneider:** At Howard Gardner, we are big on hands-on project-based inquiry and letting each student show their learning in their own way through our multiple intelligences approach. Some students learn better by making up a song with a rhythm and others learn with numbers or visually. Project jobs help our class take ownership over the project and break down the bigger task, in this case honoring local heroes, into more manageable chunks. It also allows for students to use their talents. For example, the "creators" created something to honor the heroes, but they still needed to write about their creation in an artist's statement. Each student had to fill out a three-page job application and write a cover letter to apply for their project job. In some

cases, students completed multiple applications.

Our project jobs included the project manager who oversees the project, the "RIW" team which stands for Researcher Interviewer Writer, the materials coordinator, the assistants, and the designer who designed digital media on Canva, such as our event invitations and certificates for the heroes. Many of the jobs relied on each other, which created a genuine need to learn how to work together in group projects. For example, the RIW team needed to schedule interviews through the Public Relations team, and the creators relied on the RIW team's research in order to create their piece for the selected heroes.

**Jeff Bettger:** Which community members were nominated and how did you follow up with them?

**Julie Schneider:** We selected eight heroes from the community nominations: Councilmember Jose Preciado, Anaith Cabadas of San Ysidro Health, TSA agent Jair Dorsey, Dr. Sylvia Garcia of Southwestern College, Principal Kat Shaw, Officer Jeff Pace, Editor-in-Chief Yanelli Robles, and Sofia Padilla Petroulias, the chairwoman of the Bonitafest. Axel and Ricky, from our fifth grade public relations team as well as Benny, one of the fifth grade assistants, created scripts to use on the telephone to call the selected heroes and inform them of their selection as a hero. They also drafted e-mails to follow-up. During the phone call, the students would congratulate the hero and schedule an in-person or phone interview. Then, the students would have to e-mail our school's administrative assistant to inform her of the interview appointment and tell our fifth grade project coordinator, who would then tell the RIW team. The RIW team would work with the creators to create research-based interview questions.

**Jeff Bettger:** What did your students learn when the nominees came to talk at your classroom?

**Julie Schneider:** They learned so much! It is different when your teacher is telling you "reading is cool" and when you have Yanelli Robles, with her style and laid-back confidence sitting in front of a group of students saying she loves Takis and Bluey and "yeah you should really read newspapers more often." I can say "you should study" but when Officer Pace, sitting aside Mario who's interviewing him, while he's clad in full police uniform with 8 stars on his badge says, "plan your goals early," it just hits different. I was really touched by how vulnerable everyone was with our students. They shared intimate parts of their past, from stories about not growing up with supportive adults or being labeled as unintelligent in Kindergarten because their first language was Spanish, and then hearing the amazing stories of success and strength. Dr. Garcia created a whole curriculum, and our principal Kat Shaw, explained she does what she does so she can be the person she didn't have growing up. Both Ms. Cabadas and Ms. Dorsey were interviewed by their daughters, and Ms. Dorsey said her favorite part of her job is coming home and taking care of her family and children. Ms. Petroulias explained you can have a passion that doesn't come naturally to you and that you have to work at.



*Creating tributes via multiple forms such as poetry and art.*



Chula Vista Officer Pace is selected as a Hero.

**Jeff Bettger:** Then your students researched the nominees and made impressive reports, wrote poems, and created art works inspired by the nominees. What was the reaction of the nominees when they attended your Winter Showcase event?

**Julie Schneider:** Overall, it was an incredible experience and I was touched by how both the students and community came through. Each student created something beautiful for the heroes and every single hero showed up to the event in some way or another. Councilmember Preciado's assistant came, many heroes brought their families with them to the event, and Officer Pace said he ran straight from an unplanned police call to the school to make sure he didn't miss it. Many students worked on their projects on their own time to spend extra time on it because they wanted to make something special. Ruby and Antares filmed the puppet show for Sofia Petroulias after school. Natalia edited her essay and poem for Councilmember Preciado on Google docs while sick at home. Each student made something uniquely tailored to their experience learning about their hero, based on what stuck to them. Damian and Mario made a police badge with a motorcycle on it to represent Officer Pace's childhood and the moment he knew he wanted to become a police officer. Sinay

painted a skull in a sky of stars to represent Ms. Robles' favorite quote about how Chicanas are like starry constellations. She then collaged the newspaper quote onto the painting. Many heroes also stayed for hours at the event. Natalia wrote an essay and poem to celebrate Councilmember Preciado, part of which read:

*"He speaks for the ocean, the birds, and the trees  
A fresh, salty South Bay breeze  
He helps our families find a place to stay  
A safe happy home at the close of the day"*

**Jeff Bettger:** What were the takeaways for the students and nominees from this project?

**Julie Schneider:** The students could see their work was important – this was not just a drop by visit, but the local heroes truly cherished their work, read it, showed up and brought their families. They were proud of the students' work just as the students were proud to have them in the community and celebrate them. It was special that even though just a few students interviewed and wrote about each hero, the whole class felt connected to them. When they showed up at the showcase many different students ran up to greet them because their initial visit to our classroom when they were interviewed left an impact. We are so excited also that this project experience has ignited a new project for our students around newspapers. We have been given the opportunity to attend Southwestern College on a field trip, as we were invited by Yanelli Robles to see the news room, and Dr. Max Branscomb and Dr. Sylvia Garcia helped coordinate the field trip, which will take place in March. I love how special our community is in that one experience can open doors to many others.

**Jeff Bettger:** Thank you again for creating this wonderful event. Bringing together schools and the community is so important. We are thankful for great teachers like you!



by Principal Kat Shaw

Howard Gardner Community School is a hidden gem tucked away in Chula Vista, but more than that, it is a true community anchor. As a public charter serving 200 students from TK through 8th grade, we were founded in 2012 by a school psychologist who believed in a simple but radical idea: every child is intelligent, in their own way. We root our teaching in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, moving past the idea that success is only found in a textbook. In our classrooms, some students learn by seeing pictures or hearing songs, and others learn by moving. Some students can show you their knowledge in writing while others need to build it for you. For this reason, we have multiple project showcases a year in which students show their learning in multiple ways.

Our journey began over a decade ago in a repurposed shopping center, but recently, we reached a critical breaking point. As our building began to age and deteriorate, we found ourselves physically outgrowing the very walls meant to nurture our students. Rather than letting the school succumb to these challenges, our community galvanized over this past school year to resurrect it. We refused to let our students' potential be limited by a crumbling infrastructure, pouring our collective sweat and spirit into overhauling our programs and stabilizing our space. Local leaders shouldered the burden alongside us: Chris Conwright of Liberty Mechanical donated his time and supplies to carve out a new library and modern learning spaces, while Lieutenant Matt Smith became a constant guardian, reading to kids, conducting security checks, and even funding jackets. From teachers tutoring long after the school day has ended to local businesses like Detour Inc. giving our girls' group a night out at a Wave game. Every milestone we've hit has been a hard-won victory fueled by a community that refuses to give up.

As our culture flourished, so did our opportunities. We expanded from volleyball and basketball to include a football and cheer team, often fueled by coaches who volunteer their own time and vehicles. We also inaugurated the Honeycomb Society, a prestigious honor society where students must demonstrate exemplary character and undergo a rigorous interview process before earning their personalized letterman jackets. These changes didn't just improve the atmosphere, they drove results. In just a few months, we watched our attendance climb, our academics soar, and our enrollment numbers jump as families realized something special was happening here.

The final piece of our transformation arrived this past May in the form of a floppy-eared, four-month-old husky mix named Thunder. I met him at an event with Shadow Husky Rescue, and with his one blue eye and one brown eye, I knew instantly he was the missing piece our school needed. Since joining us, Thunder has become our heartbeat. He soothes the tears of Kindergarteners at morning drop-off, runs laps at PE with the middle schoolers, and "supervises" staff meetings. During spirit weeks, Thunder also dresses up in reindeer antlers, pajamas and more. Students now work to earn a "Thunder Pass" to train him with his talking buttons or brush his fur, and his office (formerly

my office) has become a sanctuary for both kids and staff. You can find staff grading papers while laying beside him during their plan times. He's even become a local celebrity, appearing on Fox5 multiple times, gaining thousands of followers on TikTok and Instagram, and receiving packages in the mail from small businesses to large corporations like Chewy, proving that a little extra love can amplify the magic of a school.

Today, we face a "good" problem: we are outgrowing our home. Our growth in programs and enrollment means we are bursting at the seams, and our next big goal is to secure a new building that matches the ambition of our students. We are currently working toward a \$100,000 goal for a down payment, and we are looking for partners who believe in our mission to help us get there. Whether you contribute to our Zeffy fundraising link or simply join us for a project showcase to see our students' brilliance firsthand, we invite you to be part of our story. We've always had the heart and the talent; now, we just need the space to let it all grow.

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*Thunder providing support to those students in need.*



# THUNDER'S Word Search

Thunder needs your help finding important words. Look carefully and try to find them all! Need some help? Find the answer key online at [www.ChulaVistaMagazine.com](http://www.ChulaVistaMagazine.com)!

1. THUNDER	9. SLEEPING
2. DOG	10. COLLAR
3. TEACHER	11. THERAPY
4. SCHOOL	12. TREATS
5. HOWARD	13. LEASH
6. GARDNER	14. PUPPY
7. FUR	15. BOWL
8. PLAYING	

M D J O M I R D E X B I J S G A L E J N  
S R C X D T F B A H P P G A R D N E R Y  
Y C W K P V H M Q X B V Q C B M E K B K  
H Z A L G O J E F I O M Z U B H S H P P  
Z F K D Y E D E R L B L E A S H E M K B  
R L Z T G J T N B A Z F Q A Y N J D E B  
I U B K C G H U X F P E Q S F C R I R X  
B H F N R O E U U M H Y Q Q P C Z T U A  
X H D S R E L D G O M R E F I Q V H E I  
N N R I C H B L P Q G G Z T V G J U H F  
P I A S V F H F A L E F S H P Q M N S G  
F L U C S J T R T R A B O W L R M D C W  
B F R H T E A C H E R Y S U A O W E I D  
B R C O U B V K N W Y R I N T E R R M J  
H Q S O F N K X Y I T M H N V N L J D I  
W A Q L I V V Z F O I M W R G A K V X F  
U N F S M P U P P Y E Z H D O S W P Q Z  
T R E A T S D U N F S L E E P I N G E R  
H O W A R D K O M M U L V U N U Q L X V  
P L N A S J I L G J S R N D D L F J O M





# TRIBUTE TO SWC BASEBALL COACH JERRY BARTOW

by Alfonso Julian Camacho

Jerry Bartow had reached his limit with the umpire.

After the ump called a Southwestern College baserunner out at the plate on a bang-bang play, the 78-year-old coach threw his hat to the ground with his left hand and pointed at the beleaguered man in blue with his right.

"I'll show you!" Bartow shouted, red faced.

Whereupon he sped to the spot the third baseman typically stood to replicate the play. His left foot hit the inside of the bag in perfect form, then he barreled the final 90 feet like a locomotive on a mission. He crossed the plate with a flawless hook slide, dragging his trailing right foot over the far side of the plate, in his mind evading the catcher's lunging tag attempt.

"That's how it happened," Bartow said as he dusted off his backside and the burgundy 40 on front of his soiled jersey.

"He's still out, Jerry!" hollered the umpire.

Bartow had a zinger ready, but his teenage player was standing close by so he kept it to himself. He patted his player on the back.

"Sorry, babe," he said. "Ump's too stubborn to admit he's wrong."

The scowling ump stomped toward Bartow and raised his right fist with his thumb extended. An ejection seemed imminent, but then the umpire chuckled and pulled on his mask.

"Jesus, Jerry!" he said. "You're crazy."

Bartow started to laugh.

"First right call you've made all day!"

Jerome "Jerry" Bartow was crazy like a fox, insist his friends and former players. He was eccentric, a brilliant strategist, a champion, a hall of famer, a groundskeeper, a teacher, salesman, fearless driver of a dilapidated baseball bus and entertainer. He was a gopher assassin, savior of cheerleaders and Chula Vista's Father Christmas.

He was also loved. Deeply.

Bartow died in September as the baseball season was in its final stretch. He was 91.

## COLLEGE COACHING LEGEND

He coached the SWC baseball team for 39 years starting in 1976 after wrapping up 16 years at Hoover High School. He won three CIF titles at Hoover and 11 conference titles at Southwestern. His 2009 team played for the California Community College Championship. He retired at age 79 with 907 victories at SWC.

Bartow liked to say he began his life with a splash. His mother was a Wiyot Indian who gave birth to her child in a river near Otis, Oregon. He was given up for adoption and taken in by Major League Baseball legend Carl Mays of the New York Yankees – best known for accidentally throwing the pitch that killed Cleveland Indians shortstop Ray Chapman in 1920. It remains MLB's only on-field fatality. Mays was also the roommate of baseball deity Babe Ruth. He nearly brawled with the legendary Ty Cobb when Cobb threw his bat at him after a few pitches up and in. Cobb called Mays a "no good son of a bitch." Mays stood his ground and called Cobb a "yellow dog."

Mays was a cantankerous player, but Bartow said he was a good dad who spent lots of time teaching him how to pitch, shoot baskets, throw footballs and box. Bartow lettered in baseball, football, basketball and boxing at Taft High School and was a stellar badminton player. Mays offered sound advice throughout his life, Bartow said.

In high school Bartow was the talented quarterback of the football team that played for the state championship, and all-league in baseball and basketball. He had hoped to play quarterback at Oregon State but accepted a baseball scholarship to

Washington State University. Bartow pitched the Cougars to the Pacific Coast Athletic Conference title and a spot in the 1956 College World Series by beating USC.

In 1958 he pitched for the Drain, Oregon Black Sox, winning the National Baseball Congress championship, an annual tournament for elite college and semi-pro players held in Wichita, Kansas. Satchel Paige, Don Sutton, Tom Seaver, Ozzie Smith, Tony Gwynn, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens and Albert Pujols all played in the tournament.

Dreaming of a Major League career like his step-father Carl Mays, Bartow pitched professionally for two years with the Salem (Ore.) Senators. Mays gave him some life-changing advice. He pointed out that minor league salaries of the time topped out at about \$1,500 a season. The old righty convinced the young lefty to go back to Washington State and grad school.

Bartow earned a Master's and departed for a teaching job at San Diego's Hoover High School in 1961. He started coaching baseball in 1962, completely transforming the program – including the ratty baseball field. Word of his ambitious rehabilitation plans got around. He received a sizable donation from Hoover's most famous alumnus, Boston Red Sox Hall-of-Famer Ted Williams.

He had help from another MLB legend. Carl Mays, then a scout for the Cleveland Indians, traveled down from Oregon each preseason to help Bartow with the Hoover players. He taught them to get along, respect the game and play safely. Mays, the surly villain of the Roaring '20s, was redeemed on Hoover's grassy cathedral of baseball.

Hoover reached the CIF finals four times under Bartow, winning three, including a 1975 win over Bonita Vista High School in San Diego Stadium. He went out on top, moving to Southwestern College for the 1976 season. Players and fans marveled at

Bartow's insanely loud whistle and the funny nicknames he gave players. Like many 1960s - '70s baseball rats, Bartow called players and friends "Baby" and "Babe." If Bartow called you the B word, you were on his good side.

Bartow transformed SC's shoddy baseball field into one of the region's best. He spent uncountable hours and piles of his own money creating Apache Junction (named for the college's original mascot. Southwestern changed to Jaguars in 2000).

The energetic southpaw earned a reputation as a winner. He was a keen talent evaluator, relentlessly hard worker, inspiring teacher and devoted father figure to generations of young men. He was also an all-time character.

## WAR ON GOPHERS

Before "Caddy Shack" and maniacal groundskeeper Carl Spackler with his "license to kill gophers," Bartow saw the destructive subterranean rodents as Public Enemy #1. He claimed to have taken out 17 during his first day at Southwestern and was a relentless assassin of *thomomys bottae*. Players from the late 1970s called him "Gopher Godfather." Like Michael Corleone, he sent burrowing rodents a clear message not to cross him. Gopher sightings tailed off immediately. Apache Junction was Bartow's turf.

A bold idea to dry the infield following a rainy evening almost got Bartow arrested. He lit the infield on fire in the belief the heat would make the dirt playable that afternoon. College President Chester DeVore was livid when the Chula Vista Fire Department arrived to monitor the smokey field of flames. DeVore told the firefighters to handcuff Bartow and arrest him. Though they were not happy about the fiery

diamond, they declined to haul away the coach in shackles.

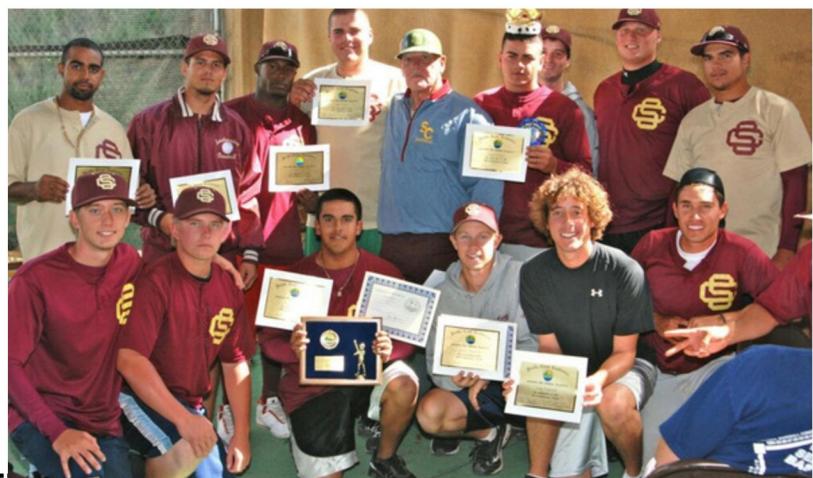
Professor of Journalism Dr. Max Branscomb said he ran afoul of Bartow in the late '70s when he and his teenage friends would try to sneak onto the pristine field for Sunday pickup games that never happened.

"I was already bitter because Jerry coached Hoover when they beat my Bonita Vista Barons in the CIF finals, then he moves to Southwestern and kept kicking us off the field!" he said, tongue in cheek. "I swore he slept in the announcer's booth because before we could even lace up our cleats, there he was, telling us to go play somewhere else. He came out of nowhere like a phantom." Later, in 1996, when Branscomb began teaching at Southwestern, Bartow became one of his dearest colleagues.

"Coach was such a character," Branscomb said. "He drove this golf cart made up as a Jaguar's baseball cap right to the door of the journalism lab, causing the electronic door to open. Then he'd let loose with that impossibly loud whistle and shout 'Hey, Babe, you in there?' Luckily, I usually was, but there were a couple times my students were eager to tell me all about this old guy that drove a motorized baseball hat and hollered in the door for Babe." Bartow never lost his natural gift for throwing things, Branscomb said.

"There are these three large rocks up the hill from the first base line where I would sit sometimes when I'd go to watch a few innings," he said. "If Coach saw me

*SWC won 11 conference championships under Coach Bartow*



he'd grab on orange, whistle and shout 'Hey Babe! I'd put my hands up chest level like a catcher's target and from about 100 feet Coach would fire the orange right to the target. Every time."

### UNMATCHED FUND RAISER

Bartow was a relentless fund raiser for his underfinanced program. He dragged a child's red wagon around campus selling popcorn. His wife and kids sold hotdogs and peanuts at games. For generations he and his players famously sold Christmas trees on the "corner lot" at Otay Lakes Road and "H" Street. He peddled pumpkins, consigned candy and sold sunflower seeds.

New baseballs, aluminum bats and shiny white bases were expensive, as was grass seed, fertilizer and Gopher-Gone. Bartow was, friends said, eternally cheerful as he raked in dimes, quarters and dollars for his Field of Dreams. Family and friends say he raised hundreds of thousands of dollars, but nobody really has a figure. He gave a lot of the money to support Southwestern's unfunded cheerleaders and was their faculty adviser so they could have standing to represent the college.

His daughter Karin Bartow McCurdy said she has fond memories of her dad and the concession stand.

"My best memories as a child was



*"Coach 40" sharing his vast baseball knowledge*

tagging along with him to all the baseball games," she said. "We helped sell concessions but probably ate half the profits in hot dogs and candy. He loved the game, and he loved his players."

At least 20 of Bartow's students played Major League Baseball, including Alex Palaez of the Padres, John Jaso of the Pittsburgh Pirates and Oakland A's, and Vidal Nuno of the Yankees. Mike Davis of Hoover High was a star for the Los Angeles Dodgers and was on base when Kirk Gibson hit his legendary home run in the 1988 World Series. At least 40 SC players signed professional contracts.

Kevin Ginkel, a slender pitcher Bartow helped through arm injuries, pitched in the 2023 World Series for the Arizona Diamondbacks, including a clutch eighth inning relief appearance in Game One where he retired the Texas Rangers' Josh Jung with the go-ahead runners on.

At least 200 of Bartow's players received university scholarships – an average of five per season. His athletes had stellar academic records and transferred at rates higher than almost any other SWC program.

Bobby Rector, who played for Southwestern and the San Francisco Giants system, said the field was lovely and the trophies shiny, but Bartow's greatest achievements were the young men he mentored.

"He was a father figure (who) always had good advice," Rector said. "It was always (spot on). He used to say stay out of TJ, don't get an expensive car and don't get a girl pregnant. The guy knew (how to talk) to young men."

Like most baseball lifers, Bartow was superstitious as a riverboat gambler and ritualistic as a shaman. Even at age 79 he would hop over the chalk line, look away during tense moments and celebrate wins by sliding headfirst into home. Every pitch was an adventure, said Rector, every game a joy.

Bartow was inducted into the San Diego Hall of Champions in 2003, SWC Athletics Hall of Fame in 2007, California Coaches Hall of Fame in 2015 and

Hoover High Hall of Fame.

In 2012 Bartow was honored by the Academic Senate with Southwestern College's highest recognition, the Honorary Degree.

Karin Bartow McCurdy said his "World Series victory" and happiest win in life was his wife, Betty Jean.

"They always had fun together and I remember a lot of laughter in our house," she said. "He loved her dearly."

In 2014 Bartow hung up his cleats. Players autographed second base and Bartow counted the artifact among his favorite things. His mantle at home was a living Dia de los Muertos shrine with cherished mementos - his #40 Jaguars home jersey, a plaque and a large bag of sunflower seeds.

After he died peacefully with his son and daughter by his side, messages poured in like fastballs in an April doubleheader. Air Force war hero Jimmy Doyle who flew 223 combat missions, former assistant Branon James, long-time buddy Ricardo Ahumada and scores of Bartow protégés told their coach one final time how much they loved him.

Adam Virchis, who pitched for Bartow in 1992 and '93, then for the Chicago White Sox system, thanked Bartow for being a teacher and father.

"(Coach Bartow) shaped me into a good human being," he said. "40 taught me so much more than throwing the ball over the plate and how to pitch inside. 40 taught me how to drag a field, ...water the field (not into the wind), ... he taught me about Christmas trees. He taught me what a good orange is. He taught me work ethic and to be on time. He taught me how to be a great teammate. He touched so many lives and he will never be forgotten."

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# Kindness Lives Here

Kindness Week shined a spotlight on the power of simple gestures and shared connection

Turning the calendar page from December to January often invites reflection. As a new year begins, many of us ask what truly matters, both in our own lives and in the livelihood of our families and communities.

During Kindness Week Worldwide in November 2025, our community showed how much kindness matters. Recapping all of the service projects and human connections that took place that week would fill an entire issue of *The Towne Local*. In their own words, participants reflect on what kindness looked like in practice, and how those moments continue to resonate.

## Kindness often begins with our youngest community members.

"Our son Leo participated in the *chalking up kindness* art activity and was welcomed so warmly. After making his kindness pledge to 'continue to include everyone while playing at the park,' he put it into practice right away. He invited a group of kids to play, and they all had a wonderful afternoon together. It was such a simple but meaningful reminder of how small acts of kindness ripple outward.

We truly appreciated the event and the heart behind it."

The Valdez Family



## Kindness also honors those whose service and sacrifice have shaped our community.

"On Veterans Day, organizations from all over the community collaborated to put on an event that our residents are still talking about. The Kindness Club and volunteer groups created memorable moments by making our veterans feel seen and appreciated. The power of kindness and human connection were on display as high school students laughed and joked with seniors; staff and residents danced to live music; and volunteers, residents, and staff shared meals together. I would love to see more of these connections in this world."

Michael Glover  
Activities Director  
Veterans Home of California – Chula Vista

**For others, kindness shows up through service and trust-building.**



"During Kindness Week, dedicated members of the City of Chula Vista Homeless Outreach Team contacted and provided unsheltered individuals with needed supplies. Care packages generously assembled by the Altrusa Club of Chula Vista included essential items: male or female hygiene products, blankets, beanies, non-perishable food, and information about local homeless resources.

Several people who had previously been hesitant to accept assistance were willing to engage with our teammates. The kindness kits enabled us to build rapport and gather valuable information to support future outreach efforts. There will always be community members in need, and Kindness Week's focus on compassion, service, and community engagement truly has an impact."

Sam Alzubaidi  
Park Ranger Program Manager, City of Chula Vista

**And kindness extends beyond people, reminding us of our shared responsibility to all living beings.**

"Participating in enrichment activities at the Chula Vista Animal Care Facility was a truly meaningful experience. It was incredibly rewarding to spend time connecting with dogs who so deeply deserve love and compassion. The experience brought joy in the moment, and inspired me to seek more opportunities to spread kindness within our community."

Yahaira Hudson  
Board Member, Chula Vista Community Foundation



The moments shared during Kindness Week began with simple gestures, and their impact continues to ripple outward. These activities offer a glimpse of what is possible when compassion is prioritized and community is centered.

Kindness is not a one-time event, but a shared practice that grows stronger when it is visible, intentional, and inclusive. Kindness belongs in our homes, schools, workplaces, and broader communities.

As the new year unfolds, we know kindness matters. The question is how we will continue to carry it forward. Practiced collectively, kindness strengthens bonds and shapes the kind of community we want to live in, not just for a week, but all year long.

**You Belong, You Matter, You Make a Difference**

**[www.TheKindness.Club](http://www.TheKindness.Club)**

# MEET Karla Preciado

## DO YOU TYPICALLY START A PAINTING ALREADY KNOWING WHAT COLOR PALETTE YOU WANT TO USE?

Sometimes I will have a faint idea of what I want my predominant color to be, but I usually just go with an intuitive flow and work from there.

## WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON INSPIRATION FOR YOUR PAINTINGS?

Nature has long been a major source of inspiration for me. Forests, flowers, deserts, and beaches tend to leave a positive and joyful impression on me. It's about capturing a moment in time, a feeling, an experience,

## WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER PAINTERS JUST BEGINNING THEIR ARTISTIC JOURNEY?

Paint, paint, paint! Practice, hone your skill, experiment, lead with curiosity and find your own unique voice. The only way you can authentically thrive is by being yourself.

To learn more visit or follow:

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5th grade teacher Julie Schneider's Local Heroes Project: Students invited community heroes to their classroom to talk about their occupations.



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