THE TOWN LOCAL
Chula Vista



SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE
65TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 **JAGUAR SPECTACULAR**
Free Celebration, Nov. 7

5 **FREE CONCERT**
SWC Gospel Choir at Bonita Library

6 **65 YEAR CELEBRATION AT SWC**
by Stephanie Kingston

8 **A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE**
Past, Present, and Future of SWC

10 **FilAm Creator Con**
Filipino Creators Display Their Art

12 **KENDRA "LA PEKE" VILLA**
Chula Vista's Boxing Champion

15 **DEREK LOCCIDENT**
Paralympic Champion

20 **RUNNING FOR CITY COUNCIL**
An Interview with Greg Martinez

22 **KEEPING TRADITIONS ALIVE**
Artist Maricruz Alvarado



Filipino American History Month celebrated at SWC. Front cover: Dr. Mark Sanchez, President at SWC. Photos by Steve Wood

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JEFF BETTGER
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

If you ask me, “What is the gem of Chula Vista?” I would reply, “Southwestern College.” For 65 years, SWC has served as the cornerstone for everything that has become eastern Chula Vista. It has provided higher education opportunities for our students. It has allowed older students to learn new skills in night classes. It has been the home of award-winning Journalism and Mariachi programs, among other. It has provided a place where all students can feel welcomed. The past has been bright, but the future is stellar! Expanded courses offered in National City and San Ysidro. A new Student Union, Biological Gardens, and athletic facilities to name a few. Perhaps most surprising is the number of new partnerships with four-year universities, that allow students to take upper-level classes while staying on the SWC campus.

In addition to SWC, we are again proud to present articles on a wide range of topics--a convention of Filipino artists, a young boxing champion, Day of the Dead exhibit, city governance, and a Paralympic champion.

Thank you!

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Find additional video content on our social media platforms. Search for **Chula Vista Magazine** on Instagram and Youtube.

Do you have an idea for a future story? Please contact me at Jeff@TheTowneLocal.com

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ROARING INTO 65 YEARS AT SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE



The exciting new planetarium. One of numerous additions to the SWC campus.

By: Stephanie Kingston

A new academic year is underway at Southwestern College, bringing nearly 20,000 students back to campus and welcoming new faces as they begin a new chapter in their lives.

For some, fall semester is the next step toward a degree or certificate. For others, it is a path to a university, a new career, a new skill or a personal goal. Whatever brings them to Southwestern College, students are an integral part of a story that has shaped South County for 65 years.

That makes this fall especially meaningful.

Throughout the 2026-27 academic year, Southwestern College is celebrating its 65th anniversary with the theme, "Celebrating 65 Years: Transforming Lives and Communities." The theme was selected with input from students, employees and community members and reflects the college's longstanding role in the region.

"For 65 years, Southwestern College has been woven into the fabric of South County," said Superintendent/ President Dr. Mark Sanchez. "We have grown and evolved alongside the communities we serve, expanding access to higher education, responding to workforce needs and creating opportunities for generations of students. This anniversary is a chance to celebrate all that we have accomplished together and look ahead to what comes next."

Since opening its doors in 1961, Southwestern College has grown to serve students throughout South County and the broader Cali-Baja region. Today, more than 32,000 students take classes throughout the District each year, up from approximately 22,000 when Sanchez arrived at the District seven years ago.

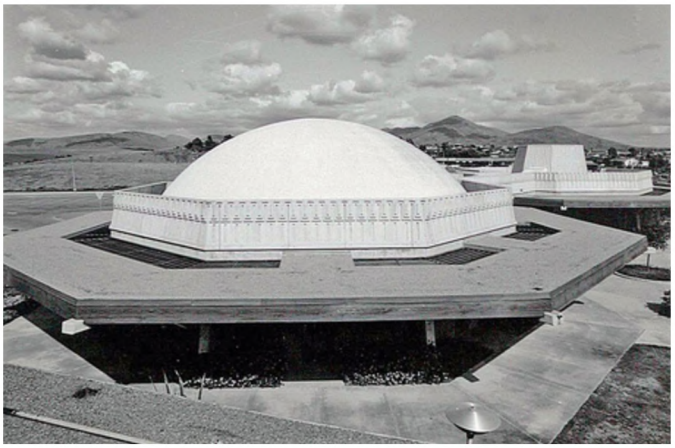
But behind those numbers are individual stories of lives changed.



Introducing the new Jonny Jaguar mascot

Stories like SWC alumna Viry Martino. Twenty years ago, Martino was a student at Southwestern College, where she participated in the MESA program, played on the women's tennis team and worked as a math tutor in the Academic Success Center. She transferred to the University of Southern California, earning degrees in civil engineering and construction management.

Currently, Martino works with Turner Construction as a design manager on the



The original planetarium on the SWC campus

New Terminal 1 project at San Diego International Airport. She has also remained connected to the college, even establishing a scholarship to support students pursuing careers in architecture, construction and engineering.

"It's a privilege to give back to a place that gave me so much. And it's even more rewarding to see the next generation beginning their own journeys," Martino said.

That sense of giving back, and paying it forward, has become part of the Southwestern College story.

"This anniversary is really a celebration of the people who have made Southwestern College what it is," said Governing Board President Kristine Galicia Brown. "For 65 years, students have walked through our doors with dreams for their future. Faculty and staff have helped them find their way, and our community has continued to invest in the college. We are proud of that history, but we are equally excited about the future."

As Southwestern College celebrates its history, another familiar member of the Jaguar family is getting a fresh look. Jonny Jaguar, the college's iconic mascot, has been updated as part of the anniversary celebration. The new design honors the tradition and pride behind generations of Jaguars while giving Jonny a fresh, modern identity.

"In many ways, the updated Jonny reflects Southwestern College itself," Sanchez said. "We are rooted in tradition, but we are always willing to transform and evolve."

The community can celebrate the milestone with Southwestern College at Jaguar Spectacular on Saturday, November 7, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Chula Vista campus. The free, family-friendly celebration will bring together students, employees, alumni and community members for a day of festivities and experience which makes Southwestern College such an important part of South County.

"Jaguar Spectacular is going to be a celebration for everyone," Galicia Brown said. "A full day of entertainment and student performances, food, classic carnival games, train rides, a Ferris wheel, and opportunities for families to explore our Planetarium, programs and services."

The anniversary celebration will continue throughout the academic year with events and activities honoring the college's history. For Sanchez, who is beginning his final academic year as Superintendent/President before retiring in June 2027, the anniversary has added significance.

"Our 65th anniversary is not simply about looking back," Sanchez said. "It is about recognizing the people who built Southwestern College, celebrating the students and employees who make it what it is today and looking forward to imagining what the next 65 years can look like.





Student Reflections on SWC

SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE IS MARKING ITS 65TH ANNIVERSARY!

By: Ines Cervates

It isn't just a college. It is a home to many and has brought value to every single person who has set foot on the campus. It has a rich history and an impressive list of accomplishments. As the Editor-In-Chief of our national award-winning college newspaper, The Sun, I asked fellow students questions in regard to the state of the college education today.

INES CERVANTES

What advice would you give to high school students thinking about going to college?

I attended Helix high school. The focus was to prepare students for college via preparatory classes, tutorials, extra support classes and career events. Even with all of these I struggled extensively. Originally I applied to universities for my parents. I had no interest in attending college. I did get accepted into some of the universities but even with some of the scholarships I received, it wasn't enough to cover my educational costs. I decided to attend community college to save money and that was the best choice I could have made.

I joined the college newspaper the second semester at SWC and it changed my life. I found my passion and what I loved doing. My advice to other students would be to search around for what interests you and try new things out. Whether it is a newspaper or something else, it can open doors for you that you never imagined. Remember that success doesn't happen right away. We each have different paths on different timelines. Everyone is unique, with different skills and interests.

ALEXA LIMA

How did SWC prepare you to continue your education at a 4-year university?

What helped me prepare to continue my academic journey at a 4-year university was the people at Southwestern College. From the teachers, like Dr. Max Branscomb, who take their time teaching and motivating students to reach for their goals, to the cafeteria workers who make small talk to help brighten up your day. To the ladies at the administration office who help you navigate the tedious website we have. And most importantly, the friends you make along the way to motivate you and push you to be the better version of yourself.

ALFONSO JULIAN CAMACHO

What would you like to see in the future at SWC?

I walk life in different shoes. I don't have the same skills everyone else has. College for me was supposed to be unattainable. I joined SWC as a dual enrollment high schooler. Disabled and mute, I wondered how my life would change. Nothing could have prepared me

for the answer. At SWC I became invisible in the best way. My professors saw my work, not my movement delays, they saw my commitment, not my impulses, and they believed my words, not just my appearance. It has been a home of inclusion and opportunities. I am treated as a whole human, and given the academic rigor every college student deserves. I was scouted by "The" Dr. Max Branscomb and became a journalist for The Sun and El Sol. My words have reached the other side of the ocean. I was catapulted at SWC. I hope the next 65 years fill the South Bay and the world with roaring Jaguars jumping towards their goals and tearing up preconceived notions of what the college closest to the border can produce. Our dear SWC publishes the finest college newspaper in North America, has graduates in Major League Baseball, and alumni preserving history and heritage. SWC students change our community and our world. I envision us as a meca of learning, opportunities, progressive inclusion, and equality. Cheers fellow Jaguars! This is only the beginning!

CARLOS LUNA

What advice would you give to students who don't follow the traditional timeline of finishing high school and going straight into college?

My academic journey is far from traditional, but the story is much too common. After graduating high school in 2016, I went to UCSB. I finished my degree in 2020 and had some success in the film industry. However, I realized that I wasn't satisfied with my work, and I felt the need to search for a greater purpose. I was doubting my career choices, as people commonly do. There were a few years when I stumbled about, and tried to convince myself that I should stick with my choice, and that the feeling of doubt would go away. It never did. After a few months of self-reflection and a week of research, I realized that I could go back to school. After talking about it with friends and family, I felt more confident about the idea. Most importantly, I realized that there was still time to shift my career focus. I'm nearing my 30s, and I still have a few semesters of school to finish an associate's degree in Journalism, with a potential Master's after that. I couldn't feel more hopeful about my future.

To anyone else doubting their career choices, I want to say that there is still time to make that change. Give things a try. If I hadn't pursued a film career, I would've never realized it wasn't my passion. Regret, and lingering doubts, can be feelings that will haunt your mind for the rest of your life. So try new things and know that if you're unsatisfied with your choices, that you have the power to shift your trajectory. Take your time.

NICK SINSABAUGH

How do you feel about the new Student Union?

As a student at Southwestern College, I believe the Student Union represents something much more meaningful than just another building on campus. College can be overwhelming sometimes, especially when you're trying to balance your education, work, and personal responsibilities. Having a place where students can come together, take a break, and feel like they're part of something bigger makes a difference. For me, Southwestern College has become an important part of my life, not only because of the education I'm receiving but because of the people I've met and the experiences that I've had along the way. I think the Student Union should reflect that same sense of community and give students a place where they genuinely feel welcomed, appreciated, and heard.



INES CERVANTES

In summary, Southwestern College has been a hub in Chula Vista that has provided education, resources and opportunities. It has helped guide students towards their careers and even change students' lives around. Maybe equally important, it has also provided students with a feeling of home, comfort and safety. Given the many improvements to the campus and new educational programs, I believe it will continue to do so well past this 65 year celebration.



FILAM CREATOR CON BRINGS TOGETHER FILIPINO ARTISTS

By: Jeff Bettger

On Saturday morning, Sept 19, my cousin and I entered the Chula Vista Civic Center Library and found ourselves in a scaled-down version of Comic-Con. No long lines, no badges, but the same high quality of artists with a twist. The convention highlighted art and lectures by Filipino creators. It was a wonderful balance of "human scale", community, and accessibility to presenters. I felt fortunate that my friend @JungleVillageChief had invited me to this event. To find out more about the event, he suggested that I talk to the founder, Aaron Nabus.

JEFF BETTGER: How many years has the convention been in existence?

AARON NABUS: The annual convntion has been around for three years. Though, the idea for an annual convention that celebrated Filipino American creators started in July of 2019, after attending San Diego Comic-Con that year. I organized a team and a plan was set to have our inaugural convention in the fall of 2020. Unfortunately, the pandemic came and it wasn't until 2023 that I got the team back together to plan for a 2024 inaugural convention. On the back of the success of FACC 2024, FilAm CreatorCon became an official nonprofit organization in 2025, to better serve our community.

FACC 2024 was held at the National City Library. We were able to showcase 16 exhibitors and we had 8 panels. Our special guests that year were Whilce Portacio (legendary comic book creator and co-creator of the character, Bishop) and Bobby Rubio (former Pixar story artist, director of the Pixar Sparkshort, Float, and creator of the comic book, Neighborhood Legend). Since our conventions are currently FREE to attend, we can only estimate total attendance. We estimated that for our first year we had at least 500 attendees.

FACC 2025 was moved to a bigger venue, the Chula Vista Public Library (Civic Center Branch) – due to growing demand from both attendees and exhibitors. With this new space, we were able to accommodate 38 exhibitors, 16 panels (plus two short film screenings), and musical performances for our 2nd annual convention. Our special guest was Bryan Pangilinan, Composer and Executive Producer for Larry the Musical: An American Journey.

FACC 2026 – While still at Chula Vista Public Library (Civic Center Branch), we were able to make room for 48 exhibitors this year. Programming wise, in addition to twelve panels, we had a Filipino martial arts demo that was part of a panel courtesy of Orihinal Doce Pares San Diego and a Mahjong demos courtesy of San Diego Mahjong Club. We also debuted a children's reading area where authors would read their books to kids. Our special guest this year was musical artist, AJ Rafael. Whilce Portacio and Bobby Rubio also made special appearances. We had 48 exhibitors, and 4 food/drink vendors. We estimate that over 850 attended this year.

JB: Are most of the vendors/artists from the South Bay or San Diego county, or is this a state-wide event?

AN: While most exhibitors/artists and panelists are from around San Diego County (with an ample amount from the South Bay area), we do have a few professionals that came from the San Francisco area, Los Angeles, Orange County, and Arizona. Last year we had someone from New York City attend as both a speaker (they presented a short film) and exhibitor.

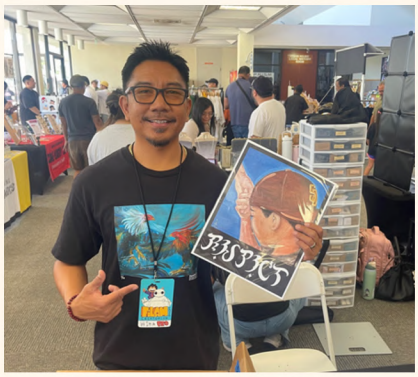
JB: What is your background in the arts?

AN: I'm a proud 2nd generation Filipino American (of Benguet descent – an indigenous Igorot group in the Philippines). Being the son of a U.S. Navy sailor, I also moved a bit when I was younger. For the first 10 years of my life, I lived in Hawaii, National City, the Philippines, Long Beach, Puerto Rico, and finally south San Diego (Otay Mesa) – where I graduated from Montgomery High School.



Special guest artist Bobby Rubio

I'm currently a graphic designer, though my first love was photography (I was photography editor of my high school



Multi-talented artist Iz inocencio

newspaper). I also enjoy interviewing independent pop culture creators as a podcaster (the Hall H Show) and connecting and creating opportunities for other artists (through FilAm CreatorCon and also as a brand ambassador for the International Mobile Film Festival).

JB: How would you describe some of the common characteristics of Filipino art?

AN: With thousands of islands, over 100 distinct languages, and history rife with conflict, you can expect Filipino art to be vibrant, diverse, resilient, and story driven. Across mediums, you often see a strong emphasis on family, heritage, layered history, and community. Because the Philippines has a rich history of trade and cultural exchange, Filipino art uniquely blends indigenous roots with Spanish, American, and modern Asian influences—resulting in work that is deeply expressive, versatile, and visually dynamic. A lot of superstitions and folklore stories live on as well and are reflected in Filipino art and literature throughout the diaspora. The recent animated movie, Forgotten Island, and Bobby Rubio's comic book, Neighborhood Legend, are good examples of this.

While modern or avant-garde art can feel detached from a specific geography or era, when it comes to art from a Filipino American perspective, it is usually never completely divorced from culture. In fact, art is often a bridge that tries to connect us with our roots in the Philippines while also telling our unique stories as Filipino Americans. A good example is artist Patrick Ballesteros' unique, whimsical takes on everyday life, sprinkled with pop culture and Filipino references and puns.

At FACC, we see "Culture" as the shared stories, traditions, and values of a people, while "Art" is the unique lens through which those stories and personal experiences are reimagined for today. Searching for a connection to the homeland while navigating feelings of not being Filipino enough, or dealing with trauma of being ostracized by family for choosing a non-traditional career are some common themes that Filipino American artists try to reconcile with their art.

JB: What are the plans for next year? Can you find a larger venue?

AN: We were so thrilled by this year's turnout! The day of our convention, September 19, 2026, by proclamation courtesy of Supervisor Paloma Aguirre, was even declared "FilAm CreatorCon Day" throughout all of San Diego County! For next year, our goal is to retain that welcoming, intimate, community friendly atmosphere while continuing to grow organically.

Can we find a larger venue? Unfortunately, the Chula Vista Public Library (Civic Center Branch location) will be going through a nine-month remodeling phase next year. Since our annual convention usually takes place the third weekend of September – which overlaps with their remodeling schedule, we will need a new venue. We are currently evaluating potential venues that offer a bit more room for more exhibitors, panels, entertainment, food vendors, and interactive demos. I would love to keep the convention in the South Bay since this area has such a rich history with the Filipino community.

As we look forward to 2027 (and the next few years after that), and seeing as how we are approaching the 1,000 attendee threshold (I think we have the capacity to grow into a 3,000-attendee event by 2030), a more concerted advertising and marketing effort will be needed to support this growth.

Speaking of growth, I'd like to give a shout out to the growing planning committee who were instrumental in making this year's convention a success: Alex Benedicto, Alicia Ricafrente, Brandon Salvidar, Chelle Esteban, Craig Wilson, Francis Bautista, Gail Iliria Lau, Hunter Tabiendo, Oliver Bayona, Rex Revilla, Scott Lost, and Vince Alvendia. And also, a special Thank You to Senior Librarian, Alyson Hamlin and her staff at the Chula Vista Public Library. They were so accommodating and helpful in making sure my team felt supported.

JB: What would you like our readers to know about FACC? Is there a website? How can people contact you?

AN: FilAm CreatorCon is more than just a nonprofit organization and convention – it's a living celebration of Filipino American creativity, representation, and community which is open to everyone, regardless of background. Whether you're an avid art collector, an aspiring creator wanting to connect with a seasoned professional, or a family looking for an empowering and educational day, there is a place for you here. We also host other community outreach events like open mics, pop up markets, mixers, drink and draws, and panels/workshops throughout the year



Event founder Aaron Nabus

Website: filamcreatorcon.org
Social Media (Instagram): @filamcreatorcon
Contact Email: info@filamcreatorcon.org



The Future Champ:
KENDRA ‘LA PEKE’ VILLA

By: Blanca Esthela Castañeda García

'I CAN DO THIS'.
UP AND DOWN.
'I CAN DO THIS'.
LEFT TO RIGHT.
'I CAN DO THIS'.
INHALE AND EXHALE.



Muttered words roll off her tongue through her large protective mouthguard. Mentally rehearsing the walk towards the ring, the young boxer imagines the taste of triumph before the first bell rings.

"I am certain that I will be the best boxer of all time," Kendra Villa claims. This is an unexpected claim from an otherwise quiet and reserved youth. But interviewing her for even a short amount of time, her competitive fire is evident. "To be ready to fight I just have to say it again and again, 'I can do this. I can do this!'," she explains.

At just 15 years old, Kendra has competed at both the Boxing National Championship and ranked #3 in the 125lbs category at the Junior Olympics last year, making her a national champion. "She was seven years old when she announced she wanted to be a boxer." says her dad and trainer, Carlos Villa. Starting at 10 years old in a proper boxing gym, Kendra started competing professionally after two years of training, earning her nickname 'La Peke' (the little one), "I have been in fighter mode since I was little," she recounts, "before this I used to do gymnastics."

In the ring, Junior boxing lasts three rounds, two minutes each. In the case of Kendra, age is definitive on who and how she fights, "Once I turn 16, I will be in the Youth division and my rounds will last three minutes," she explains about the sport, which happens to not only captivate TV pay-per-view watchers, but enthralls the San Diego South Bay in its many unique ways. Friends and families gather to watch local matches. Supportive communities of coaches, boxers and parents form at the neighborhood gyms. Giant murals adorn our streets with the images of Canelo Álvarez, and Manny Pacquiao, who is depicted outside of National City's House of Boxing. A fading wall on Market Street depicts its late resident, light heavyweight champion Archie Moore, who founded his own local boxing organization in 1957, ABC Youth Foundation.



Kendra's dedication and training pays off in the ring

Despite its tremendous positive impact, women athletes in San Diego still find difficulties in the combat sports, "It's challenging to find girls that can spar with her, sometimes we have to travel all the way to Los Angeles or Tijuana to find a partner," Carlos says about the current landscape of

female amateur boxing, “If there are girls to practice with, they might be too light or too heavy.” Nevertheless, San Diegan women have had great success, with La Mesa’s native Amaris ‘Diamond Girl’ Quintana being ranked #19 in the World Boxing Councils Strawweight rankings as of 2025, alongside San Diego State University’s teaching star, Heidi Sarmiento Wilson, certified USA Boxing Coach and a Masters Boxing Champion.

“My role model is Katie Taylor, she’s the legend, the best boxer ever,” Kendra exclaims, “I’d love to meet her one day.” Irish boxer Taylor has just retired from the sport at 40 years old as a three-times undisputed champion, defeating her final opponent this past September in front of a record crowd.

Training sessions are the focal point of Kendra’s life right now. Her daily routine begins with a morning run, followed by footwork practice and punching bags. When asked about the parent-coach dynamic, “at the beginning, we didn’t quite find a training dynamic that fit us, we kept mixing up our roles,” Carlos recounts, “That’s when we decided to separate the parent-coach dynamic, the key was talking through it. Once she started seeing me as a coach, things really improved. We have learned so much about each other, both as father and daughter and as coach and athlete.”

Nowadays, Kendra continues her education through





Kendra and her father, Carlos, talk about her next match

independent studies, “I was attending Castle Park High School, but now I do independent studies. I would love to go to college and keep boxing,” she says smiling, “What keeps me going is the future. I can’t wait to pay my parents back from boxing,” she explains. Kendra’s mother, Consuelo Figueroa, currently manages the publicity around Kendra’s fights, “We are grateful for those who’ve showed up when we announce food sales to fund her trips,” Consuelo exclaims.

With a sparked interest from an early age, Kendra reminisces about watching famous Canelo fights on TV and sneaking off from her gymnastics sessions to the boxing ring in her local gym. When asked about the secret to her success, Kendra shows a maturity beyond her age, “Humbleness is key to improving right now. I'm working with a nutritionist to keep my weight on track to be healthy and a personal trainer to increase my speed and power. I am looking forward to the explosiveness.”

As Kendra prepares for her transition into the Youth division, her ambition remains on athletic sharpness and dedication to a sport that has many exciting doors yet to be opened. Guided by the support of her family and a growing reputation inside the amateur boxing landscape, Kendra holds onto her mantra ‘I can do this.’

And we at The Towne Local Chula Vista Magazine also believe you can! It is truly inspiring to meet a family so dedicated and supportive of each other. Kendra, you and your family are already champions inside and outside of the ring.

To finance the costs of the sport, the Villa family promotes Kendra’s career through ongoing food sales and fundraising events. For more information on her journey and how you can help support Kendra, please visit her mother’s Instagram page: @myskgirls



The Greatest Comeback

By: Catrice Chan

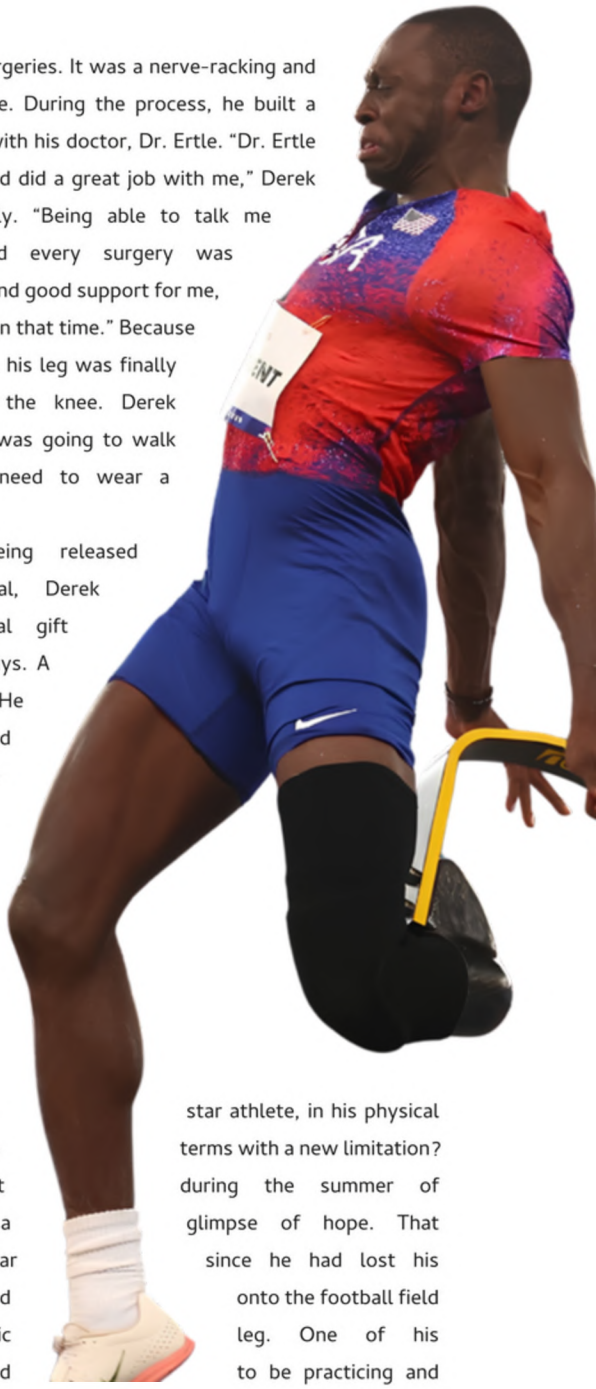
Many athletes have overcome injuries to find success on the field. Some injuries that required rest and some injuries that required surgery... and then there is the story of Derek Loccident. Growing up in Oklahoma, he began playing football at the early age of eight. He quickly rose to become a football star, displaying pure athleticism and dominance on the field. In high school, he received several college offers and ultimately committed to playing DII football at nearby University of Central Oklahoma. During his first season, he was off to an extraordinary start, racking up 16 defensive tackles in just the first two games. He was energized, determined, and excited. With big dreams, he knew that he would be unstoppable.

Then came the train accident in September 2018 that completely altered his life, changed his perspective, and deterred him from his goals. That night, after a football game, Derek was having fun at a party when he realized that his phone wasn't working. He spotted a gas station down the street and decided to use their pay phone to call his friends. A train was parked between him and the gas station. To save time, Derek decided to cross between two of the train cars. Just as he put his foot on the latch connecting the two cars, the train began to move. In a panic, he tried to move quickly but tripped and fell, hitting his head and knocking himself out. "As I regained consciousness, I'm looking up at the sky and I can see a few clouds, the moon, and I'm like, what just happened?" Derek recalled. "And I try to get up and I feel a little tingling sensation at the bottom of my left leg. And I lift my left leg up, and then my foot's just completely gone."

In a single moment, it seemed like his life was over. All his dreams, his hopes, and his football career vanished before his eyes. "I was slowly getting the thought of just laying there and bleeding out," Derek said. "And then probably 3 to 5 minutes after that, I'm like, no, I can't just stay here. I'm like, I gotta get up." Using his remaining energy, he somehow managed to hop to the main road and scream for help. When no cars stopped, he hopped further to the traffic light, dropped to the floor, and leaned against the post. Soon, he saw headlights stopping in front of him. A lady rushed out of her car and called 911. He was rushed to the hospital, where he survived.

"Every time I think back to it, I'm thinking of how lucky I am, but also how that has made me the person I am today," Derek reflected. "I don't speak about it too much but when I do, I try to be informational and try to give good details about that experience, because it's a close and dark experience. But it's close to me, and it is part of my life and who I am today. So definitely, it was one of the worst days, but I know I am very, very lucky and fortunate to still be here."

Derek spent a grueling two months in the hospital and underwent eight surgeries. It was a nerve-racking and terrifying experience. During the process, he built a strong connection with his doctor, Dr. Ertle. "Dr. Ertle is a great doctor and did a great job with me," Derek expressed gratefully. "Being able to talk me through each and every surgery was definitely amazing and good support for me, because I needed it in that time." Because infection had set in, his leg was finally amputated below the knee. Derek realized that if he was going to walk again, he would need to wear a prosthetic leg.



After being released from the hospital, Derek received a special gift during his rehab days. A Rubik's cube. He quickly discovered that he could solve the cube with ease. "It's one of those hobbies that I had to get myself to do," Derek explained, "to get my mind off of things."

But how does a star athlete, in his physical prime, come to terms with a new limitation? One particular night during the summer of 2019 gave Derek a glimpse of hope. That night, in barely a year since he had lost his foot, Derek walked onto the football field with a prosthetic leg. One of his teammates happened to be practicing and challenged Derek to run on the field. At first, the fear of running on a prosthetic leg terrified him. Running on a prosthetic leg seemed impossible, almost preposterous. With the encouragement of his teammate, Derek finally summoned up enough courage to try. "I did a few sprints on my daily walking prosthesis," Derek said excitedly, "and I was like, holy cow, I can kind of move in this thing!" It was as if the field was calling him back. He began to dream the impossible dream. His football career, it appeared, was far from over.

Excited and full of energy, Derek felt ready to try out for his team for the 2019 season. However, conference rulings about

players with prosthetics prohibited his chances of playing. It turned out to be a silver lining – Derek used that year to sit out, continue to train, and prepare for the next season.

The next season, Derek felt ready to play. However, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the season was cancelled. Devastation and frustration set in. "That also was another punch in the gut," Derek said, "And I was like, holy cow, can I go through another season like this?" He soon received an offer to be coached in the Paralympics by a coach named Coach Cruz, who recruits athletes for the Paralympics. This offer would mean beginning a career in Paralympic track and field while quitting football. The decision was tough, but after that confidence boost that one summer night in 2019, his mind was set. His hunger to play football again with his teammates overpowered all other decisions. He wanted to play college football and show the world what he could do.

"I had unfinished business on the field," Derek said confidently. "I'm just going to get out and grind for a season of football, graduate, and see what happens next!"



Learning how to adjust to and become comfortable playing with a prosthetic leg took hours of dedication, perseverance, and intense focus. He spent countless hours on the field and in the gym, always grinding and striving for perfection. "And it was lot of me just winging stuff," Derek explained. "Like there was no guidebook, no rules on how to go about things. It was just me going off, getting creative, figuring out ways to move because once the leg was padded up, it got a little heavy."

To the best of Derek's knowledge, only five other leg amputees have played college football. Derek played defense as an outside linebacker and safety, two very high-impact positions that required him to chase fast receivers, change direction quickly, and tackle large running backs. His return was more than proving that he could play football again; he was doing something that very few amputee athletes had accomplished.

His heart and passion for the game had never left. On the field, Derek felt pure joy. He knew that the field was where he belonged. While the pressure to prove himself and his abilities was challenging, his skills and talent quickly became apparent. Many players did not even notice that he had a prosthetic leg during the game because of the abundant padding and pulled-up sock. After games when players noticed, he received incredible and well-deserved respect and admiration.

"So a lot of teams didn't really know," Derek said. "But the ones that did were like, holy cow, like he's, this is insane. Because even mid play, during like a run play, I remember one of the offensive linemen kind of blocking me off and then looking at it was like, yo, what are you doing out here with that thing, bro? I'm like, nah, bro, I'm just chilling. Don't get in the way though. He just laughed it off and we'll have little jokes here and there on the field." Derek's journey, from playing football to losing part of his leg to returning to the field, speaks for itself. His amazing comeback, however, does not end with football. When he graduated and his football days ended, a new challenge was waiting, and a new chapter opened: track and field in the Paralympics.

In his first year participating in the Paralympics, Derek only had six months to prepare for the World Championships, which would qualify him for the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. His football background, work ethic, and natural athletic ability helped kickstart his success in track and field. He would go on to win two silver medals in the Paris Games, one in the long jump and one in the high jump. "I'm learning to love track and field, and I'm loving it more and more each time I compete," Derek exclaimed with a smile.

Nicknamed D-Loc by his fellow teammates, Derek uses a variety of prosthetics and blades when competing for different track and field events. For the 100 meters, long jump, high jump, and javelin, he has four prosthetic legs, each designed for a specific event. He also has multiple blades, including about seven to eight blades for the 100 meters, five for long jump, two for high jump, and his daily walking leg for javelin.

The setup for a prosthetic leg is more complicated than it may seem. Rather than just a piece that connects to his leg and a single blade, it requires several parts, including a socket, a blade, and a spike plate. Within the socket itself are many other components, including an air valve, a bolt holder, and liners. Derek's



Throwing out the first pitch at a Padres Game with Joe Musgrove

favorite event, long jump, requires the most complicated and most expensive blade. He once recalled receiving a bill of about $86,000 for five prosthetic legs. Derek explained that the different blades are used in different conditions. Even the slightest wind can affect how he runs up to the take-off board.

One of the exciting aspects of being a Paralympian is the chance to travel internationally to compete. Because he competes in four events, Derek brings four blades with him. To help prevent losing a blade while traveling overseas, Derek carries a custom bag from Nike, which holds up to four blades. This makes it easier and more efficient to go through the airport and onto the plane.

Connecting with different cultures while traveling and competing alongside his teammates and friends has made his career enjoyable and memorable. Derek expressed, "It's definitely fun to be able to travel and compete, because I was never really a traveler until I got into Paralympics." Recently, he had the amazing opportunity to travel to the beautiful country of Tunisia in North Africa. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that opened his eyes to the joys of traveling and interacting with individuals of different cultures. Today, Derek continues to train at the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center in preparation for the upcoming 2028 Los Angeles Paralympics. "I've loved it," Derek said appreciatively. "It's kind of been my second home." Compared to Oklahoma, Chula Vista serves as the ideal location for him to train – sunny days, great facilities, access to coaching, proper nutrition, and any needed treatments.

Beyond the track, Derek is a caring, motivational superhero for younger athletes in the community. His happy and youthful personality makes him a natural leader. He is currently in his second year of coaching at La Jolla High School. Additionally, he connects with other younger athletes in the Paralympic community by listening to their stories, encouraging them to push past their limits, and giving words of wisdom and advice. Most profoundly, he promotes positivity and creates happiness on the faces of young amputees. "Being there for people, honestly, being just an ear, just listening, hearing their story and being able to encourage them to move on and keep going. I think that's the most important thing," Derek expressed. "If there's anything, I'm going to leave and have some type of impact. This could be on the next generation, but also the people in the community, man. That's what we're here for. As athletes, it's not only just winning medals and winning races and stuff; it's also having some type of impact off the track and have some type of encouragement in that and shedding some type of light and giving people hope and sense of things."

Looking ahead, Derek is excited to continue competing abroad, including in Dubai next year. He is especially eager to compete in Uzbekistan for the World Championships and hopes to win a gold medal. This would result in an automatic qualification for the LA Paralympics, skipping the Paralympic Trials entirely. In LA, some of his goals include winning three or more medals and throwing the javelin over 55 meters. With fierce dedication, confidence, and determination, he is already set up for success. When considering the greatest comebacks in sports history, we submit Derek Loccident's story for consideration.

Follow Derek's journey IG @ dlllock



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RUNNING FOR OFFICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH GREG MARTINEZ



By: Jeff Bettger

District 1 in Chula Vista covers the northeast corner of the city. This district includes basically the communities of Terranova, Rancho Del Rey, Rolling Hills Ranch, and Eastlake. Local resident and business owner, Greg Martinez, is running to become the next City Councilmember to represent District 1. As a public service, I wanted to learn more about Mr. Martinez's background and his reasons for running for office.

JEFF BETTGER: Thank you for your time today. Let's start with a little bit of your background. Where did you grow up?

GREG MARTINEZ: Thank you. I was born and raised in LA and went to school there all the way through college. I mostly grew up in Norwalk, and then in my high school years, we moved to Yorba Linda in Orange County. After high school, I went to USC, where I studied accounting and I got my accounting degree.

JB: Why did you decide to become a CPA?

GM: When I was young, my parents both worked union jobs. They were working class people. My dad worked for the aerospace industry and my mom was a social worker for the county of LA. I was the first one in my family to go to college. I went in for chemical engineering, but I found out that USC has a really good accounting school. I liked that accountants get to interact with more people and the math is different. Basically, we solve a lot of word problems, right? People have their taxes, their accounting, and usually there's a story regarding their goals. So I transferred to the Business school and earned my degree.

JB: When did you move to Chula Vista?

GM: After college, I worked in accounting in LA for a while and then moved to Michigan for about 6 years. I was working in the tax software industry where I would meet with government officials and other software companies to help develop standards for electronic filing. I was actually elected as industry co-chair of one of those groups that help promote electronic filing standards in the tax industry. One group that I worked with was Intuit, which was based in San Diego at that time. After a year and a half, I was interviewed and received a job offer to move to San Diego in 1999.

JB: Why did you decide to open your own accounting practice?

GM: Working in the tech software industry for many years, I saw several rounds of downsizing. I wanted to make sure that I wouldn't have to go through another downsizing. So I decided to hang my CPA certificate and start my own business. (A little known fact is that I also have an insurance license to sell health insurance, which I don't really do anymore.) I am lucky that my office is only two miles away from my home here in Rolling Hills. I don't have to deal with traffic and can go home for lunch if I want to.

JB: How many employees do you have?

GM: I have four employees now plus myself. It just worked out that they're all local here in Chula Vista. We have a nice-sized staff so we can turn the jobs around quickly. In this business, it's just like any other business in a lot of ways except we sell financial services. We are good at turning jobs around quickly and accurately and we have good customer service. We work hard to make sure nobody falls through the cracks.

JB: Tell me about some of your volunteer efforts.

GM: When I first moved to Rolling Hills in 2006, I joined the HOA and served one term. Back then it was a lot different because we were basically trying to get the residents to submit their architectural plans and to landscape their houses. Recently it came to my attention, 20 years later, a lot of the infrastructure and assets are deteriorating and need repair. Now, instead of policing the homeowners, I'm trying to hold the management company accountable. I led an effort to replace the management company which I felt was not doing a good job. It took a lot of work, but we got a good management company in now, and everybody seems happy with the change. I just got reelected this year. I believe I got over 80% of the vote. It's not hard to get elected to be HOA president because you don't get paid. But I work with a good group of people. We're just the board of directors. We oversee it and provide guidance, kind of like the City Council provides guidance to the City Manager who runs the city day-to-day. It's all about having the proper budget to



maintain those assets.

JB: I believe you were also on one of the commissions for the city as well?

GM: Yes, I was on the Measure P Citizens Oversight Committee for eight years until I termed out. Measure P was an extra half a cent sales tax that went to fund infrastructure. We met quarterly to review infrastructure needs. There were some major improvements at Loma Verde Park, potholes, storm drains, along with police and fire vehicles. It's given me insight as to all the assets the city has and the costs that it takes to maintain them and keep them up and running properly. I got to meet some city staff. I would definitely say anybody who wants to be in city government should consider joining these boards and commissions and meet people who care about the city, as well as city staff and some of the elected officials like the city attorney.

JB: Given your busy business and volunteer efforts, why did you decide to run for city council?

GM: Well, some of the things I saw happening at the city council were not ideal. A recent attempt to increase salaries was kind of rushed through without any scrutiny from the public or the Charter Review Commission or the Ethics Commission. So that's why I'm running. We kind of have a block of four city council members who vote basically in lockstep and are always challenging the mayor, who's been very popular and I think he's done a very good job. I want to bring some balance back to city council and bring trust back. I want to be a council person for everybody in Chula Vista, all of our veterans and all the hardworking people that make this such a good place to live. I've been here 20 years, so I feel I am pretty transparent and I'm in the neighborhood all the time. I have nothing to hide. As a small business owner and CPA, I would bring important perspectives and skills to the council. Creating budgets takes work and knowledge.

JB: What are some issues you would like to address specific to District 1.

GM: One thing that has gained momentum that I've advocated for is a police station on the east side. Whether that goes in Councilmember Inzunza's District 3 to the south of us, or in District 1, that would be good just so we get faster response times out here. There's also been some talk about building a senior center out here. I would support that. There are a lot of seniors, and we don't have a meeting place like that. The nearest one would be the Bonita Library.

Next, an issue that I would be opposed to would be putting high density or low-income housing on the Salt Creek Golf Course. If you are going to put housing there, it should stay consistent with the housing that is already in the area. I would also advocate for something to take over the shopping space that used to be Albertsons in the San Miguel Ranch Shopping Center. Along with repairing roads, those are the type of local issues I would like to see addressed.

JB: For me, the most significant thing I've seen in the last five years is this idea of a Chula Vista University District. What are your thoughts about that?

GM: Absolutely. I support the efforts to bring a four-year university here. A university would not only be beneficial to the students, but also faculty and administrators would come in and hopefully settle here. In addition to raising the tax base, people in universities are a really good incubator of business. I would like to leverage that as part of a larger business development plan in the city. If you look at the business environment in North County, it is stronger than it is here in Chula Vista. This has always been kind of like a bedroom community. Even El Cajon, I think, has a little bit more in terms of industry. There's no reason we can't have that here. We just need to focus on that and work towards that goal. That's the future. I want to bring Chula Vista into the future. We are the second largest city in San Diego County.

JB: Thank you, Mr. Martinez, for your time and for sharing your opinions and insights. We recognize the effort and time that it takes to run for an elected office.



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The Towne Local Chula Vista Magazine is a non-partisan publication. Its goal is to provide interviews with the people and leaders of our communities. Incumbent Councilmember Chavez did not respond to inquiries about doing an interview. Whichever candidates you support, please remember to vote on or before Nov 3. Your voice matters.

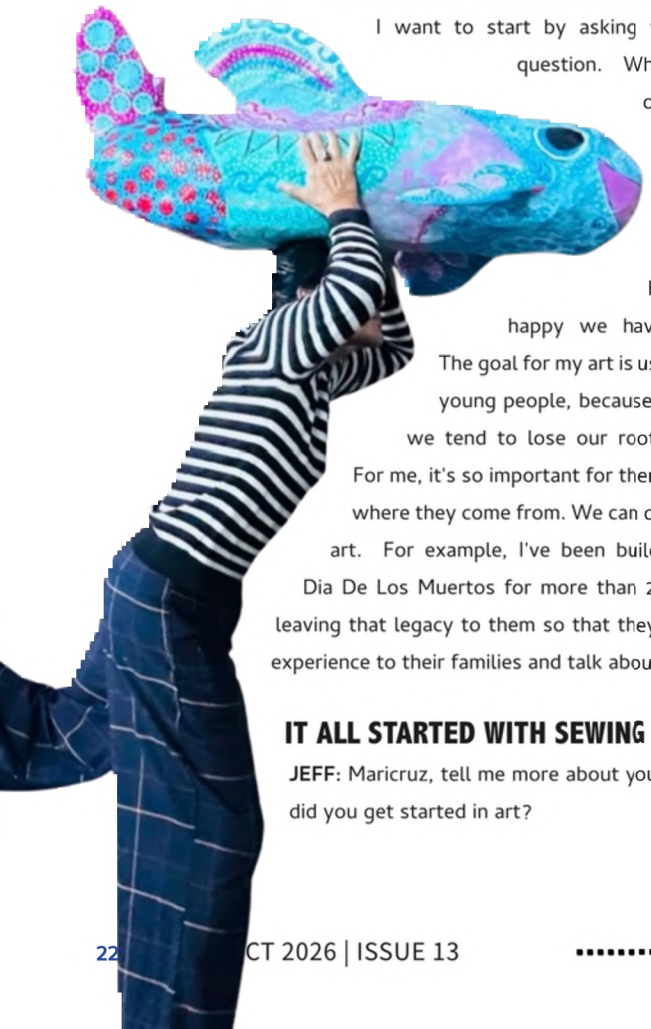
WHERE THE ARTISTS ARE, YOU FEEL THE ENERGY



By: Jeff Bettger

Trying to describe Maricruz Alvarado is not easy. Too many words come to mind: friendly, activist, historian, gravitas, authentic, fun, talented, leader. After watching numerous people come up and greet her warmly at an event, I started calling her "La Reina" (the Queen) With two new multi-media exhibits underway, one at the Bonita Museum and Cultural Center and one at Birch Aquarium in La Jolla, I caught up with Maricruz between a KPBS interview and a guided tour of her work.

JEFF BETTGER: Hi Maricruz. I have been looking forward to this interview for a long time. I know you are extremely busy now. You have the "La Ruta De Nuestros Ancestros" (The Path of Our Ancestors) exhibit at the Bonita Museum and the Ajolote exhibit in La Jolla. Before we talk about both, I want to do something different. I want to start by asking you a general question. What is the goal or purpose of your art?



MARICRUZ ALVARADO: Hi Jeff. I am happy we have the chance. The goal for my art is usually to target young people, because as immigrants, we tend to lose our roots, our culture. For me, it's so important for them to remember where they come from. We can do that through art. For example, I've been building altars for Dia De Los Muertos for more than 25 years. I am leaving that legacy to them so that they can take that experience to their families and talk about it.

IT ALL STARTED WITH SEWING

JEFF: Maricruz, tell me more about your youth. How did you get started in art?

MARICRUZ: Well, I was born in the north of Mexico, in Chihuahua. I was maybe seven years old when we moved to Ensenada to live with my aunt. My mom was working in the United States. So it was my aunt who raised me and my two brothers. From that point on, art was always a part of my life. My aunt only went to 3rd grade, but she was very creative. She was a seamstress and taught me how to sew at a very early age. I remember when I was about 7 or 8 years old, I started cutting threads and doing easy things. Over time, that escalated into more and more sewing. That's my love, just to sew.

From there, I moved to Long Beach to live with my mom for the first time at age 16. At that time, my mom was barely able to pay the rent because she was a single mom. I was going to high school at that time, and she told me that she didn't have extra money to buy me clothes. Because I knew very well how to make my own clothes, she bought me a sewing machine. That's how I dressed myself. It was beautiful because I made my own patterns. I would just open any magazine, and I could choose whatever I wanted. I was really proud that I knew how to sew. After that, I went to college for one year, then I got married to my high school sweetheart and had three kids. Then we moved to San Diego.

PAPER MACHE AND ENDANGERED FISH

JEFF: I know that you create art with many different media. Please tell me more.

MARICRUZ: My love for ceramics started when I was in high school. In Mexico, I didn't have as many opportunities to explore art. When I discovered ceramics, I loved it. I haven't stopped working with ceramics since then.

I also create with paper mache. At the end of each year, my

focus is always on paper mache. Starting in July, I begin planning installations for Dia De Los Muertos and other projects. This year I have three large paper mache pieces displayed at the Birch Aquarium. They showcase endangered sea animals—the Marine Cow (Vaquita Marina), the cute Ajolote (Axolotl, an amphibian found only in in the Xochimilco Lake in Mexico City), and the Turtle Caguama. In fact, they are opening a garden dedicated to the Ajolote. The goal is to create understanding to help save them from extinction.



DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

JEFF: Please tell me what Dia De Los Muertos means to you.

MARICRUZ: Well, Day of the Dead is very important for me because I believe that the departed are not gone. They are here. They live in our memories and in our hearts. We celebrate it on Nov 1st and 2nd. In Mexico, it's a big celebration. It's a very old celebration. The indigenous people had it before the Spaniards came.

For this exhibition in Bonita, it is called La Ruta de Nuestros Ancestros (the Route Traced by Our Ancestors). It is about the route that they have already created for us when our time comes. That is also the same route that they come back to us on the 1st and 2nd. We have 16 artists participating in the exhibit, including me. Each artist created a special piece showing the sentiment coming from what Dia De Los Muertos means to them. In the altar I created for the exhibition, I have the cempasuchil (marigold) flower as one of the offerings. Its smell brings back our loved ones. I also asked other community members to draw on beautiful veils of semi-see-through white fabric. The idea was to match the artists who made the altars with the community members who made the veils as a way to start conversations about our departed loved ones.



TODAY'S ART SCENE

JEFF: Tell me your opinion about the current art scene in the South Bay.

MARICRUZ: It's very vibrant. It's very alive. Being so close to the border, there is now an exchange of art. We have great artists here. You can see that people are hungry for art. They used to go to San Diego for art. Now they can come to the Bonita Museum, Chula Vista's Casa Casillas, Art Through the Glass at the mall, and to places on 3rd Ave. And I want to mention what a great job Wendy Wilson has been doing here at the Bonita Museum, creating opportunities for artists. And I want to thank you, Jeff. You are really part of this movement. Your magazine looks beautiful and you promote artists and their works. It is not easy for artists to become known. It's important for local artists to get to know each other and support each other. Where the artists are, you can feel the energy.

Last, I believe that now is the time for women artists. There is too much talent to be ignored. Women have a different perspective than men, but in the past, haven't been given the opportunities. But I think everybody has the capability of expressing themselves through art. Being an artist comes from within. Art is our heart and soul. The important thing is being honest with ourselves.

JEFF: Thank you, Maricruz, for sharing your story, insights, and experience. Thank you also for all that you do for the community. As a leader, artist and mentor, you play such an important part of the South Bay's growing art culture!

To see more of Maricruz's art, follow her on Instagram @Maricruz.makes.art



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