

# THE TOWNE LOCAL

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## Chula Vista

**MAKE YOUR FITNESS**

**GOAL  
YOUR  
REALITY!**

JULY 2026 | ISSUE 10



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Photo courtesy of Steve Wood; Chula Vista Lemon Festival

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# CHULA VISTA UPCOMING EVENTS



**JEFF BETTGER**  
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

Welcome to our July issue! This month we have interviews with an amazing group of people, topics ranging from beauty, fitness, government, Olympics, Rock-n-Roll, Folklorico Dance and the History of lemon production in Chula Vista!

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Now that schools have begun the 2026-2027 year, there is still time to enjoy some sun and fun on the weekends. Here are some major upcoming events.

- July 23-26 World Famous Comic-Con
- Aug 9 Bonita Firefighters Pancake Breakfast
- Aug 15 Chula Vista Lemon Festival
- Aug 22 Chula Vista HarborFest
- Sept 12 Bonitafest Parade & Celebration
- Sept 23-26 Bonitafest Melodrama
- Sept 26 Chula Vista Art Fest

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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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Steve is a legendary Chula Vista photographer. When not capturing beautiful sunsets, he and his wife can be found supporting community art events.

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



*When Life Gives You Lemons*

# CHULA VISTA LEMON INDUSTRY

by Harry Orgovan



*Ralph Granger Orchard in Paradise Valley. Photos from "Images of America: Early National City" by Carnes & Nye Arcadia Publishing ISBN 13 978-0-7385-5910-0*



*Granger owned packing house purchased from Frank Kimball*

Southern California had its first oranges brought by the Spanish missionaries in 1769. These particular oranges were grown at the San Gabriel mission in 1841 in an orchard. The oranges we know today, known as navel oranges, were first grown in India by the Portuguese, then transplanted to

Portugal, and then to a colony in Brazil. Twelve of these Brazilian naval orange trees in 1870 were sent to the Department of Agriculture in Washington DC. The state of California received two of the twelve in Riverside, California. These were deep orange in color, with excellent taste flavor and easily peeled to be sectioned. It also had a thick skin that made it favorable for shipping.

Orange groves by the thousands sprang up. One of the two original trees still produce Washington Navel oranges as they're called.

The Valencia orange, which

is full of juice, came from the Azores to Southern California, along with the import of orange trees, lemon and grapefruit trees.

Frank Kimball and his brothers in 1868, came into possession of the Mexican land grant known as Rancho de La Nación. This land grant included what we know today as National City, Chula Vista, and Bonita. National City was first developed as a railroad hub connecting to other parts of California and across the United States. Then they turned their attention to the 5000 acres south of National City which they named Chula Vista.





## CHULA VISTA : LEMON CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

In the late 1800's land developers composed of stockholders and directors of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, formed a corporation named the San Diego Land and Town Company. Chula Vista was chosen as the development's name, which in Spanish means Beautiful View. Before this time, the Chula Vista area consisted of four homes with a windmill and a well for water.

The area also included the old adobe La Punta Rancho House, once home to Santiago E. Arguello and his wife Guadalupe Estudillo Arguello.

The developers discovered Chula Vista was perfect for growing citrus. They divided 5,000 acres into parcels of 20 acres. Every house built had to be "of approved taste and plan, to cost not less than \$2,000." The parcels sold quickly and lemon trees were planted at the same time orchard houses were constructed. Large Victorian homes started to be built, surrounded by lemon groves. The first houses had no running water or indoor plumbing. The community didn't have gas or electricity at first, so kerosene lamps were used for light at night,

and cooking was done on a wood burning stove, which was used to heat the home also. Large storage water cisterns were used for domestic water use. By 1888 the Sweetwater Dam was completed which allowed for ample watering of the lemon groves at a price of \$3.50 for 30,000 gallons of water. The dam also supplied water to the residents. Most families had a cow for fresh milk, chickens for eggs. Fruits and vegetables were grown in gardens, then canned or dried.

The average grove size was no more than 10 acres so there were thousands of citrus growers. They would sell their lemons to packing houses, to process and market their crop. Growers often ended up owing money to the packing houses. Growers came together to form co-ops so they could market the citrus production themselves and control quality and quantity to maintain an acceptable price. By 1896, Chula Vista had two packing

plants and eventually was the home to two large co-ops: the Chula Vista Citrus Association, associated with Sunkist, and the Chula Vista Mutual Lemon Association affiliated with Mutual Orange Distributors, eventually known as Pure Gold. They operated large packing plants in the city until the 1960's.

The railroads developed a specialized railroad car called the "reefer" using ice at first, to transport lemons to the Midwest or east coast without spoilage. There was spraying, cultivating, fertilizing and hauling lemons by teams of horses. During the winter months, smudge pots burned all night, and growers learned to use



*1906 photo of the San Diego Fruit Company, whose parent company was San Diego Land and Town Company.*



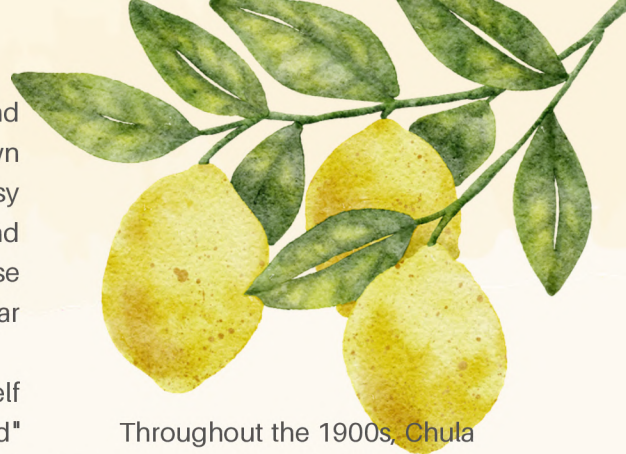
the roots of orange trees and graft the lemon tree to it, improving its ability to survive in cold, too much rain, or drought.

Around 1920 San Diego County built an insectary at 511 G St. in Chula Vista. Here they would grow good insects to battle the bad insects in the groves and fields in the surrounding areas. George Cox, the grandfather of former Mayor and San Diego County Supervisor Greg Cox, came to Chula Vista in 1918 as the manager of the Sunkist lemon packing plant on the southeast corner of Third Avenue and K St.

Lemons were harvested year-round. Pickers used special ladders with one supporting leg pushed into the tree. Lemons were collected in picking bags and loaded into wooden field boxes, then taken to the packing plants. The lemons were sorted into three

grades, Fancy, Choice and Standard, each with their own lemon crate label for easy identification. The artwork and names associated with these labels have made them a popular item for collectors.

Chula Vista proclaimed itself the "Lemon Capital of the World" in 1900 with 3,000 acres and 60,000 lemon trees. For many years, business in Chula Vista centered around the lemon industry. One of the early packing plants was at the corner of Center and Landis street, called the Leach Packing Plant in 1908. In 1911 Chula Vista was incorporated as a city, and some houses were being modernized with gas, electricity, indoor plumbing and telephones. Community activity centered around Third Avenue with horses, wagons and later paved streets accommodating automobiles.



Throughout the 1900s, Chula Vista growers had their ups and downs with severe freezes (1949), low prices, tree diseases, and other crops eventually becoming more profitable products, such as tomatoes, lettuce, and cucumbers. After World War II, groves gave way to new housing, developments, businesses, and schools. Wooden boxing crates gave way to cardboard cartons, and packing houses became automated. By 1965, both packing houses had ceased lemon operations and Chula Vista's lemon growing era ended.



## CHULA VISTA LEMON FESTIVAL

**EAT, DRINK, AND BE ZESTY!**

**When:** Saturday, August 15

**Time:** 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM

**Where:** Third Ave, Chula Vista

This year's Lemon Festival includes two stages of live music, zesty photo opps, a kids zone for the Lil' Lemons, arts and crafts vendors, a pie-eating contest and delicious food options.

To learn more, visit:

<https://downtownchulavista.com/events/lemon-festival>



# Keeping the Dances Alive

BY BLANCA ESTHELA CASTAÑEDA GARCÍA



*Chula Vista's Wa Kushmaa academy*

Beaming under the ambient light of the outdoor mall corridors, the stomps of dancers echo from the terrace at the Chula Vista Center almost every Friday night. For the past 21 years, this weekly routine birthed journeys from the mall's sun-drenched second floor all the way to the rugged peaks in Eastern Europe and the sweltering rains of South America. The Mexican folkloric dance academy 'Wa-Kushmaa' has enchanted audiences internationally and has enriched its members through cultural exchanges and a determination to preserve cultural traditions.

"When I started teaching folkloric dancing, it brought me immense relief, like medicine for my heart, since it allowed me to integrate to the United States in the best way possible," says 'Wa-Kushmaa' founder, Anel Álvarez. After moving to San Diego and attempting the retail job lifestyle, Álvarez took her preschool educator degree and experience as a dancer to create not only a business for herself but a venue of learning, discipline, and sharing.

"My group's mission is to bring Mexican traditions to the Chula Vista and San Diego communities," Álvarez states, "to offer a space where Mexicans can feel a sense of connection, and to introduce others the joy and color of our dances and customs." In the beginning, the academy congregated in San Ysidro, then later moved to the liminal warehouses surrounding the Iris Avenue Trolley Station, and eventually landed a spot in the H Street shopping center. "We have been fortunate enough to travel extensively to various parts of Mexico and to countries such as Serbia, Macedonia, Colombia, and Peru. Ultimately, these journeys have inspired us to cultivate a sense of discipline and commitment."

Yet, despite the vast reach of the group outside of California, Álvarez highlights how the lack of passion for art education is transformed when children get introduced to these classes. As a former dance instructor and employee of the Sweetwater High School District, Álvarez recounts, "having these teenagers in the rehearsal room, dancing away their emotions in a healthy way, at an age where they are vulnerable to being pulled off



track, these art programs bring them closer to a better future.” Her testimony on the impact of art on Chula Vista’s youth is beyond doubt as she remarks, “my academy is able to exist because of young people chasing their next steps.”

The academy groups the dancers into various divisions. Starting with age, groups range from 4 to 7, 8 to 10, 11 to 14. The group most coveted by the youngsters is the juvenile division which can stretch up to adulthood. The adult division contains members from 27 years old and beyond. “I make sure to hear what children talk to each other about, what makes them laugh, how they play, and when does one start to feel self-conscious,” she explains, “Fundamentally, children need to reach a place of comfort through those they can relate to.” Mirroring the students’ experience, instructor Alvarez started performing in junior high through art programs provided by her school.

Managing the academy comes with its unique challenges, such as the lack of a proper performing venue within the city limits, “I think dancing offers a unique opportunity to create a cultural space, the kind the city of Chula Vista

needs, especially for residents and visitors.”

Considering the lack of community owned theaters in the South Bay area of the county, Álvarez has been faced with obstacles when attempting to secure dates in an expensive theater, such as Southwestern Community College’s Performing Arts Center, “Access to theater in incredibly complicated, having no space to showcase the students’ skills makes me wonder why is it made difficult for artists to create.”

The academy’s name is “wa kushmaa” and means ‘family that dances.’ It is its title and the meaning of its mission. The name comes from the Kumeeyay language, celebrating the indigenous influences that have shaped folkloric dancing over the northwestern region of Mexico. The academy’s course cover all of Mexico’s regional dances, including Baja California’s ‘calabaceado’ inspired by farmers’ physical motions when attending cattle, and Michoacan’s ‘danza de los viejitos’ honoring elders by imitating their moves. “For me, traditions know no borders. It makes us who we are: a community, a family that dances, lives, and expresses itself here despite the obstacles. After all, we are a product of life in the United States and Mexican heritage.”



*Training at the Chula Vista Center and performing internationally*





# A DOCTOR'S CARE

**SD HEALTH AND BEAUTY | MEDSPA AND HAIR RESTORATION**

As the faithful readers of The Towne Local Chula Vista magazine know, I like to highlight local businesses operated daily by owners who live in our communities. I appreciate the enthusiasm, pride, and extra hours they put into their business to give their patients the best service possible. As I entered SD Health and Beauty, I noticed the lovely office which had been carefully decorated to inspire a sense of calmness. A few moments later, I met Dr. Arzoo Sadiqi. Her knowledge and positive energy immediately confirmed that her patients receive her utmost attention and care.

## AN OVERVIEW

Full disclosure: after a delightful and informative hour interviewing Dr. Sadiqi, I ended up with 42 transcribed pages! It's a shame I need to condense so much medical knowledge into the following few pages. Let me begin this way. SD Health and Beauty provides hair and eyebrow restoration for men and women. Injectables such

as Botox and Fillers are also available. But what sets this MedSpa apart is that Dr. Sadiqi supervises and is present for all procedures, from the opening consultation to the follow-up visit, as well as providing the full range of medical consultation. As you consider making improvements to your beauty and health, the following pages will describe why you should consult with Dr. Sadiqi before making any decisions.

## A LITTLE GIRL FROM AFGHANISTAN

Arzoo Sadiqi's mother and three brothers immigrated to the US from Afghanistan when she was nine years old. Her name Arzoo means hope and Sadiqi means honest. Their father was a surgeon in Afghanistan, so with the unyielding support of their mother, Arzoo and her brother Rauf, chose to uphold their father's legacy and become doctors. Rauf is an internist with Sharp and a partner in SD Health and Beauty. Like so many immigrants, their story of working to live the American Dream rested on their mother's belief that



education was something nobody could take away from her children. Arzoo started college when she was only sixteen years old.

## **BECOMING A DOCTOR**

After thirteen years of school and training, Dr. Sadiqi became a Board Certified Family Medicine Physician who specializes in hair transplants and aesthetics. According to Dr. Sadiqi, “My background in preventative medicine helps people age better and take better care of themselves. So with hair loss, it’s something that’s progressive and unpredictable, and I really specialize in women’s hair loss and eyebrow loss. When you are trained well and do it right, the impact is incredible.” At last year’s World Congress of Hair Restoration Surgery held in Berlin, she was one of the youngest female surgeons among the 1,200 in attendance. Dr. Sadiqi will soon travel to St. Louis to teach a course to other doctors on the techniques she was developed.

## **FULL-SERVICE CARE**

A great frustration for many people is having to wait days or weeks or months before seeing their doctor. Dr. Sadiqi understands that frustration and has created a one-stop shop. This direct primary care eliminates the big corporations between the doctor and patient. In addition to the hair restoration and other aesthetics, she offers full concierge medicine care. For a monthly subscription, you can have access to Doctor Sadiqi whenever needed, be it for the flu or other primary care concerns. For Dr. Sadiqi, the emphasis is on prevention and helping people live healthy, confident lives.

## **CANCEL MY FLIGHT TO TURKEY**

Male pattern baldness is very common. As we age, our hairlines recede. For women, the pattern of hair loss is different. A more global thinning of the hair is typically found. We’ve all read the stories of the person who flew to Turkey to have a hair transplant done for a cheaper price. Of

everything I learned talking to Dr. Sadiqi, the point that made the strongest impact was the importance of having a local physician oversee all procedures. According to Doctor, “Looking for the cheapest procedure increases the risk of infections and post-complications. So that’s why we make it affordable, accessible, and you’re meeting with me every step of the process.”

## **DELAYED, NOT DENIED**

Dr. Sadiqi further explains that not everybody who walks in is ready for a transplant. “We start by ordering labs, we get everything we need to make sure you’re optimized and those results are long-term. We pre-screen everybody. I would not operate on you if you don’t heal well or if your diabetes or autoimmune condition is not well controlled.” However, that is not the end of the story. According to Doctor, “We would work to get your diabetes or other health concerns under better control. We would get you on our wellness program where we become your concierge doctor. We will always be able to do something for you. You may not be right for surgery today. However, in six months, you may be ready.”

Another example is the age of the patient. The amount and age of onset of hair loss depends on the individual. If a hair transplant is performed on a 20-year-old male, the pattern of hair loss will continue and soon the young man will have hair in the front and in the back but need another transplant for the receding middle. For younger patients, “I would preserve their hair follicles. I would get them on all the right medications and then in their 40s, I would say, okay, let’s transplant you.”

## **THE HAIR TRANSPLANT PROCESS**

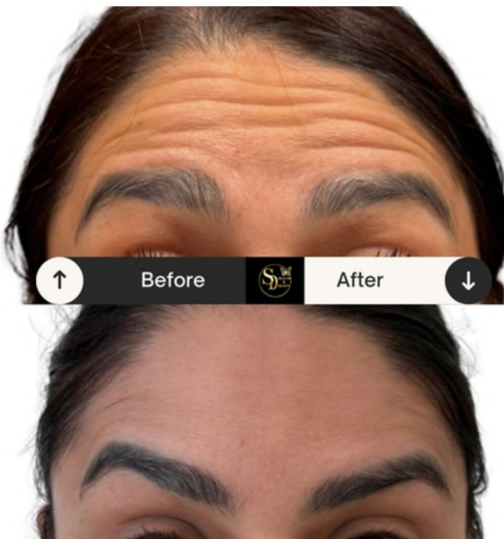
In the past, options for hair replacement included a toupee, the use of chemical treatments to regrow hair, or a hair transplant. Dr. Sadiqi explains her ground-breaking procedure. “Previously we were limited to surgical hair restoration called the strip technique. We would cut out a layer of hair on the back of the scalp, which may leave a large visible scar, longer recovery and downtime. We can do that as well, but I specialize in non-surgical treatments such as follicular unit excision (FUE). We have invested in a



state-of-the-art smart graph machine.” Explaining the process, “It allows me to take one millimeter punch biopsies where I can pull out hair follicles. Then under the microscope, we examine to make sure the bulb is intact. Then I have technicians help me trim two to three thousand follicles. It’s a very intricate process that takes the whole day, but the patient is wide awake,” continues Dr. Sadiqi, “There’s no scalpels, no cutting, and no excessive bleeding. It all very minimal. That’s why the downtime is so short. Everything we do is FDA-approved, everything is scientific-based. This process requires no cuts and thus prevents visible scars.” Patients are awake throughout the procedure.

## EYEBROW TRANSPLANTS

Dr. Sadiqi is proud that SD Health and Beauty is the only female, physician-run clinic in the entire state of California that offers eyebrow transplants with this latest technology. Typically, it is a one-time procedure, as opposed to other procedures such as getting a tattoo or doing microblade. Eyebrow restoration is a very intricate procedure. If not done correctly, transplanted hairs can look unnatural. Dr. Sadiqi has dedicated years perfecting her procedure to produce the most natural looking result. Wanting to know what her patients experienced, Dr. Sadiqi put herself in the patient seat and had her own eyebrows restored. She had struggled with naturally thin eyebrows



herself growing up and understands the emotional journey her patients experience. Undergoing the procedure helped her better appreciate both the physical and emotional aspects of treatment.

Giving another example of taking the time to prepare patients, “We recently had a 61-year-old female who wanted an eyebrow transplant. However, she didn’t have the optimal hair follicles because she wears extensions and that pulls on the follicles. So we took three months and did a full systematic approach for optimizing her. After we did her transplant, it looked beautiful. We always want to make sure we get the best results.”

One concern with having any surgery is missing work. With Dr. Sadiqi’s procedure, a patient can come in on a Friday and be ready to go to work on Monday. The typical downtime is 72 hours. During the first one to two weeks, a patient needs to avoid direct shower water hitting their face and avoid UV exposure, jacuzzies, saunas, and strenuous exercise.

## BOTOX AND FILLERS

I asked Dr. Sadiqi to talk a little about Botox and injectables. Obviously this is a huge topic, and she provided excellent information. I will discuss some of the information, but as with all the procedures discussed in the article, please make an individual appointment with Dr. Sadiqi to discuss what is best for you. Just because your best friend had Botox injections, it might not be right for you.

Botox has actually been around for three decades but not commonly talked about. Today, it is used for migraine headaches and teeth grinding as well as cosmetically. Botox freezes the muscles to which it is injected. If not done properly, it can lead to an unnatural look. A Botox injection typically lasts for three months.

Botox and fillers can be used in conjunction or separately. Doctor explains, “There’s two types of wrinkles. Static lines are already etched in and harder to get rid of it. Dynamic lines are caused by everyday facial expressions. Once the lines are etched in, it’s harder to get rid of them because that repetitive motion has created those deep creases. Now you’re seeing younger women doing Botox to prevent the



lines from developing. Today, it's about looking more natural and enhancing the natural features without people knowing what you have done. You just don't want somebody injecting stuff without good advice. It's hard to go back to your baseline if there's changes in the anatomy of the face."

We then discussed acne. I was surprised to learn that 40-50% of adults go through adult acne. As kids, the acne will clear up, but the scars remain. "Getting them on the right acne medication, getting them on the right skin care products is so important, rather than spending lots of money on a product they might have heard about from a Tik Tok influencer. There's so many different things we do that can help with acne."

### ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

I was curious to know what kind of benefits her patients mentioned over time. "I think the biggest thing is they get that confidence boost. It doesn't matter whether they're getting the injectables or the transplants or any of the services we do. When they come in and say, hey doc, I feel amazing. I look amazing. That's our goal. To help people feel more confident in their own skin. We're not here to change anybody. We're simply here to help you feel better. When people look better, they feel better and they start taking care of their health. It's the little stuff that makes a big difference. So, for instance, I had a patient who had a lot of deep pigment on her face. She would always put on tons of makeup to hide the



*Dr. Sadiqi's leading-edge technology and procedures.*

pigment. We did three months of microneedling. One day, she showed up and said, hey, doc, I'm not wearing any makeup. Can you believe it? She has continued the treatment plan we recommended and now her skin is beautiful and she feels more confident and is going to the gym regularly."

### CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned the benefits of businesses in which the owner interacts with the public daily. Dr. Sadiqi explains leading-edge medical treatments in a way that is understandable. She instills in you a sense of confidence that she and her staff will take great care of you. I will give Doctor the final word. "Our goal has been to create a wellness center where it's a one-stop shop that is physician owned and operated. When it becomes a chain, patients lose that physician oversight. Every patient that walks in gets to meet me. I get to do the consultation, build that trust, and help them create a plan of action based on their goals. SD Health and Beauty was created to be a place where patients receive personalized, physician-led care that helps them age intentionally, improve their health, and feel confident in their own skin."

For more information visit:

<https://sdhealthbeauty.com/>



*The beautiful and calming office of SD Health and Beauty*





# EXTREME FITNESS

by Jeff Bettger

As I entered this 29,000 square foot building at 2390 Boswell Rd in Eastlake, I saw before me the largest gym of my life! Rows and rows of fitness equipment. A diverse range of people lifting, running, stretching. The common factor was that each person seemed to be working with great effort and determination. I was next greeted by the owner, Mr. Alex Verdugo and began the interview.

## MOTIVATION

**Jeff Bettger:** Nice to meet you, Alex. Before we begin talking about you and this amazing place, I want to ask you a general question. What motivates people to come work out?

## WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

*"Being fit, for the average person, means having the freedom to enjoy life without limitations. It means having the energy to play with your children, keep up with daily activities, and fully participate in the moments that matter most. It means being strong enough to handle life's physical demands—whether that's carrying groceries, lifting luggage, climbing stairs, or tackling unexpected challenges. Fitness isn't about achieving perfection; it's about maintaining the strength, endurance, and mobility to live independently and confidently. Life is too short to be held back by preventable physical limitations. Being fit allows you to experience life to its fullest."* – Alex Verdugo



*Personal Training is available at  
Extreme Fitness*





*Learning the correct techniques for improved strength and injury prevention at Extreme Fitness*

**Alex Verdugo:** Thank you, Jeff. I think it is a number of things. After COVID, people felt the need to get out of their houses. Even for myself, I can't work out at home. I need to come here to the gym. The hardest part is just walking in the door. Once you are here, whether you're doing treadmill or working with a personal trainer, it's going to motivate you seeing other people work out. I mean, just getting the endorphins going is going to increase your health. Motivation is a big factor. I feel like that's what helped us build our reputation. People come in here with a serious mindset. They're very organized in their workouts. This is not a place where people come to chit chat for an hour. The energy here is contagious. Even for people just starting to work out again after many years. I tell them to not be discouraged at first. Even if you walk on the treadmill for 10 minutes, you've accomplished something. You walked in the door and your goal has been met for that day. Tomorrow you can achieve a higher goal.

## YOUTHS

**Jeff:** What about today's youth? I mean, when I was young, all the kids in the neighborhood would gather to play some kind of sport almost every day. I don't see that anymore.

**Alex:** Technology makes things easier, quicker, and more efficient for kids nowadays. Unfortunately, we have definitely lost what it feels like to work for something, to take care of ourselves, and to be simply outdoors. Whether it's walking, jogging, talking, even playing outside with your friends. It's unfortunate, but as adults and as parents, we need to come together and ensure that we instill some type of physical activity for our youths. Here at our gym, we have a six-week youth summer camp with almost 100 young athletes. But for most parents, you know, the cost of living requires them to work long hours and deal with life's other issues. But it is important people remember that the only thing you really have control over in life is your body, your health, and your children's health.

We are seeing a horrible increase in diabetic cases in adolescents now. We understand life is hectic, but you must make it a priority and build those habits, because those habits are going to reflect in adulthood and we tend to lose those as we get older.

## BACKGROUND

**Alex:** I was actually born and raised in Chula Vista. I went to EastLake High School. I'm just a kid from Chula Vista that's been fortunate to have his dream come true. I have always tried to do my best to take care of the people around me and I always love giving back to the community. Chula Vista is always going to be my home.



**Jeff:** I understand you started with bodybuilding when you were younger?

**Alex:** Yes. My dad is a classic bodybuilder, an old school classic bodybuilder. He would do a few competitions. So that rubbed off on me when I was younger, I guess. He also taught me how to coach.

My mom was very active in the endurance fitness realm, which is running long distances. I just grew a passion for it. Seeing their example made me want to challenge myself to a higher level of fitness. Then I started to enter bodybuilding competitions. During that time, I knew I wanted to help people improve their general and functional fitness and ultimately design and create my own gym. After years of dedication and hard work, here we are.

## RECOVERY

**Jeff:** Congratulations! It is always a cause for celebration when somebody's dream comes true. I want to change the topic a bit. When I think about physical training now vs. 50 years ago, one of things that stands out is the emphasis on recovery. Can you talk about that?

**Alex:** Yes, I mean, just as much as you are pushing and torturing your body, you need to have two times the recovery amount. You have to replenish your body with natural supplements, proteins, amino acids, all that. You also have to give yourself a day or two to recover. Those muscles need time to repair. Another factor people often ignore is sleep, it is essential. Without sleep, your muscles are not going to grow. Proper amounts of sleep also give you that essential mental clarity.

## EXTREME FITNESS

**Jeff:** Thanks for that explanation. Okay, without further delay, let's talk about this amazing gym. Why did you decide to create such a mega gym?

**Alex:** Having a commercial-sized gym has always been a dream of mine. Did I ever think it was actually ever going to happen? Did I think I could compete with the large corporate franchise chains?

Of course there were times when I had some doubts, but I kept my dream alive. About four years ago, I had my boutique style gym. I was doing personal training group classes. Thank God I was fairly successful in that already and was ready to take the next leap. I asked myself, "What if I opened my own commercial size gym?"

I explored that option and did my research and listened to a lot of No's. A lot of people denied me, but there were those few people that did say Yes to me and I'm very thankful for them.

I did it because I knew that Chula Vista, especially the Eastlake community, needed something like this. The machines that you find in this gym, you won't find anywhere else in Chula Vista.

**Jeff:** What one thing makes your gym different from the other corporate gyms?

**Alex:** I would say the fact that I'm present in the gym most of the time. Gym members can talk to me. If there is a problem with a piece of equipment, for example, they know I will get it taken care of. I definitely do my best to make everybody feel welcome. People say that they feel like family here. That's nice.

**Jeff:** Why did you pick the word Extreme for your business?

**Alex:** I started Extreme Fitness in 2010. That was my brand. And it's just something that stood out. You know, what better word is there out there than extreme? Everything I do is to the extreme, whether it be pushing it to the limit or my work ethic or anything I do. Extreme but safe.

## CLIENTS AND STAFF

**Jeff:** How many staff and members do you have?

**Alex:** Currently, we have about 30 employees and 2,866 members at last count. Hopefully we'll have 3,000



members before our one-year anniversary coming soon. Thankfully, we've built a good reputation very fast and a lot of people want to be here. We have a wait list to make sure there is not a feeling of overcrowding.

**Jeff:** Do you have different levels of memberships or just one type?

**Alex:** Yes, we have different tiers. We have a basic gym membership. You get certain amenities such as the sauna, the cold plunge, all that. We have a premier membership, which includes adult functional fitness group classes. We also have a personal training level. We also have our X-Form tier, which is our VIP tour tier, which includes our Pilates.

## EQUIPMENT

**Jeff:** I want to learn about your amazing machines. Exercise machines have obviously come a long way in the past 25 years from the old Bowflex!

**Alex:** In general, our machines are designed to work a particular muscle group. Even if you don't want to compete in bodybuilding, these machines are designed to target muscle groups in a more efficient way. The science of fitness is always evolving and these machines are state-of-the-art. You're guaranteed to feel every burn and every muscle being chiseled when you're using them.

## KETTLEBELLS

**Jeff:** I am surprised to see some kettlebells here. They seem to be at the opposite end of the fitness machine spectrum. Why in the world are kettlebells so popular?

**Alex:** Believe it or not, in 2010, I opened up the first kettlebell gym in Chula Vista. We were located off of E Street by Plaza Bonita Mall, where Little Caesar's Pizza is now. That was my first boutique gym ever. At that time, not many people knew what kettlebells were. But they're just a very versatile tool and that's

what actually made my career. I've been certified in kettlebells since 2008, and they are just the premium method for strength conditioning. You can take it anywhere you want. It's very universal, and it mimics a lot of athletic movements. Every movement you make is explosive. It engages the whole body, so it's very good for athletes and for people trying to gain mobility. It's just very practical.

## BOXING

**Jeff:** I read that boxers come to train with you. How did you get into the boxing world?

**Alex:** I've always had a passion for boxing. I have boxed myself, but I can't really say I'm a boxer. But me being from the strength and conditioning world, I just gradually started working with champions and, you know, they like what I do. They understand that I have a love and passion for the strength and conditioning craft.

**Jeff:** Very cool. So, as opposed to a huge lineman in the NFL, what do boxers want as far as strength and conditioning?



*Whatever your current fitness level now is the time to start!*





*Leading edge machines help you isolate muscle groups*

**Alex:** They don't want to build bulk that would slow them down. They want explosive movements. We work more fast-twitch muscles. We work on lateral explosive movements. It's more conditioning, and more endurance. Lots of lower body core muscles to build a strong foundation.

## JOINING THE GYM

**Jeff:** Do you have a range of members here? More young, middle, older families?

**Alex:** Honestly, thankfully we have a lot of versatility here. We do not have a kids club here, but we do allow parents to bring their kids in with them as long as obviously they're behaving. And most parents are pretty good about that. But for the most part, parents don't bring their kids so that they can focus on themselves and not worry about the kids. It's their time to escape from life's other responsibilities. **By the way, when a new member signs up and tells me that they saw this article, I will give them a good discount!**

**Jeff:** That's great! Thank you! I'm curious, when someone joins, do they sit down with you or somebody and go over their goals?

**Alex:** Yes, when you first walk in, you're going to be greeted by a membership advisor. That membership advisor will give you a tour of the gym and show you our amenities. Then

we are going to set you up with one of our fitness specialists/personal trainers and they're going to come up with a recommended plan for you. If for some reason you don't want to go into our personal training program, we will give you a free customized guide. But our fitness specialists are always roaming around to help out if people have any questions. We want to make sure that everybody is comfortable in this atmosphere and they're taken care of like VIPs.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

**Jeff:** Nice. Last question. For someone coming in who's not already in shape, how long before they start seeing some results?

**Alex:** That's a trick question because it also depends on the amount of time that they're putting in on a weekly basis. But if you're coming in about 3 times a week, somebody will see results as quick as four to six weeks if they really want change and are devoted to making that change. It's not going to happen overnight.

**Jeff:** When I first walked in this afternoon, I saw some really good athletes out here, really buff guys. For me, that would be good motivation. Seeing how hard they are working to get fit would make me realize I need to work hard as well to reach my goals. There is an old saying that you are going to become like those people around you.

**Alex:** Yes, if you want to reach a certain goal, you have to go to where people have already reached that goal. We have to keep learning from others and stay motivated by others.

**Jeff:** Thank you, Alex, for your time, knowledge and tour. Congratulations on your upcoming one-year anniversary. We wish you continued success helping Chula Vista residents improve their physical fitness.





by Catrice Chan

# TIME TO ROCK'N'ROLL AT SCHOOL OF ROCK OTAY RANCH

**W**alking through the Otay Ranch Town Center in Chula Vista, you pass various businesses, such as books, phones, clothing, and food. As you reach the west end, you notice a sign stating School of Rock. Perhaps expecting a rock-climbing gym, you enter and hear the thunderous beats of drums. Electric guitars produce powerful chords. Notes from a keyboard fill the air with rich, dynamic melodies. A classic rock song is recognized. This song is not the creation of a professional adult band. This song is the product of the young students at the School of Rock.

Many people dream of performing on a big stage in front of a huge crowd of adoring fans. Dreams of becoming the next Mic Jagger or Eddie Van Halen. For students at School of Rock, that dream is more than a fantasy. School of Rock serves as the ideal location for young people to develop their musical talent and to experience performing in a band. Founded by Paul Green in Philadelphia in 1998, School of Rock exploded in popularity with the 2003 movie *School of Rock* starring Jack Black. Today, the franchise has grown to about 450 locations in nine countries.

Otay Ranch's 2,500-square-foot facility is owned by Mark Sheffield. After retiring from the military, he decided to open a School of Rock in Chula Vista after discovering the nearest one was in Point Loma. The Chula Vista location features five lesson rooms, two drum rooms, and three rehearsal spaces. The school has served the community for more than six years and currently has about 200 students. Students get the opportunity to learn a variety of instruments, including electric guitar, electric bass guitar, drums, keyboards, and vocals.

The school teaches more than just music and performance. It is a place where children and adults of all ages develop life skills such as camaraderie, teamwork, and self-confidence. According to manager Kerry Richard, "Playing music with others teaches you how to communicate and work with each other. Playing in a band ultimately gives students the confidence to be on a stage. Our beginner band, Rock 101, starts at 8 years old." Unlike a traditional music class, every student gets to experience the thrill, energy, and excitement of being part of a band during local performances. Each season, school bands perform songs from a variety of artists and genres, including songs by Nirvana, Metallica, Stevie Wonder, and even more



difficult pieces by Rush. “Singing or playing in a band is what School of Rock is all about!” Kerry emphasized. For eleven-year-old Lilith Contreras, who plays the drums and bass at School of Rock, being a part of a band has been an incredible experience. “It was fun to have different bandmates and to learn how to work as a group together to make music,” she said enthusiastically. “It’s cool when a song comes on the radio and I know how to play it.”

Similar to being on a sports team, being in a band also creates lifelong, valuable friendships. Sixteen-year-old Bruno Frausto is a talented electric guitarist and has been a student at School of Rock for the past four years. “A lot of my friends are from School of Rock. I would never have met them if I never came here,” he explained.

At the school, students enjoy learning from experienced instructors, many of whom specialize in a particular instrument or can teach multiple instruments. Each instructor has had at least 10 years of experience before becoming an instructor. Most instructors currently perform in their own bands, and many are studying music in college. Some instructors are former School of Rock students, and some have earned spots in the All Stars. Top students are selected from schools across the US and around the world to go on tour and create music videos.

Otay Ranch’s School of Rock has had two students earn spots in the prestigious All Stars the past 3 years, with two more selected this year. In addition to All Stars, students have also performed at Summerfest, the massive music and cultural festival held annually in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Certified by Guinness World Records in 1999 as “The World’s Largest Music Festival,” the event features multiple stages showcasing hundreds of students from around the world and a wide range of music genres, from rock to hip-hop to country.

Getting the opportunity to perform at Summerfest is highly competitive, as only around 52 to 60 schools out of over 250 are selected each year. Impressively, Otay Ranch’s School of Rock was chosen to perform at Summerfest for the past three years. Last year, Bruno was among those who represented his school. “It was a really fun experience,” Bruno shared, “not just playing but also going on the airplane with my friends and hanging out inside the college dorms where we stayed.” Although the school was not selected to perform at Summerfest this year, it continues to excel in building a community of talented musicians.

“We now work with the San Diego Regional Center,” Kerry proudly described. “It is so rewarding to see these students thriving at School of Rock.” Today, School of Rock continues to welcome and inspire musicians of all ages, helping them grow not just in musical talent but also in life skills and feeling part of a community.

School of Rock instructor and award-winning graduate of Southwestern College Sofia Petroulias shared, “I cannot understate the many benefits of music education. I believe that while students, teens in particular, study music, they are subconsciously gaining critical life skills. Personally, music education taught me humility and responsibility. Additionally, pursuing music alongside others surrounds you with a support system who share the same values and interests. This allows students to find community with other like-minded individuals, contributing to an overall sense of belonging.”





# COUNCILMEMBER MICHAEL INZUNZA

by Jeff Bettger

Councilmember Michael Inzunza represents Chula Vista's District 3. This southeast portion of the city contains large areas of open space, newer homes, new shopping centers, and a toll road connecting Chula Vista with Tijuana. In our series of government-related interviews, we examine the challenges and opportunities each of the four districts presents. (see our interview with Councilmember Jose Preciado in our June issue and with Councilmember Fernandez in our upcoming Aug. issue).

## BACKGROUND

**Jeff Bettger:** Councilmember Inzunza, before we begin discussing governance and policy choices, tell me a little about your youth. Where were you born?

**Councilmember Inzunza:** Hi Jeff. I'm from west Chula Vista. Both my wife and I were born at Bay General Hospital, which is now Scripps Hospital, in the same brick building. I grew up near Orange Avenue. I went to Rohr Elementary and played baseball at Max Field. I learned how to swim at Loma Verde (note: after a recent extensive rehab, high school students can now compete in water polo there.)

**Jeff:** What about your youth most influenced your opinions about public service?

**Councilmember:** My parents. They were the first married couple to be

elected to a school board in the state of California in 1975. My father, who was part of the very first class of the United States Peace Corps, had come back post-Vietnam and ended up becoming a teacher at Sweetwater High School for 30 years. He and my mother decided to run for school board because there were a lot of children being neglected and a lot of services that weren't being provided. Some of the statewide efforts that my parents pioneered still exist today. I grew up in an environment where it was, "don't complain about things unless you're gonna try to get involved and do something about it."

## EDUCATOR

**Jeff:** In addition to being a councilmember, your primary career has been as an educator, correct?

**Councilmember:** Yes. I'm an educator at heart. I have taught and served as an administrator in schools in Chula Vista. My wife has served as an assistant principal and principal at various schools in Sweetwater District and is now the director of the Department of Federal and State Grants. She was just given her 25-year recognition. Because of my education career, I know the youth of the community, the parents, and the little league sports.



*Always an educator at heart.*





## BEING A COUNCILMEMBER

**Jeff:** Switching the topic now, I don't think most people know all that being a council member entails.

**Councilmember:** Well, we oversee the budget that provides services for our city. This includes our police department, our fire department, our parks and recs department, the dozens city parks, the maintenance and cleaning of public restrooms, lighting, many of our little league fields, the basic maintenance of streets, potholes, stop signs, stop lights. We also maintain working relationships with local agencies, such as the school districts, and other jurisdictions.

**Jeff:** I can imagine you and your staff must just get an avalanche of emails each day.

**Councilmember:** Yeah, we actually receive dozens of emails a day and requests. Our policy is to return any e-mail, whether it's from city staff or constituents, within a 24-hour timeframe. I'm very responsive because I come from a background where I worked for former Mayor and County Supervisor, Greg Cox. I was his District Director in the late

'90s and early 2000s. I took a lot of what I learned from him regarding providing strong constituent services, which I feel is my number one job.

**Jeff:** With a successful education career, what made you want to join public service as well?

**Councilmember:** Well, I taught government classes and was an ASB director. My students were always asking "How do we get involved in campaigns or how do we get involved with the animal shelter? How do we get involved with planting trees?" After spending years telling kids how to get involved, I looked at myself and realized I could make a difference and be a role model. When I decided to run for office, I got flooded with hundreds of phone calls and texts from former students wanting to help me.

## BINATIONAL REGION

**Jeff:** It's very rare for a city to be on an international border. And not only a border, but one in which two cities collaborate and depend upon each other in many ways.

How does our location influence

the decisions we the city of Chula Vista makes regarding the present and future.

**Councilmember:** There's multiple components. From an economic point of view, the county of San Diego would fail economically overnight if we didn't have consumers from Baja California involved with business here, such as purchasing goods and services, and the thousands of students attending our universities from different regions of Baja, California. We're a regional hub that depends on each other. There are the maquiladoras in Tijuana, and then the factories in Otay Mesa. So we have to really respect the fact that both countries rely on each other economically, but there's also some accountability. Because we are a sister city with Tijuana, that also means that the government of Mexico needs to do their part in cleaning up the Tijuana River Valley.

On the cultural side, you can't find a region anywhere in the United States with better food! Best Italian food, best Mexican food. Forget what they say in Los



Angeles. You will know what I mean when you try Lolita's California burrito or Roberto's rolled tacos.

## E-BIKE HELMETS

**Jeff:** When you say South Bay, people think about Chula Vista, San Ysidro, Nestor, South San Diego, National City, Paradise Hills, Imperial Beach, etc. When you think about policy, what responsibility does the city of Chula Vista have as far as thinking about the effects on these neighboring communities?

**Councilmember:** We're expected to be the leaders in the county. And I would even argue a lot of the things that the City of Chula Vista is doing are even surpassing those being done by City of San Diego. Out of the 18 cities in San Diego county, Chula Vista is the second largest. I am particularly proud that I was able to enact the most comprehensive e-bike ordinance in the entire state of California after lobbying the California State Legislature and the California League of Cities. The protection of our youth is critical.

## POLICE STATION

**Councilmember:** We are also the first city to use drones in our police department to reduce response times, protect our officers, and get EMT and firefighters to scenes where there could be a car flipped over on fire. With the aid of drones, we are able to arrive and pull a person out three minutes faster. That can make all the difference.

We're a progressive city, but we're also a city that's incredibly pro-safety. When I ran for office, I walked precincts for two years. What the residents asked me overwhelmingly is why don't we have a police station in East Chula Vista? If you live in Winding Walk and Rolling Hills, it's a 25-minute drive west to Chula Vista to file a police report or speak to an officer. So in my third month in office, I began an effort to conduct a feasibility study. I met with officers, I met with city staff, and I brought the proposal to the city council. I asked for a feasibility study and funding of \$398,000. They both passed. Now we are in the process of selecting the vendor who will conduct the study. By the end of November, we should have an extensive field feasibility study. Based on those findings, we should be able to select the location and put shovels in the ground.

## OPEN SPACE

**Jeff:** Your district is unique in that you have the most open space. Currently, there are several large projects on the drawing board, the Chula Vista Entertainment Complex and the University District. How do you see the rest of that open space being built out and on what timeframe?

**Councilmember:** Well, different elected officials have a different approach to the university. I will be in support of a four-year university district in East Chula Vista only if it's done with the intent of providing pipeline between

workforce and university education. In other words, there's no point in bringing a university to East Chula Vista unless jobs are coming along with them. We just signed a lease with San Diego State University for a nursing program.

Now, as far as housing, most of the housing that's going to be built in the next three to five years was approved several years ago. I want to make sure that we're doing it responsibly. I want to ensure that the majority of homes we are building are for-sale homes.

We just cannot keep building apartments and not allowing our families to enjoy the benefits of home ownership and the joy of passing the home down to their children. We need to create wealth for these families by building equity, whether they're buying an attached townhome or a condominium or a detached single-family home.

Third, as you're aware, we had wildfires in 2007 and 2013. In January, 2025 we had the Border 2 fire. That was very dangerous. I was out at Mountain Hawk Park for



*Ready to serve his community*



three days straight with a megaphone providing real information, not misleading information as was found on some social media. And what I found, Jeff, was we needed to improve our ability to communicate with our residents in times of emergency. In the same way that you receive an Amber Alert when a missing child is reported, I proposed something similar for Chula Vista. An emergency reverse 911 system was recently passed. We are launching test runs now. For example, what happens to people if their family is not home? What happens to senior citizens in the middle of the night if those embers jump the lake and homes begin to start on fire? How are we going to alert our citizens?

## MY GOAL

**Jeff:** Councilmember Inzunza, thank you for your time today and for your efforts directing the present and future of Chula Vista. As a final question, would you like to mention a project or goal that is

particularly meaningful to you?

**Councilmember:** You are welcome, Jeff. Yes, my goal, and I think it's a realistic goal, is to double the size of athletic fields for our children in the next five years. What does that mean? We work on land swaps. For example, we just bought property near the KOA Campground by the 54 and 2nd Ave. My goal is to incentivize developers to create more fields, especially for women's sports. We don't have enough playing fields and available playing times for girls' soccer and softball. And that's also part of the reason why I'm working on bringing in grants to bring lighting to Max field and Parkview's baseball complex first. There will be an agreement that if we light those fields, those leagues need to provide playing time for girls' softball. As an educator, that's something near and dear to my heart.

**Jeff:** If you have questions, suggestions or concerns, you can reach Councilmember Inzunza in the following ways:

*Office of Councilmember  
Michael Inzunza  
City of Chula Vista - District 3  
276 Fourth Avenue  
Chula Vista, CA 91910*

**Phone:** (619) 691-5044

**Email:** minzunza@chulavistaca.gov

Residents may also submit service requests or learn more about the Councilmember through the City of Chula Vista's District 3 webpage by typing in the URL or scanning the QR code below:

<https://www.chulavistaca.gov/departments/mayor-and-council/district-3-councilmember-michael-inzunza>



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# EARLY ROOTS: THE FIRST SPANISH SETTLEMENT

The next meeting of the South Bay Historical Society will include a presentation by well-known author and archaeologist Richard L. Carrico. Mr. Carrico will tell the story of Alta California's first Spanish settlement on what is now Presidio Hill. Carrico stresses that the roots of early Spanish California were on that hill above Old Town, not at the Mission located later to the east in Mission Valley.

Founded in 1769, the ruins of the first mission and fort lie buried beneath the landscaped grassy hills in Presidio Park. In his just released book on the San Diego Presidio, Professor Carrico delves into the men, women, and children who lived, and sometimes died at the presidio. Carrico said he wrote the book because there was no single, accessible book where tourists and locals alike could learn the fascinating story of the historic ruins and its people. He also wanted to ensure that the story of the local Kumeyaay and other Native people at the presidio was front and center. One example is Sinusín, a Kumeyaay woman from a South Bay village who married a Spanish soldier and lived at the presidio. Carrico follows her life from marriage, child rearing at the presidio, and her death at Mission Santa Barbara.

The presentation will be held August 6th at the Chula Vista Civic Center library auditorium at 4:45 PM.



*Come meet and greet author and archaeologist Richard L. Carrico*



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# THE WORLD'S GREATEST ATHLETE

By Catrice Chan

You probably know somebody who is good at a sport. You might even know somebody who is great at a sport. Olympic decathletes are great at ten sports, each requiring a different mix of the most fundamental athletic abilities—running (speed and endurance), jumping, and throwing. Harrison Williams is training at the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center in hopes of again representing USA Track and Field in the decathlon, this time at the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028. The goal is more than winning a gold medal; it is earning the title of World's Greatest Athlete.

## BACKGROUND

Harrison Williams grew up in Memphis and attended Stanford University. He started competing in decathlons

at the early age of 14. For Harrison, the simple thrill of taking on a challenge was what motivated him to pursue the Olympic dream. "I can't point to an exact reason why, other than just, I love the challenge," Harrison shared. "There's something pure in going for something without regard for fame or wealth, because there's not a lot of that in the Olympic sports."

When Harrison joined the track team during his freshman year of high school, he had no idea of what he was getting himself into. "I wrote down on the sheet that I was a 200 runner," Harrison said. "I had no idea what that meant. I thought the track was 200 meters around." Before a regional decathlon, his coach asked if he wanted to try the decathlon. At the time, Harrison barely knew what a decathlon was. Curious, he searched it up online



and decided to give it a shot. During his first decathlon, there were several events that he had never attempted before. “Hadn’t done like six of the 10 events before,” Harrison recalled. “I was like literally learning how to do the shot put in the warm-ups.”

Little did he know that this would be the start to his decathlon journey. When his coach, Bobby Austin, recognized Harrison’s potential, Harrison started running track with his club team called the Mustangs. He would then go on to average six or seven decathlons a year during high school. At 16 years old, he competed in both the USA Track and Field (USATF) National Junior Olympics and the AAU Junior Olympics. Harrison eventually graduated high school as the #1 decathlete, and in the top 10 in the individual pole vault, 300 hurdles and 110 hurdles events.

## THE DECATHLON

Unlike sports that specialize in a single discipline, decathletes must balance speed, endurance, strength, coordination, and flexibility across 10 events. A decathlon consists of ten events contested over two days. The first day features the 100-meter dash, long jump, shot put, high jump, and 400-meter run. The second day features the 110-meter hurdles, discus throw, pole vault, javelin throw, and 1500-meter run. After every event, athletes receive points from a standardized scoring system. After the final event, the athlete with the most accumulated points is the winner. Interestingly, this standardized scoring system not only allows athletes to compare their performance against that day’s competitors but also against past decathletes.

Success in the decathlon requires experience and consistency. “Your physical peak is probably age 22 to 26 when you’re feeling the best, you’re the healthiest, you’re the most explosive,” he explained. “But then it’s not until you get to about 26 do you understand how to do a decathlon and get through 10 events and be consistent.” Building that consistency requires intense training. Harrison’s typical week includes two to three events a day for five days. Wednesdays are reserved for yoga, stretching, and recovery, while Sundays are complete rest days. Injuries are common among decathletes, as they are trying to complete nine of the ten events in one week. Harrison said, “You kind of have to overtrain if you want to touch on every event. I mean, I always got something

going on – sore hamstrings, sore knee, whatever.”

The physical toll becomes apparent during the 10 events. Pole vault is particularly challenging, given that it is the eighth event after athletes have already completed seven. “It’s usually pretty hot,” Harrison described. “You’re out there in the sun, you’re seven events down, and you’re already fatigued.” The final event, the 1500 meter race, is when athletes exert all their remaining energy.

## WHY TRAIN IN CHULA VISTA

When Harrison moved to Chula Vista during the COVID-19 pandemic, he instantly fell in love with the warmer weather, the food, and the training facilities. Compared to previous university training facilities, the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center provided everything he needed in one place. For a decathlete, training requires specialized equipment such as poles, a pole vault pit, blocks, hurdles,



*110-meter hurdles are the first event on Day 2*

a discus ring, shot put ring, javelin, and a long jump run way. “This was the best environment to really lock in and focus on track,” Harrison exclaimed. “What I loved about this place was that everything was here – the whole track, rings to do swings on, weight room, dining hall, dorm, and a professional coach.”

## FAVORITE MEMORIES

Some of Harrison’s favorite memories come from competing in Europe, home to many of track and field’s most enthusiastic fans. He particularly enjoyed competing at the Paris Olympics and the Hypo-Meeting in Götzis, Austria, an annual track and field competition focused on men’s decathlon and women’s heptathlon. “It’s





like a high school level track in the U.S., essentially, but in the mountains of Austria, next to Zurich, just on the Austrian side of the border," Harrison said excitedly. "And the whole town comes out for the meet. And so that's a really cool environment to compete in."

Competing in the 2019 World Championships in Doha, Qatar, was another fun and unique experience. In Doha, Harrison got to compete in an air-conditioned outdoor stadium. "We started at 4:00 pm because it was so hot during the day, but even at 9:00 pm, outside it would be 100 degrees," he recalled. "But the stadium was 70 degrees, because they had ACs blasting directly onto the track. It was wild. Such a waste of energy, but kind of cool to see what you can do with 'unlimited money.'"

Besides the amazing opportunity to travel internationally, Harrison appreciates the relationships he has made with other decathletes from around the world. "The decathlon is really like a brotherhood. I've made very good friends with a lot of the foreign athletes that I compete directly against."

## CHALLENGES

At 30 years old, Harrison is aware of the financial and personal sacrifices that come with being an Olympic athlete. Travel means time away from family, and many athletes find it challenging to establish careers outside of sports. Experience in a corporate office is something that Olympians lack. "They kind of just have to transition from being outside in the sun all day to sitting at a desk," Harrison explained.

Additionally, staying financially stable while playing sports has proven to be difficult. Decathletes and Olympians in general typically have second jobs in order to support their training. With the exception of a couple of athletes such as sprinter Noah Lyles, who make a lot of money in the sport, Harrison noted, "We're just regular people who work a job and then train on the side at a world-class level."

The decathlon can be especially expensive and challenging. A specialized pole vaulter can enter 20 meets per year,

which is 20 opportunities to win prize money. Decathletes, on the other hand, get very few opportunities to win prize money, as they generally compete only two or three times a year. "I only recently started actually making money in the sport," Harrison explained. "Our training is expensive and we have to travel to Europe to make money. So it's difficult."

Harrison also explained that traveling to meets is unique for decathletes. He must take his vault poles, his shot put and discus, and the multiple pairs of specialized shoes he uses for the various events. According to Harrison, some airlines are much more accommodating than others.

## LOOKING AHEAD – LA OLYMPICS

Looking ahead with the LA Olympics approaching, Harrison hopes to get more support from local businesses and community members. "Local sponsors would be awesome," he said. "People that just want to help us out, some free meals, we'll shoot commercials, anything. That would be awesome." Additionally, Harrison encourages the public to show up and support. Every summer, there are two to three meets that are open to the public. "Yeah, we love you watching. I love performing," he added.

From not knowing what a decathlon was as a freshman in high school to becoming one of the world's top decathletes, Harrison Williams continues to chase his Olympic dreams. He represented Team USA in the recent 2024 Olympic Games in Paris while placing 7th. In 2025, he again represented Team USA and finished 7th in the World Championships. With multiple accolades and fierce dedication, Harrison continues to train in Chula Vista. Let's support his bid for the 2028 LA Olympics and the title of World's Greatest Athlete.



*Harrison with his parents and two sisters at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games representing Team USA*





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