

THE TOWNE LOCAL

Chula Vista



THE REAL ESTATE MARKET IN 2026

FEB 2026 | ISSUE 5

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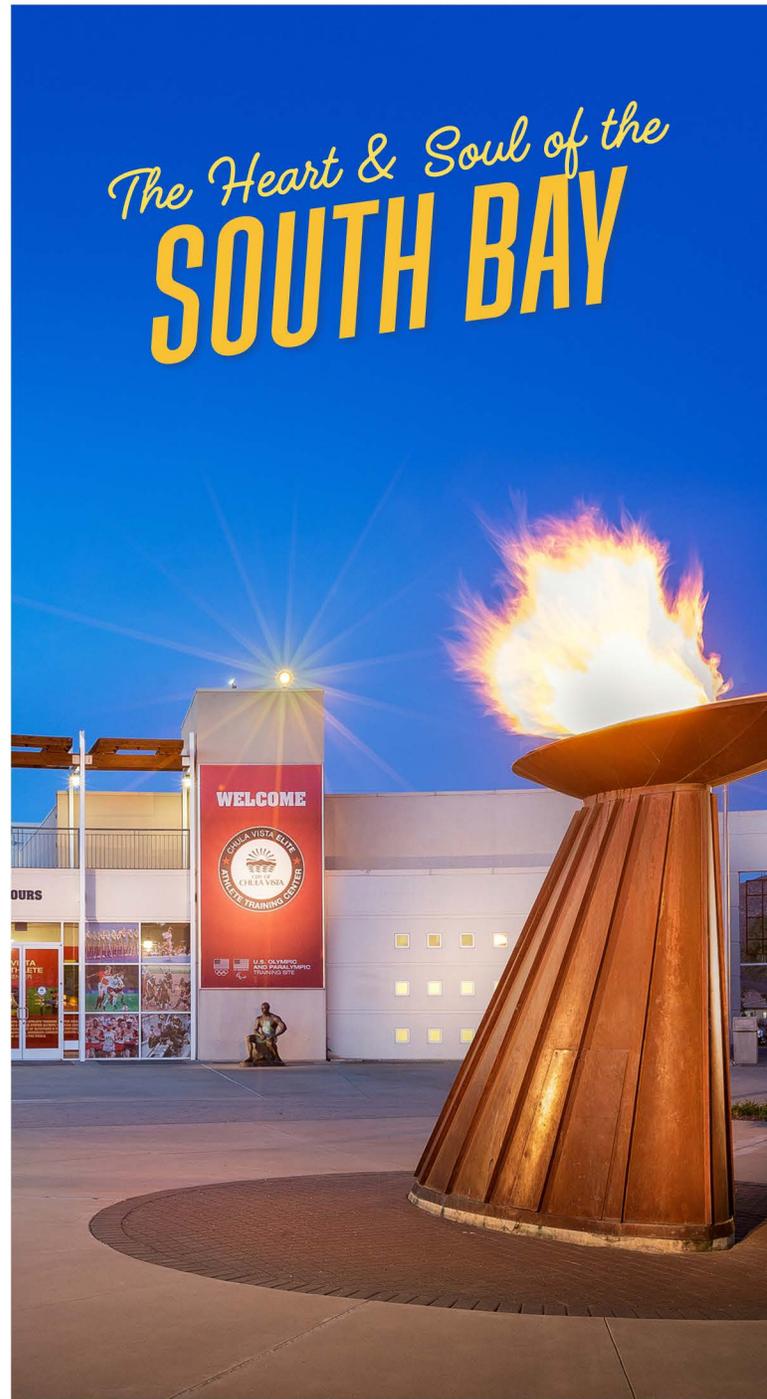
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Photo below courtesy of the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center.



For the digital version and past issues, visit:
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February 2026



JEFF BETTGER
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

My goal for each issue of The Towne Local Chula Vista magazine is to have articles about diverse topics. From local businesses to art to fun for children to sports to music. This issue accomplishes that! Chula Vista has something for everyone. As you get to know them through these articles, I hope you will support the local businesses, artists, schools, community groups, museums, etc.

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

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

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



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Small, but mighty ^ ABOUT THE TEAM



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Jeff has been a Realtor in the South Bay for 25+ years. Previously, he was a Professor of Special Education at San Francisco State University.



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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.



WHAT DOES THE Real Estate Market Hold for 2026?

As a real estate agent, this is the question I hear the most often. Clients want to know if they should buy now, or sell now, or do nothing at all. From my 25 years as a Realtor in Chula Vista, I find it helpful to review the past.

To find data that is consistent, I looked back 10 years at the sales of two-bedroom condos in the Camelot community of Eastlake. Camelot is located on Brookstone Rd and Lakeshore Dr in Chula Vista 91913.

I selected Camelot because the community has many two-bedrooms condos, they were all built around the same time, they are reasonably priced compared to others in the area, and they share the same excellent amenities. The chart on this page shows the number of units sold and their average sales price between Nov 1 and Dec 31 of each year. The chart also shows the average 30-year interest rate for that year.

One can see a steady increase in price from 2015-2023. Interest rates jumped from a low of 2.9% in 2021 to above 6.8 % in 2022. Notice also that in the same Nov-Dec timeframe, no units sold in 2024 or 2025. This reflects the cool down we have seen across the San Diego County market. At the time of this writing, there are 3 Active units for sale, with an average asking price of \$530,000.

Certainly, the rapid change in interest rates has played an important part in the story. From my discussions with many potential clients (buyers and sellers), they have been waiting for the past couple of years for the interest rates to come down again. But with continued high inflation, this has not happened. Given this current market, I have asked a few of the expert real estate professionals at Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Clarity for their advice on a number of relevant topics.

NOV 1 - DEC 31	# SOLD	MEDIAN PRICE	AVE 30 YEAR
2015	4	272,500	3.85
2016	1	305,000	3.65
2017	3	325,000	4
2018	5	340,000	4.5
2019	2	350,500	3.9
2020	2	397,500	3.2
2021	2	465,000	2.9
2022	2	495,000	5.4
2023	1	560,000	6.8
2024	0	0	6.75
2025	0	0	6.6
2026	3	530,000	ACTIVE

Data from the Sandicor MLS

Real Estate Advice

From the Experts



Broker Elias Levy
619-778-3514
DRE 01421986

What are some of the reasons why owning a home is better than renting?

First, when you own a home, you have tax deductions (such as the interest on your loan) that you do not have when renting. Furthermore, if you work from home, you can also deduct other expenses.

Second, owning a home allows you to build equity through the years instead of creating equity for a landlord. For example, if you pay rent for 5 years at \$3500 per month with no deductions or credits, you spend \$210,000 with no extra benefit. On the other hand, if you pay a mortgage of \$6,000 per month on an \$800,000 property, you have a secure place for your family, a \$10,000 tax deduction per year, a yearly tax deduction for interest with a 6% Loan of approximately \$45,000, and a historically average equity gain for 5 years on moderate growth will be \$127,000 Equity.



Agent Amy Tadlock
619-616-8767
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Why should potential buyers not give up hope of buying a home?

Everyone deserves the safety, stability and peace of mind that are found in owning a home. Homeownership remains the best way for individuals and families to build generational wealth. Homeownership can also create stability for individuals and families in their community. Many families believe their only option is to rent in today's market and many have lost hope that they can afford a home of their own. Residents may be unaware of the many opportunities found in city, county and state programs that help provide down payment assistance.

Just like any goal in life, homeownership takes planning. And just like a regular physical health check up, our finances need regular check ups too. If you have set aside your dream of homeownership, now is the time to put it front and center and reach out to a trusted mortgage lender to review your finances. They can help you create a plan to simplify your finances, increase your FICO score, save for a downpayment, or qualify for local assistance programs all without impacting your credit. Don't put your dreams on hold. With proper planning, your goal of homeownership may be closer than you realize!



Broker Associate
Patty Nesbitt
619-203-6520
DRE 01045808

Explain the benefits of buying your first home, then turning that into a rental property and buying another home.

If I could go back and do it all over again, I would never sell a single property I owned. My best advice? HOLD. HOLD. HOLD. Wealth builds slowly and often quietly when you make smart, consistent choices. Real estate is one of the most powerful tools. For first-time buyers, your journey often starts with something like a one-bedroom condo. Live in it, save, then purchase your next property, but keep the first and rent it out. Repeat that process over time, and by the time you reach your 50's, you could easily be a multi-millionaire. I didn't fully understand that when I started, but now I teach others how to do exactly that.



Agent Araceli Gonzalez
619-253-2097
DRE 01330934

When selling a property, what are some of the reasons why it is so important to hire an agent?

Selling your home is one of the most valuable investments in your life. Hiring a Realtor is important because the process is complex, high-stakes, and heavily influenced by strategy and timing. A professional agent brings market expertise to price the home accurately based on current data, buyer demand, and local trends —helping sellers maximize value while minimizing time on market. Realtors also advise on preparation, repairs, and staging so the property presents competitively from day one.

Equally important, a Realtor manages exposure, negotiations, and risk. We market the property through the Multiple Listing Service MLS, professional networks, and targeted outreach to qualified buyers. We then help negotiate offers, explain contingencies, and discuss repairs to protect the seller’s bottom line. Based on my years of experience throughout San Diego, I also handle disclosures, contracts, and deadlines, reducing legal and financial risk while guiding the transaction from start to finish for a smooth closing for all.

What are some of the new laws for 2026 affecting tenants and landlords?

New laws include:



Broker and
Property Manager
Peter Carlseen
619-370-6555
DRE 01441961

1. *California passed Assembly Bill 628 (AB 628)*, which changes the state’s habitability rules so that beginning January 1, 2026, landlords must provide and maintain both a working refrigerator and a working stove in most residential rental units. This takes effect on any new lease, amendment, extension or alteration on or after January 1, 2026. Existing leases are not affected by this until the lease is renewed, or otherwise amended. If tenants are supplying their own appliances, they have the right to give the landlord a 30 day notice to supply the appliances.

2. *Limits on What Landlords Can Deduct from Security Deposits (AB 2801) Effective: April 1, 2025*: Landlords may soon be restricted from deducting security deposits for normal wear and tear and must justify and document legitimate deductions. In many cases, this requires pre-move-in photos and post-move-out photos to support charges. Tenants must be given the option to repair at their costs, and then if it is not repaired, pictures must document the problem at move out and that repair has been completed. The time limit to return a security deposit is 21 days from move out.

3. *Optional Rent Payment Reporting to Credit Bureaus (AB 2747) Effective: April 1, 2025*: Landlords of larger residential properties (generally those with 16+ units or corporate owners of smaller portfolios) must offer tenants the option to have their on-time rent payments reported to credit bureaus. Tenant participation is optional and landlords must obtain consent.

4. *Rental Application & Fee Restrictions (Proposed/Emerging Legislation)*: Some bills under consideration or introduced in 2025–26 may further limit landlord practices, including:

- a. Prohibiting landlords from charging fees that aren’t explicitly listed in lease agreements (e.g., rent processing or pet fees) (SB 381, proposed).
- b. Requiring notice and legal documents be provided in certain languages for non-English-speaking tenants under some conditions (AB 863, proposed).

Note: These are proposed/evolving laws and may or may not be enacted or take effect in their current form.

As a professional property manager with over 20 years of experience, and a regular contributor on the property management legal update panel at our local real estate association, I stay informed of all the newest changes in the law. If you want more details, contact me. I also have a podcast episode with an attorney going over some of these issues. Scan the QR code below to go directly to the podcast.



Decisions, Decisions

Buying or selling a property is an important decision. As you can see from above, many factors should be taken into consideration. Nobody can predict the future. Will interest rates go up or down? Will a world event change the financial markets significantly? What we do know is that Chula Vista is a wonderful place to live. With so many new industries arriving (Gaylord Convention Center, Chula Vista Entertainment Complex, a new university on the horizon), the demand for housing will only increase. Looking at the chart at the beginning of this article, prices continue to increase, thus making any time in the past a good time to buy. Contact any of the professional Realtors at BHGRE Clarity.



*Jeff Better, Broker Assoc. 619-548-1288, DRE 01292879
Whether you are buying or selling a home, we will walk you through the process step by step.*

**THE KEYS TO YOUR NEW HOME ARE JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY.
WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU WITH ALL YOUR REAL ESTATE NEEDS!**

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Find professional real estate agents at BHGRE Clarity. Whether you prefer to do business in Spanish, or have a limited schedule, **we've got you covered.**



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DRE 02250537

CHULA VISTA'S NEW ART HARBOR

Casa Casillas

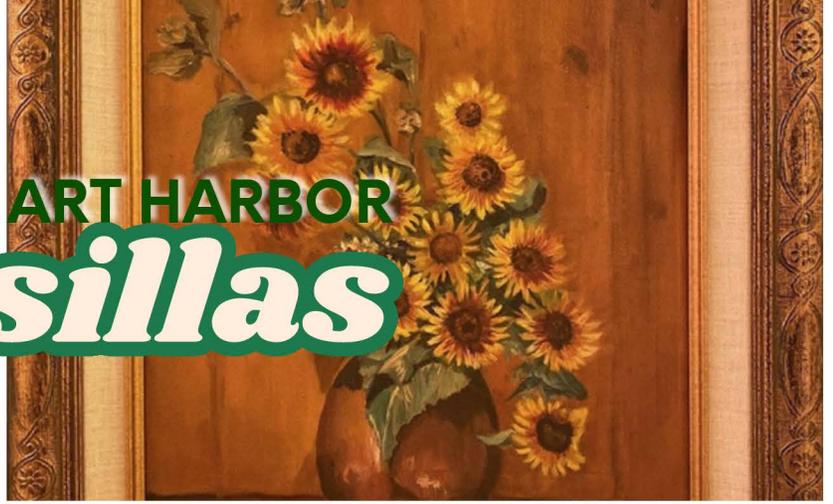
by Blanca Esthela Castaneda Garcia
IG @ecastagar

Chula Vista residents have long craved a space to gather and to display their creativity without having to travel to downtown San Diego galleries or Balboa Park museums. With the recent opening of Casa Casillas, their needs finally may have been met.

A local champion fought for years through fiscal setbacks and political challenges to fulfill a South Bay civic need: Chula Vista's own permanent public arts center. For Mary Salas, Chula Vista's former mayor (2014-2022), providing a public arts center was a priority. "For me," Salas said, "a key factor in the healthy growth of a city, especially for the second-most populated community in the county, is access to art and culture."

During her first term on the City Council, Salas attempted to have the city purchase a downtown building. "When a fellow councilmember changed his vote from yes to no, the plan to purchase the site failed," she explained. "But I never lost a desire to have some kind of a city-sponsored cultural arts venue."

*Paula Silva Casillas
diverse artwork.*



LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

During the last months of her term, Salas saw an opportunity to redevelop a city-owned space, a former YMCA building at 50 N. Fourth Avenue.

After much work and transformation, Casa Casillas opened on Aug. 11, 2025, becoming the first public cultural arts center in the city. In acknowledgment of her efforts, the city chose to name the site in honor of the former mayor's mother, Paula Silva Casillas.

Paula, a lifelong Chula Vista resident and self-taught artist, was born in 1923 in the Pala Indian Reservation. "She was always doing something creative," Salas said. "She had a pretty difficult early life, so she used art to soothe herself and deal with the hardships of living in poverty."

Religion played a big role in Casillas' portfolio, including paintings, needlework and carvings depicting Catholic iconography. These works were inspired by "Santera," which is a 400-year-old Hispanic tradition of creating devotional images. She expressed this style in different genres. "Mom really developed her skills after my dad died," Salas noted, adding that both her parents had strong

roots in the city. "My paternal side of my family came here from Mexico in 1919, and two of my uncles served on boards and commissions in Chula Vista. The family has always been civically engaged."

Casa Casillas houses two artists-in-residence, Melissa "Melicha" Salgado, an oil and acrylic painter, and German Rojas, a painter and ceramist. "In the future, I would love to see artist "pop-ups" in this space to display and, perhaps, sell their works. Hosted receptions and art shows also would be great," Salas said. The gallery is open on Wednesday and Thursday from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m.; on Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and on Sunday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Casa Casillas also offers free workshops, which range from basic color theory for painting, sketching, crafts (such as ribbon making and bookmarks), and crocheting, the latter Salas and her daughter have been enjoying.

"I was taught at home to work for something beyond my own family. When you improve the lives of the community, you improve the life of your family. That is the way I have always looked at it." Salas concluded, saying that she hopes the venue adds to the expanding of Chula Vista's culture.

Stay informed of new programs, classes, and exhibits at IG @cvcasacasillas



From left to right: The grand opening celebration of Chula Vista's art gallery, Casa Casillas interior, Former Mayor Mary Salas



The Spot with THE EMPANDAS

According to Jose, “One of the nephews suggested making Grandma’s empanadas. So that’s what we ended up doing. So, we began making empanadas from home and selling them over Facebook. Katia Callahan at EastLakeFoodToGo was one of our big supporters.” (see the article about Katia Callahan in Issue 3). Jose further explains, “I just got a vision from God, I guess. We decided to open this location on 3rd Ave. We found the money, and lots of contractors helped me out—flooring, painters, contractors, framers. It was a blessing.”

One of the benefits of belonging to a community is knowing the special places to grab delicious food. But it is more than freshly made food, it’s the fact that the business is family-owned and operated. It’s the feeling that you are truly welcomed and your patronage is appreciated.

Jose Rameriz, the owner of The Empanada Spot, is a fountain of energy. As you enter, you will likely see him talking with customers—asking a young family about their baby, thanking military members for their service, or explaining the cultural importance of empanadas to workers on their lunch break. This is the kind of energy and greeting that can highlight your day. But the positive experience doesn’t stop with Jose. His wife, daughters, and sons who work with him exude that same enthusiasm.

Jose has always been an entrepreneur. He remembers as a child realizing he could buy a bag of candy then sell the individual pieces for a profit. As he grew, he became trained as a barber. “It’s very humble work. You meet a lot of people and learn that good communication is key.” He soon opened Mikey Rich Barber Shop in Plaza Bonita. He is proud he has given many talented young people the start of a career. Call to schedule an appointment 619-855-5553. Open 7 days/week.

In 2020 as COVID hit, Jose realized many people could not get out to eat. He decided to start a new business venture with his family. They brainstormed different business plans. Should they make burritos or tacos or something else?

What menu items can you expect to find at The Empanada Spot? “My grandma’s original recipe is beef, potato, black olive and red chile like a tamale. It is very traditional. It was her way of showing her love and it’s our pleasure to share that same love now. To order it, just ask for the OG. But we have an empanada for everybody. We have savory and sweet.” Can’t decide on one kind of



OUR SPOTLIGHT NEIGHBORHOOD - THIRD AVE. IN CHULA VISTA

empanada? Mix and match from Pepperoni, Rajas, Costilla de Puerco, Shrimp & Cheese, Chicharron, Bean & Cheese, Chicken Pot Pie, Birria, and Chipotle Chicken. Add a side of Macaroni Salad, Basil Pesto Salad or Potato Salad. For dessert, order Apple Pie, Peaches & Cream, Banana Nutella, Strawberries & Cream, PB&J, or Churro Cheesecake. Wash it all down with a refreshing Agua Fresca.

The Empanada Spot also serves breakfast. Start your day with a satisfying breakfast sandwich made to order with your choice of bread, egg, protein, etc. Take out or enjoy the cozy atmosphere inside or on outside tables with a warm cup of coffee from next door business *The Coffee Machine*.



Filled with Love

The Empanada Spot

 Address: 1223 3rd Ave, Chula Vista

 Phone: 619-948-9412

 Instagram: @EmpanadaSpot

Hours:

 Mon-Fri: 6:00 AM – 8:00 PM

 Wed: 10:00 AM – 8:00 PM

 Sat-Sun: 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM



Holistic Spa Palace

HONORING SELF-CARE



An important concept in the health care industry these days is “self care.” This refers to taking time for preventative therapy. The Holistic Spa Palace located at 1227 3rd Ave in Chula Vista can provide a wide range of beneficial treatments. The owner, Jeanette Saucedo, is licensed as a medical massage therapist and also a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA). “Medical massage is aimed at therapeutic recovery and rehabilitation for the body after an injury, a surgery, or chronic pain. We work on range of motion, traction, resistance exercise and stretching. It helps with overall flexibility, mobility, and decongesting the tight muscles and the nerves that are really compressed.” Jeanette further explains that she can work with the VA and the Community Care Network (CCN) for veterans through Tri-West Insurance. “I adapt the massage to what is needed for each individual, as opposed to the same generic massage for everybody.”

Holistic Spa Palace also offers Lux Massages. Jeanette explains, “This can include custom body wraps or dry exfoliation or sugar scrub exfoliate. These are excellent for hydrating the skin and gives your skin that natural glow.”

Jeanette is also an aesthetician and a manicurist. As with her massages, her facials are also customized to the needs of the client, whether acne is a concern or dermaplaning is recommended based on her twelve years of experience. If this wasn’t impressive enough, Jeanette also offers contouring, sculpting, lash extensions and sugaring. Sugaring is a new method of waxing and hair removal.

Talking with Jeanette for even the first few minutes, her pride in her business and her care for her clients comes shining through. She made a point to explain she uses only natural products such as coconut oil, unscented lotions, and apricot oils. “It just all fits into why I opened The Holistic Spa Palace.”

Jeanette recommends booking a reservation by scanning her QR code below, or booking online at HolisticSpaPalace.com. Clients can view the many award-winning services offered. Her normal operating hours are Wed-Sat. (with varying start times) until 7:00 pm, and Sundays from 9-1 pm. Born in Chula Vista, Jeanette keeps her prices reasonable so that more people can benefit from her services, and she offers discounts for seniors and the military. Clients can book one appointment, but most repeat clients have a membership for monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly visits. Jeanette is also willing to travel to a regular client’s home if that client is older and has a harder time traveling to her business.

Thank you, Jeanette Saucedo, for taking the time to explaining the many wonderful and important services you offer. The Holistic Spa Palace is a one-stop destination for health and beauty. After just a few visits with Jeanette you will not only feel better, you will feel like family.

Digital business card qr



Booking qr code



OLYMPIC TRAINING CENTER HISTORY

The Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center is home to many talented athletes from around the world. It was intentionally designed with the purpose of supporting an inclusive environment for both able-bodied athletes and Paralympians to train side-by-side. In the early 1990s, the US Olympic Committee, in conjunction with the San Diego Sports Foundation, worked diligently to raise funds and build the facility. In 1995, the facility opened as an Olympic Training Center, dedicated to Team USA and serving as one of the largest Olympic Training Centers in the world.

Chula Vista has proven to be the ideal location for the Center. Sitting in the southwest corner of the US, Chula Vista is well known for its family-friendly community. Its mild, Mediterranean climate provides consistently moderate temperatures, low humidity, and approximately 260 sunny days per year. The area also features a flat campus for extensive training fields and is surrounded by miles of

country roads perfect for running and biking. In addition, the Center is conveniently located next to the Otay Reservoir, which provides an ideal training site for canoeing, rowing, and kayaking.

In 2017, the US Olympic Committee turned over its ownership to the city of Chula Vista, which then placed it under Elite Athlete Services. On January 1, 2017, the facility grew from an Olympic Training Center to an Olympic Training Site, expanding its mission to serve not just Team USA but also athletes from other countries, colleges, and professional teams.

The COVID 19 pandemic in 2020 created significant setbacks for the Center. The facility faced an exodus of athletes, coaches, and medical personnel, as well as the challenge of protecting immunocompromised individuals. Despite these difficulties, the Center overcame the many obstacles and is once again thriving.

VISIT THE TRAINING CENTER

Spanning an impressive 155 acres, the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center contains seven fields, two gyms, 300 beds, a dining hall, a field hockey pitch, and a lake with 2,000-meter lane lines. Now thirty years old, the Center is well known for its archery and BMX training and competitions.

For residents of Chula Vista, the Center provides many opportunities to explore its unique features and its vital role in uplifting the Olympic movement. Tours of the campus are offered every day, as well as community events like Fourth of July celebrations, corporate events, birthday parties, and drone art shows. Fun Runs are held on the grounds four to five times a year, and visitors can enjoy a shopping trip at the Visitor Store for a variety of Olympic-style merchandise, including clothing and souvenirs.

The Center also has a health and health sciences station as part of the Chula Vista School District's unique program called Innovation Stations. This program is designed to provide fourth- through sixth-grade students with a hands-on, interactive learning experience. In particular, the Center's program provides students with a unique opportunity to experience what life is like as an Olympic athlete.



THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

Today, the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center remains committed to its values of inclusivity, equity, and integrity, while creating a space where athletes' dreams can become a reality. "Sports are a great equalizer. Whether it's Paralympians training with other Paralympians, Paralympians training with able-bodied athletes, any of our athletes training with athletes from other countries, sports really bring everybody together," Melekian said.

Athletes from around the world now train at the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center, all dedicated to bringing home the gold medal. "What makes Olympic athletes special is probably one word, and I think that word is sacrifice," Melekian added. Their motivation is fueled by the numerous sacrifices they make every day to push past limits, break their own records, and improve their performance. The Center is home to not just Team USA but also many teams from Canada. Each Olympic team from Canada will pass through the Center in preparation for the LA Olympics.

However, running the facility has proven to be a difficult task, as the Center is significantly underfunded. "What's different about running this Olympic training facility compared to running the soccer stadium that was built by a billionaire with billions of dollars behind it, is we have to work 10 times harder. We have to row 10 times faster just to stay in place," Melekian noted.

Surprisingly, the US is the only country in the world that does not receive government subsidies for its Olympic athletes and instead, relies solely on donations, sponsorships, and TV-generated money. As a fully self-supported facility, it has become increasingly challenging to meet the needs of Olympic-level athletes, as costs continue to rise for food, equipment, and other operational necessities. To help raise funds, the beautiful Center can be rented to host corporate and private events.

LOOKING FORWARD: FUTURE PLANS

As the 2028 LA Summer Olympics approaches, The Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center is preparing for an increase of athletes who will be staying in Chula Vista. Currently, many athletes, particularly rugby players, live outside the Center in local hotels or surrounding neighborhoods due to limited space. Plans include installing approximately 200 more beds, an indoor gym, and a pool to better support its athletes.

Recently, in December 2025, Chula Vista approved a 10-year lease extension with Elite Athlete Services, marking a significant milestone for the Center and its efforts in supporting the upcoming LA Olympic and Paralympic Games. The 2028 Summer Games will be a huge cornerstone for the Olympic and Paralympic movement in the U.S., especially for track and field. The Center hopes to host events for the public to meet and become inspired by Olympic and Paralympic athletes, as well as put together watch parties.

"The first thing I'd tell you is that no athlete born in Chula Vista has ever won a gold medal in the Olympics or Paralympics," Melekian said,



"And I'd love to see it in LA or in Brisbane in 2032, but I would love to see that change."

This article focused on the history and operation of the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center. In the next issue of The Towne Local Chula Vista, we will introduce you to a few amazing Paralympic and Olympic athletes who train at the Center and who continue to work toward achieving their dreams. Their stories are both extraordinary and powerful.

To find out more about the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center, please visit <https://trainatchulavista.com/>, where donations can also be made.



Marie Zhivago: *Artist and More*

INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE READERS. WHERE DID YOU GROW UP, FAMILY LIFE, OCCUPATION(S)?

I grew up in Chula Vista, California, and this city has shaped nearly every chapter of my life. My family background includes immigration stories, military service, and a strong work ethic—values that were always present and grounding.

My path hasn't been a straight line. Before becoming an arts educator, I spent 18 years working as a surgical technician. Later, I became a Visual and Performing Arts and Digital Arts teacher with CVESD, teaching students from kindergarten through high school. Today, I'm a retired arts educator, and an illustrator, cartoonist, and storyteller creating full-time under Dr. Zhivago Global.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR PEN NAME, AND HOW DOES IT CONNECT TO DR. ZHIVAGO'S NEIGHBORHOOD?

The name Dr. Zhivago came from real life, long before it became a pen name. While I was working as a surgical technician, an anesthesiologist I worked with started calling me "Dr. Zhivago." It was said with respect and warmth, and it stuck. Years later, when I transitioned into education and began teaching Digital Arts with CVESD, a principal

started calling me Dr. Zhivago again—this time creatively, almost like Dr. Seuss, because of the way I used imagination and storytelling to connect with students.

What truly gave the name meaning was my love for this community. I cared deeply about Chula Vista and the South Bay, and I wanted my students to understand that creativity didn't exist somewhere else—it lived right here. Through my Digital Arts program, I brought CVESD students into the world of San Diego Comic-Con, exposing them to illustration, comics, and creative careers they could actually see themselves in.

That's where Dr. Zhivago's Neighborhood began—not as a brand, but as a belief rooted in community. Inspired by the warmth and kindness of Mr. Rogers, and the playful imagination of Dr. Seuss, I wanted my work to feel welcoming, local, and human. Being featured on the front page of the San Diego Union-Tribune as Dr. Zhivago sealed the name as my creative identity.

HOW AND WHEN DID YOU BEGIN YOUR INTEREST IN ART? DID SOMEBODY ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTINUE CREATING?

I've been drawing for as long as I can remember, but one early experience shaped



me. In second grade, we had an art project with very specific instructions. I didn't follow them exactly because I was more focused on expressing myself. When the project was graded, my artwork was held up in front of the class and given an "F." I was embarrassed and emotional. Art was the one place where I felt confident, so that moment felt personal.

When I got home, my father could tell something was wrong. He sat with me and talked it through calmly. He explained that failure didn't mean I wasn't talented—it meant I had something to learn. He told me that being brave doesn't mean you never fail; it means you keep going when something matters. That conversation stayed with me and taught me courage early on.

WHAT FORMS OF ART PROJECTS HAVE YOU CREATED?

My work spans many forms, including children's books, coloring books, digital illustrations, printables, stickers, and character-driven story worlds.

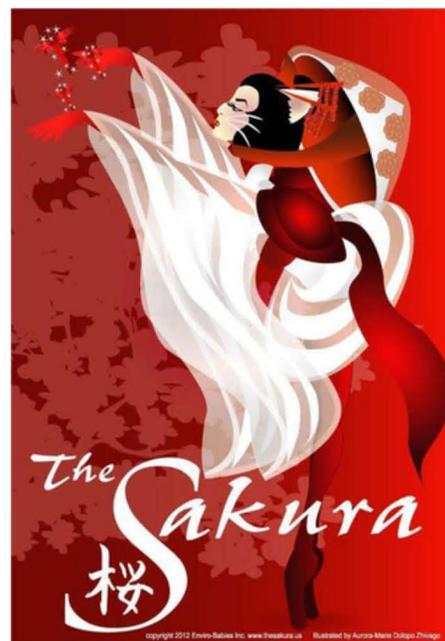
Some of my long-developed story universes include Pandylant, The Pride of Hawaii, Enviro-babies, and my children's book *The Sakura*. Each project connects storytelling, culture, and care for the natural world.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR CAREER HIGHLIGHTS?

One of my biggest highlights has been building story worlds that grew over time rather than creating one-off projects. For more than 30 years, my work has focused on environmental storytelling and a deep love for rare, threatened, and endangered animals.

The Sakura was shared in local libraries and later adapted into a playscript for children's arts theater programs. Seeing children bring the story to life on stage was incredibly meaningful.

Another major highlight was my work as a Digital Arts teacher with CVESD, especially bringing students into the creative world of San Diego Comic-Con. Helping students see that art and creative careers were possible right here in their own city was incredibly rewarding.





WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG ARTISTS?

Don't let one grade, one comment, or one rejection define you. Learn the rules, but don't lose your voice trying to please everyone. If art matters to you, keep showing up. Bravery is something you build.

What is your dream for the future regarding your art?

I want to continue creating work that feels gentle, welcoming, and meaningful, and rooted in place. Dr. Zhivago's Neighborhood is about building a creative space that feels safe and familiar—rooted in community, imagination, and kindness.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE READERS TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR WORK?

I hope people feel welcome. I hope they feel reminded that kindness still matters, that creativity belongs to everyone, and that caring for animals, the environment, and our neighborhoods starts with empathy.

Marie Zhivago is a Chula Vista-based artist and illustrator. More at www.drzhivago.us | YouTube: www.youtube.com/@dr.zhivago | South Bay Historical Society feature: <https://youtu.be/7tL7vF7CpJc>

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DISCOVERING YOUR FAMILY'S HISTORY

RESEARCH, DNA, AND SURPRISES



Chula Vista Genealogical Society to find out more about tracing one's family history.

Jeff Bettger: Hi Terri and Karen. Thank you for joining me today. Tell me about your organization.

Terri Seat: Thank you, Jeff. We appreciate that you're doing this because we really want to get the word out to the community about the Society and invite people to join us. We currently have about 80 members, but we have had over a hundred in the past.

Jeff: When did your society begin as a formal group?

Karen Smith: 1982, I think. Neither of us were members at the time, but from what I've read from the history, it was just a group of people that got together to talk about genealogy. At first, I believe, they met in somebody's home. Then they began to meet with the South Bay Historical Society.

Terri: Then the Society broke off and has been on its own since. We are the Chula Vista Genealogical Society, but we involve the whole community. Right now we have one in-person meeting a month at the Bonita Sunnyside Library.

Karen: I do an education class there the third Tuesday of every month. When we have new people attend, our more

experienced members are ready to help. So it's a really fun group. We start each class by teaching people how to do research and how to verify any information they find by cross-checking with other records and where to find those records.

For example, a lot of people go on ancestry.com and they see a family tree with somebody in their family and they just copy the whole thing. That's a really a bad idea. We let people know that they have to verify everything, even information in a death certificate. If the person giving the information was not reliable, the information on the death certificate could be wrong. It's a matter of teaching people how to do good research. For example, you might be able to find a city directory or a voter registration. Sometimes it has their address or if it's a voter registration, it'll tell you their political party.

Terri: We also hold three Zoom classes per month. We have a general meeting in which we hire a professional speaker to give a presentation. It's nice because now with Zoom, we can have people from all over. We've even had a speaker from Canada and another from England.

Karen: The first Wednesday of the month we have a board meeting and the second Wednesday we have a research group, which is about research methods and where to find historical records. The third Wednesday of each month we have a Family History Roundtable with discussions of family history and how best to preserve it.

Terri: Our group learns and then members share their findings and process. Someone often gives others ideas to try. We enjoy lots of collaboration.

Jeff: In general, do you find any commonalities among your members regarding their ancestry?

Karen: Sometimes you find out you are somebody's eighth cousin. This is Chula Vista. People are from all over. I don't know how many people we have that are really local.

Jeff: Are you able to find lots of records about the history of the South Bay?

Karen: Randy Seaver runs our research group and he's our resident expert. He's very experienced. He has spoken nationally. I know that we have really good newspaper archives at the San Diego Library that go way back and property records and data like that. But my family started in Virginia in the 1600s. There's nothing like that here because California was part of Mexico. So everything we have here is probably from the mid-1800s to the present.

Jeff: What happens when some of the records are in a different language? Do you have someone who can help translate them?

Karen: There are programs like Bing Translate and Google Translate, but now a lot of translation is being done with AI. In fact, you can look at a document that's been written in longhand cursive, and AI will do a transcription of it, although it is probably only 85% to 90% accurate. You need to go back through to see if

it make sense and matches with the story you already have. However, you need to be aware that your story may not be correct because we have found that oral family stories are not always accurate.

Terri: I wished that I had asked my parents and my grandmother more questions before they passed away. I wasn't much interested in my family history when they were alive, but now I'm interested and I don't have anybody to ask.

Jeff: If somebody would like to join your society, is there a fee?

Karen: No, everything is free, except when we have our professional speaker on the last Wednesday. We record that presentation, which is available to members only. Anyone can come and listen to the presentation, but only members can access the recording and the handout that goes with it. The annual membership fee is \$30 and helps pay for the expert monthly speakers. We also have a newsletter and a website. Randy Seaver is our editor and he puts together a monthly 8-10 page newsletter. We have an archive of newsletters.



2025 Holiday Celebration

Jeff: Have any of your members found a major surprise in their genealogy?

Karen: I think the biggest surprise is when someone finds out a family member is not biological. That's what happens when they do DNA testing.

Terri: That actually happened to me. After my DNA results came back, I thought they couldn't be right, just by the way the numbers were coming out. I ignored it for a while and then started doing research, and through the research, I found out that my grandfather was not my biological grandfather. So yes, there are some surprises!

Jeff: What about you, Karen, having a common last name like Smith has got to make it more difficult.

Karen: Yes, there were seven Karen Smiths at my university alone. And to make it worse, my parents didn't give me a middle name. So yes, it's tricky. Also, I have relatives with other common names that married into the Smith family.

Genealogy research is like Alice going down the rabbit hole. If you really get the bug, it's pretty habit forming in a good way. And, as Randy would say, it's something you can do in your bunny slippers with a cup of coffee and your laptop.

Jeff: Thank you again, Terri and Karen. Readers can find out more about the society on your website.



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An advertisement for Praeclusus Property Management. The background is a photograph of a two-story house with a white garage door and a brick chimney. The Praeclusus logo, consisting of a stylized house icon and the text 'PRAECLUSUS PROPERTY MANAGEMENT', is in the top left. A dark green banner across the middle contains the text 'PROPERTY MANAGEMENT WITHOUT THE DRAMA!'. Below this, a list of services is provided in white text on a green background. In the bottom right, a white box contains the text 'CALL TODAY' in green, followed by the toll-free number and website. The CA DRE #01889835 is in the bottom right corner.

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ARTIST KYLE GARRITY BIG ART FOR BIG WALLS

Large painted murals are special. They require special planning and patience. They require the ability to work on small details one by one to create a much larger whole. Furthermore, they are special because the finished result will be seen by many and it represents the business or public space it adorns. Local artist Kyle Garrity is one such special artist and has painted several large murals that travelers down Chula Vista's Third Ave will recognize.

Kyle was born in Bonita and has always loved being outside and at the beach. She signs her artwork with the name kurrents (that's K for Kyle and three r's to signify the ocean waves she loves). Her

parents were always supportive and enrolled her in different programs. When she was three years old, she started taking dance classes on Bonita Rd and made friends that she still is in contact with today. In fact, the parents of one of those friends opened a brewing business in Santee and commissioned her to paint her first mural. When they expanded



Groundswell Brewing Co., they again commissioned her to paint a mural on their back patio at their Chula Vista location and two for their Grantville location.

Asking Kyle more about her early training, she remembers her grandparents enrolling her in a music class. She realized that music was not for her (as opposed to her brother who was a natural). Instead, Kyle enrolled in the Bonita Art School down the street. Kyle

still credits her teachers, Miss Hayley and Miss Tita, and their Saturday morning three-hour classes for giving her a strong foundation in art.

JEFF BETTGER: Your largest mural can be found on the side of Lime in the Coconut restaurant on the corner of 3rd and Davidson. Tell us about the process. How long does it take to create a large mural?

KYLE GARRITY: Honestly, it takes me a long time once I start painting, sometimes weeks. And obviously it depends on many different factors, such as the wall size and texture, the design that I'm working on, and of course my painting schedule.

As for the Lime murals, I had already painted both bathrooms and the bar wall when ownership told me about the Create Chula Vista Art Grant. I applied for the grant to partially fund the exterior mural at Lime in the Coconut, but I didn't start painting until a full year later.

I had to do all these things I had never done before, like get a business license and a right of way permit. I was only 22 at the time, and all the paperwork was a bit overwhelming.

JEFF: How did you come up with the theme of the mural?

KYLE: Since the exterior wall is about 70 feet long, I realized I couldn't put too many different elements on it. In hindsight, by painting murals, I've learned restraint. For my style, I like very crisp clean lines and curves. I also love bright colors. Knowing that Chula Vista was famous for its citrus production I decided to use that as the theme because it matched perfectly with the tropical vibe of the restaurant.



JEFF: Tell us about your mural down the street.

KYLE: It's at Chula Vista Smiles, owned by Ilse Savelli. She is so nice and you can tell that she really cares about her patients and her staff. The timing was perfect because she was expanding her business into the next building. She knew exactly what she wanted, a silhouette of a child blowing bubbles. It's always ideal when I'm talking to clients and they have an idea of what they want. So I was able to apply for the Create Chula Vista Arts Grant again to fund that project.

JEFF: I love it. I can imagine many children feel more at ease going to the dentist after seeing your charming mural. Then I believe you also did something at the library?

KYLE: Yes, after becoming familiar with my work through my other grant applications, the City of Chula Vista reached out to me as they were renovating their children's area space at the Civic Center library. They asked me to paint a mural for their story time nook. That area has these large floor to ceiling windows, so they wanted to bring the outside to the inside. They envisioned a nature-inspired mural that children and families could interact with. Inspired by my Chula Vista upbringing and my love of nature, I portrayed Mount Miguel in the east with coyotes and common cacti, and the marshlands and bay to the west with seagulls and herons.

JEFF: What kind of feedback have you received about your work?

KYLE: Well, when I was painting at the dentist's office, it was during the day while patients were coming in and out. So I'm hearing children and their families making

comments like, "Oh look, she's painting a butterfly." It was a great way to get people engaged, and I think people enjoyed seeing me in action.

JEFF: What advice do you have for younger artists?

KYLE: I think it's important to remember that public art and murals beautify our community spaces, and we should take collective pride in that. I hope to be a role model for young artists so that they can see it's possible for them to create something big and meaningful.

I think I would just say, don't stop. I've definitely had periods in my life where I haven't created as much. There's so much in life that can get in the way or seems like it takes priority. But if painting is the thing that brings you joy, keep painting. It is the thing that makes you unique and it's a way for you to express yourself. If it feels essential, then you will keep creating.

JEFF: Thank you for this interview and for sharing your incredible talent with Chula Vista. Each time I drive up Third Ave, I look forward to seeing your murals!



THE SOUND OF MARIACHI

BY GABRIEL GORDILLO



Not only performing, but also teaching the next generation of mariachis

Guadalajara is the epicenter of Mexico's mariachi maravillosos that broadcasts the emotional musical form throughout the nation. Tucson, Arizona, however, is the home of two Americans who spread it around the world. Superstar recording artist Linda Ronstadt is one. Superstar mariachi educator Dr. Jeff Nevin is the other.

Ronstadt had already been a rock and popular music luminary for 20 years when she stunned her fans with her 1987 mariachi masterpiece "Canciones de mi Padre." It was more than just a passion project. Ronstadt, a fully bilingual Chicana, proved to be a remarkable mariachi singer. Her record of classics with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan was a Grammy winner and the greatest selling non-English album of all time.

Nevin was a mariachi trumpet player in a Tucson high school when he first met Ronstadt. He said she made

the musical form popular around the world with "Canciones de mi Padre" and the subsequent tour. "Before Linda, there were mariachi programs that would start and stop," Nevin said. "They could never quite get their footing. But after 'Canciones de Mi Padre,' there was a surge." Ronstadt proved that American and European audiences could connect with mariachi and would buy the records and attend concerts.

"The presidents of colleges and high school districts saw that and started saying 'I want mariachi in my school,'" said Nevin. "Whereas before Linda, if anyone wanted a mariachi program they had to fight to get permission to do it. You'd do it on your lunch hour, you'd do it before school. But now they will hire a full-time guy to make it happen. She completely changed the nature of mariachi music in the United States."

Nevin is the other part of the surge. Growing up in a Latino Tucson community with mariachi musicians inspired him to learn Spanish fluently and play in local grupos. He studied music composition in college, crowned by a Ph.D. in Music Composition from UCSD.

Southwestern College was the first college in America to start a mariachi program and Nevin was hired in 1998 as its director. He set out to develop a curriculum and SWC became the first college to offer an Associate's degree in mariachi music.

Nevin, like a true champion, evolved way beyond his job as SWC's director of mariachi activities. He became the Johnny Appleseed of the art form, developing textbooks for teachers around the world and songbooks for musicians. For a quarter of a century he has worked tirelessly to spread mariachi to schools

throughout the United States, organize concerts to celebrate the form and raises hundreds of thousands in scholarships to encourage young mariachi musicians to pursue higher education.

He has also kicked down doors for women mariachis, who for generations were discouraged from playing and singing in a male-dominated form. He inspired the two-time Grammy-winning Mariachi Divas, many of whom are his former students. He said he wanted to pay homage to Ronstadt by propelling other women singers and instrumentalists into the professional world.

Southwestern Mariachi singer Sandra Camarena said there were no opportunities for women in mariachi when she was in high school and college. "It's exciting to participate in a genre that I didn't have access to when I was younger," she said. "Mariachi classes were not offered in school for my generation."

A retired elementary school

teacher, Camarena sang with the San Diego Opera for 30 years, but said she is having a wonderful time singing mariachi at Southwestern with Dr. Nevin.

"I've felt a sense of loss because I appreciated mariachi music as a child and young adult but did not see any female role models," she said. "It is very gratifying that I can now represent women -- and especially women from my generation -- in an art form which was male-dominated for decades."

Nevin said stories like Sandra Camarena's are heartwarming because she has worked with intention to make mariachi music more inclusive and available to musicians of the region. "I feel like I owe it to the world to make it easier for more schools to implement mariachi and easier for teachers to teach mariachi," he said.

Camarena's bandmate Chelu Landa has been an "on-and-off" member of Southwestern's mariachi

program for more than 20 years, he said. He left for a while to pursue filmmaking in Mexico. He shares that same approach to music, he said, and yearns to pass down the emotion of mariachi to the next generation. "It's being in contact with your roots," he said. "When you hear the music you hear everything, you feel everything. It's food for the soul." Landa said he has been around mariachi music his entire life. His ancestors were mariachis in Jalisco, he said, and he was a makeup artist for female mariachi singers.

"Being a member of the group, represents a challenge," he said. "You are an example for the new generation and can help them to be proud of what they are. Sometimes we forget that music has no age."

Southwestern College has four mariachi bands that allow musicians to gain proficiency and move up. The top group is Mariachi Garibaldi, named for one of Nevin's most cherished mentors. Another of Nevin's most cherished mariachis is Ronstadt, who he met with recently. The great star is struggling with Parkinson's disease and can no longer sing, but Nevin said he was fortunate to meet with her on a good day. "It was great to actually have the opportunity to speak with her," he said.

Dr. Jeff Nevin and his mariachi from Southwestern College





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