

THE TOWNE LOCAL

Chula Vista



Guiding to
GOLD

MAY 2026 | ISSUE 8

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Art by Lupita Shahbazi

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IT IS GRADUATION TIME



JEFF BETTGER
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

Congratulations to all of our graduates. Your dedication and the support of your family is worthy of celebration. Take a moment to appreciate your achievement!

A special shout out to those graduating students who have contributed to or have been featured in past issues of our Bonita magazine and now Chula Vista magazine--Ella Aldridge, Sebastian Bello, Blanca Castenada, MacKenzie Koeppen, and Sofia Petroulias. I am looking forward to watching where your promising futures will lead!

I constantly receive positive feedback on the beauty of each issue. That credit goes to **Kim Skulavik**. Not only is she a genius at coordinating colors and shapes, but her endless imagination keeps each article and each issue fresh and unique. . . . and she is a pleasure to work with! Thank you, Kim!

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

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



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100% Local ABOUT OUR 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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The Heart & Soul of the
SOUTH BAY

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GRADUATES. YOU DID IT.



YOU ACCOMPLISHED
A GOAL. TAKE A
MOMENT. ENJOY LIFE.

by Jeff Bettger

It's that special time of year again. The school year ends, and for some, graduation. For those graduating from elementary school to junior high school, a significant jump. The end of childhood. New expectations of maturity, patience, and focus await you. Enjoy this summer. Have fun with brothers, sisters and neighborhood friends. Swimming pools and Little League. As you grow older, you will fondly remember this summer of freedom.

For those graduating from junior high school to high school, another significant jump. No longer part of a collective whole. No longer a standard program of academics. Soon you will begin to define who you are and who you want to be. Enjoy this summer. Perhaps your first real job. A significant family vacation. Parties with friends. Clubs and athletics may take your time.

For those graduating from high school, the most significant jump of all. Your cohort of childhood friends will now scatter in many directions. Some to university out of state, some to college not far away, some to begin their occupation. But now you are an adult, and each decision you make becomes more important. Which skills do you have, and which skills do you still need to acquire? Thank those teachers who believed in you.

For those graduating with a degree, you have invested significant time and money. Sacrifices were made. Knowledge gained. Will you begin your career now or continue in pursuit of an advanced degree? Remember to thank those professors who encouraged you the most. Don't stress. The first job you have will almost certainly not be the last. You may change fields several times. That's ok. Continue to build your skills and knowledge.

Whatever your stage of graduation, congratulations! You accomplished a goal. Take a moment, a week, a summer to enjoy it. Enjoy it with friends you may not often see again. Say Thank You to the loved ones who supported you. Who drove you to school. Who took you shopping for that backpack. Who tried to help you with your math assignments. Who listened to you when self-doubt crept in. Who helped pay what they could for your tuition. But most importantly, should you need assistance in the future, remember that you and your family are not alone. Your community is here waiting to help you.

This greeting was originally published in the May 2025 issue of The Towne Local Bonita.





Your Place for Celebrations & Gatherings:

THE CHARCOAL HOUSE

It's that time of the year. Graduation celebrations, birthday parties, baby showers, wedding receptions, baptisms, anniversaries, quinceaneras, reunions, awards ceremonies. You have the people, now you need a venue large enough to host the event. The elegant Charcoal House is your answer!

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SUCCESS THROUGH SELFLESSNESS



David Brown and Jerome Avery

By Catrice Chan

The Olympic Track and Field events are individual contests of speed, strength, and endurance. The best athletes from around the world compete against each other for the elusive gold medal. We cheer as athletes cross the finish line, stand on the podium, and throw their arms up in victory. But for one Olympic athlete, Jerome Avery, his gold medal came in an unexpected way. Now at 47 years of age, he is the vision behind some of the greatest successes in Paralympic history. As a guide runner for blind athletes, Avery embodies the qualities of teamwork, resilience, and dedication. This is his story.

EARLY LIFE

Growing up, Avery developed an early love for track and field. Both of his parents had run track. His father was a military man and the neighborhood track coach. His mother always had an outgoing personality and was happy to talk to everyone. His parents' influence extended beyond sports – they taught him valuable lessons such as giving, compassion, and determination. “I am my mother and father,” Jerome said. With the support of his parents, Jerome developed a clear vision – a dream to become an Olympian. “What got me into the sport was definitely my family, and what kept me in the sport was my family,” he explained.

QUEST FOR INDIVIDUAL GOLD

Jerome was always fast and specialized in the 100 meters. “I love that event for the simple fact that it’s one of those events where everybody wants to see who’s the fastest,” Avery said, “So I’ve always wanted to be that guy.” In 2000, at the end of his second year of junior college, Avery qualified for the Olympic Trials in preparation for the Sydney, Australia Games. After years of hard work and dedication, he felt prepared. However, the trials proved to be overwhelming, and he was eliminated in the first round of heats. This was a devastating setback that tested his ambition and determination. With his career at a crossroads, Jerome faced two difficult options – train another four years for the next Olympic Trials or give up his Olympic dream. Young, ambitious, and determined, he decided to continue training.

Two years later, Avery received a phone call that would change his life. As a promising athlete full of potential, he received a golden opportunity to train full-time at the Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center (then called the Olympic Training Center). Rather than training by himself and working at Walmart in the evenings, Avery seized this opportunity. “As soon as I got that call, I immediately packed my bags and moved to San Diego. Who’s going to say no to San Diego,

right?” he explained excitedly. Upon arriving, he instantly connected. “The training here is probably one of the best blessings that I’ve ever had,” Avery said, “You know, this place has allowed me to grow not only as an athlete but as a person as well.” For the next two years, the Training Center became his home.

2004 ATHENS OLYMPICS

In preparation for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the Olympic Trials were held in Sacramento, CA. With the support of his father in the stands and his own determination, Avery made it through the first round of 100 meters. Then, he made it through the second round. “My coach and my father would always say, ‘What got you there will keep you there.’ That’s a big saying that I believe in,” Jerome said. As he prepared for the semi-final race, he warmed up too much in the scorching 115-degree heat. Having spent too much energy warming up, Jerome did not do well in his race. He did not qualify for the finals.

Heartbroken, Jerome again faced another tough decision about his future. His decision was soon made for him. The Olympic Training Center informed him that he would not be invited to continue to train there. They were giving his spot to another younger runner.

Assuming his running career was now over, Jerome soon received another life-changing phone call. This time from Marlon Shirley, a Paralympic leg amputee athlete who had previously trained alongside Jerome at the Center. Shirley simply asked, “Hey, Jerome, do you want to go to the Athens Games?” And Jerome said, “How are you going to make this happen?” The answer he received was unexpected; he was going to be a guide runner for visually impaired athletes. “The first thing I thought about was a free trip to Athens, Greece,” Avery shared, “And yeah, why not? You can’t beat that.” He had three weeks to learn everything he could about being a guide runner. “So what I did was go onto a huge open field with nothing around me, put a blinder over my face, and started to run at full speed,” he explained, “After two steps, I panicked. I didn’t trust myself without being able to see. I imagined how difficult it would be for somebody with no sight to give their full trust to a guide.”

RUNNING IN SYNC

Guide runners serve as the “eyes” of a visually impaired athlete, connected by a piece of leather looped between the fingers. Together, they sprint down the track as one united pair, each occupying a lane which they must stay in. Every stride requires flawless rhythm, timing, and communication. One small misstep, one step over the line to the right or left, and they are disqualified. If the guide runner crosses the finish line before the athlete, the team is also disqualified.

Jerome explained the difficulty in having to adapt to each athlete’s stride. “I’ve had athletes that I’ve ran with that are 5’6 and others that are 6’4,” he said. Guide runners must mimic the athlete’s stride length and arm swing. Being an Olympic-level sprinter himself gives Jerome the ability to make these adjustments and to shout verbal cues during the race.



Jerome Avery and Lex Gillette

MEETING LEX GILLETTE

Upon first meeting 18-year-old Lex Gillette, Jerome and Lex instantly connected. They bonded over music and family, building a strong trusting relationship. “He is like my brother,” Avery expressed, “He’s an amazing guy.” With only three weeks to prepare, Avery and Gillette worked together to prepare Lex for the long jump. They developed a system in which Jerome would stand at the take-off board, clapping and shouting “FLY” at an increasingly faster rate as Lex approached the board.



Coaching the Wounded Warriors Program

Upon arriving in Athens, the track and field events were some of the first to take place. With 70,000 people watching, Lex stood at the far end of the runway while Jerome stood by the take-off board. When he was ready, Lex started running, and Jerome started clapping and screaming “FLY.” Gillette exploded down the narrow runway, listening to the rhythm of Avery’s voice. As the crowd watched, Avery was a split second too late to move out of the way. Gasps filled the air as Gillette collided into him. Both Lex and Jerome fell to the ground. Everything stopped. In that moment, they had to decide. Do they work through this or do they give up?

In the blink of an eye, Gillette jumped back onto his feet. Seeing this, Jerome stood back up as well. “Lex didn’t give up,” Jerome explains, “So why should I give up?” Undeterred, the pair was ready for their next attempt. Their hearts were pounding as Gillette sprinted down the track. This time, Avery swiftly moved out of the way at the last possible moment. The mostly Greek fans in the stadium erupted in cheers as the American Gillette’s jump was good enough for a silver medal.

Seeing Lex standing on the podium with a huge grin on his face was a major turning point for Avery. “He had the flag and was thanking me for being a part of it,” Jerome said, smiling, “That’s when I knew one door had closed and another had opened. That’s when my mantra, Success Through Selflessness, came alive. If he wins, I win. And that’s when I knew my journey as an individual athlete was over. But I was perfectly fine with it. The reason why I say that is because, mind you,

we’re in Greece. I’m working with a phenomenal athlete.”

Just when he thought he could now enjoy some time at a Greek beach, another guide runner became injured. Avery was asked to step in as an alternative for an athlete named Lacey Porter. Jerome ran with him in the 100, 200, and 400-meter races. Even without prior time to work together, they made it to the finals. In the end, Porter did not receive a medal, but he did break the American record. Happy with the success of his partners, Jerome retired for two years and became a performance coach.

RECEIVING HIS OWN MEDAL

The contributions and dedication that guide runners give to their athletes often go unnoticed, as they do not receive their own medal. However, this changed in 2009, when an announcement was made to the Paralympic world that guide runners would also be receiving medals. Upon hearing this, Avery jumped at the opportunity and in 2012, came out of retirement for the London Games. The idea of winning a medal was a thrilling prospect. However, he and Lex did not qualify for a medal. Jerome explained, “I was thinking about the medal. I was thinking about that opportunity, and I lost focus on our team. I lost focus on what got us there.”

For the next 2016 Paralympic Games held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Jerome was paired with an outstanding runner named David Brown. Determined not to make the same mistake as in London, Jerome and David worked hard to refine their technique. When they made it to the finals of the 100-meter race, Jerome remembered, “Gun goes off, and I am shouting, ‘Drive, drive, drive. There you go! Come on, David, you got this, let’s go!’” When they crossed the finish line first, the excitement felt unreal. “Mind you, he can’t see anything. But he threw up his hand, because he knew he had won that race,” Jerome exclaimed, adding “One thing that I always do after every race is shout to the crowd, ‘He can’t see you, but he can hear you. Let’s make some noise.’ I love to get the crowd hyped.” Standing on the podium with David, Jerome received his guide’s gold medal. His childhood dream had finally come true.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a delay in the Tokyo Games. Jerome wanted to train and prepare; however, for the first time, he became injured. The timing could not have been worse. David Brown made the difficult decision to train with another guide runner rather than train with an injured Jerome. If a guide runner cannot finish a race, the athlete is disqualified.

These days, Jerome stays physically fit by training six days a week and eating a “rainbow of vegetables.” He is currently preparing for the upcoming Los Angeles Paralympic Games in 2028. Jerome summarizes his track career as such: “This will be my last games, and I’m excited about it. I’m thankful for everything, especially this place here in Chula Vista, being a part of my life too, because I have met so many amazing people on this journey. I’ve traveled the world and met three presidents. I’m thankful for all the opportunities that I have had through running and working with so many amazing athletes, especially Lex Gillette. Lex has taught me about guiding, but he has also introduced me to the world of speaking engagements, how to handle business outside of track, and he encourages me to tell my story.”

In addition to their training and speaking engagements, Jerome and Lex have started a team building program, which is a perfect activity for their outgoing and likeable personalities. Their program brings sighted people onto a track and gives each partner the opportunity to experience what it feels like to be a guide runner and a blind runner. Participants quickly realize the importance of developing trust.

COACHING THE WOUNDED WARRIORS PROGRAM

Avery also continues his mission as the head track coach of the Special Operations Command for the annual Wounded Warrior Games (SOCOM) program. This program is similar to the Olympics but focuses on former military members, including those from the Navy, Air Force, Rangers, and Marines. Through this program, Avery connects with athletes by actively encouraging them, leading drills, and preparing them for competitions. “I grew up in the military,”

Avery added gratefully, “So being around these military guys has a special place in my heart.”

A PATH ALREADY PREPARED

Reflecting on his disappointments and successes, Avery said, “Life experiences prepared me for positions before I even knew it. What it entails is selfless leadership. I mean, my mother and my father, they were constantly helping people. Those are all the qualities I grew up with and know. It’s about being a team. Me being an athlete in an individual sport like track and field, I never realized that all these things that my parents had instilled in me growing up would play a part in me becoming an amazing guide and team player.”

For more information, you can reach Jerome Avery at Jeromeavery@gmail.com or www.JeromeAvery.com (All photos provided by Jerome Avery)

This is the third in a series of four articles on the Chula Vista Elite Training Center and its athletes. The first article on the history and organization of the Center can be found in issue 5. The interview with Lex Gillette can be found in issue 6. The fourth interview with Olympic Decathlete Harrison Williams will be found in the upcoming June issue 9.



Coach Avery sharing his knowledge

FC BAYERN ANNOUNCES

ITS FIRST RESIDENTIAL ACADEMY IN USA

Press Release from FC Bayern

NEW YORK (May 18, 2026) – FC Bayern is expanding its international youth development program and opening a residential academy in San Diego, California. The academy is a central component of the FC Bayern Pathway and marks the next milestone in the systematic development of international talent. It represents FC Bayern's first permanently established youth development structure in the United States.

Director of youth development Jochen Sauer: "Our approach is holistic: first-class training, personalized development plans and strong academic programs. Through close integration with our FC Bayern Campus in Munich, we ensure that young talents are consistently trained to FC Bayern standards. The academy also brings us even closer to our partner Los Angeles FC and strengthens the exchange in youth soccer."

Head of international youth football Lars Weichert: "San Diego offers an environment with a high concentration of talent, strong infrastructure and great development potential. We will consistently implement FC Bayern's training philosophy on the ground

to support ambitious young players in their next steps – whether that be towards college sport, professional football or international opportunities."

Operating in line with FC Bayern's training philosophy and methodology, the academy in San Diego will develop young players from the United States according to the same principles, standards and training approaches that shape player development at FC Bayern, whilst also offering a clear route via the FC Bayern Pathway to opportunities in professional soccer. This pathway embodies FC Bayern's structured approach to international youth development and links grassroots and elite soccer through clearly defined developmental stages. Players, families and partner clubs are to be offered authentic access to the expertise, methodology and values of the German record champions with a focus on long-term, player-centered development both on and off the pitch. One positive example is Maycon Cardozo, who made his first-team debut in Salzburg at the beginning of the year.

The FC Bayern U23s already held a training camp in San Diego in January. The Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center, an official U.S. Olympic & Paralympic training

site, offers ideal conditions for high-performance training and international talent development, confirming its suitability as a long-term location within FC Bayern's global strategy.

ABOUT FC

Bayern FC Bayern is one of the world's most successful sports organizations on and off the field. Since the club's foundation in 1900, FC Bayern has won 35 national championships, 20 domestic cups as well as six UEFA Champions League titles, making it the most successful German team in history.

FC Bayern is also renowned globally for its financial success, youth development and supporter culture. The club's unique ownership structure sees more than 430,000 club members own a majority share, more than any other sports organization in the world. With over 1 billion interested worldwide, FC Bayern is one of the strongest brands in global sports.





ARTIST LUPITA ZHAHBAZI

1). *Lupita, how long have you lived in the South Bay?*
Since the 60's. Our first home was in San Ysidro, then National City, then Chula Vista, and now Eastlake.

2). *When did your love of creating art begin?*
I've always drawn since childhood, so I always knew that my dream was to create. The one person that got me to open my imagination and to be creative was my father. He was an excellent storyteller.

3). *Why did you pick collage as your artistic expression?*

The first time I was introduced to collage was in elementary school. Many of our homework assignments were to cut and paste imagery from magazines. Then I began to be interested in the hands-on motor skills, cutting, pasting and creating my own stories. I did get into a lot of trouble by my aunt, when I went to visit her. I used to cut out her beautiful magazines. In high school, going to the library was a pleasant moment, since I got to check out art books. One of my favorite artists was Romare Bearden. One of his interests was collage. After seeing his work, I knew that my style of art was going to be collage.

4). *What lessons did you learn early in your art journey?*

My lesson was to never be discouraged about challenging myself to be a successful visual artist.

5). *What inspires your art?*

Many things that speak to me! My heritage, being able to express my ethnic roots and nature. Recently, I have begun to focus on environmental degradation themes. Much of my artwork also involves symbols like birds, butterflies, and things that express freedom. Another common symbol is keys. Keys symbolize letting go, new beginnings, good luck and love.

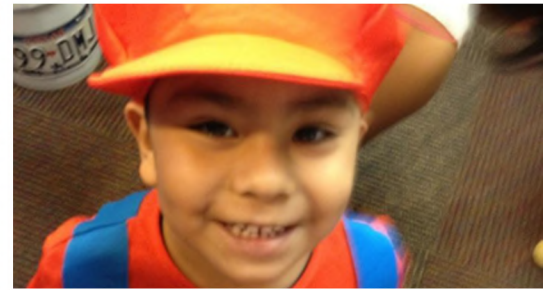
6). *What advice do you have for new artists?*

Be involved in the community and art groups. The rewards of having a creative life really are priceless.

IG @lupita_shahbazi_art

Fun 4 All:

SEBASTIAN BELLO



I have spent my life driving north and south on Hwy 5 to and from Chula Vista. One particular landmark will forever be engraved in my memory. Opening in the 1970's a giant sign with white lettering on a baby blue background announced the Fun 4 All Family Fun Park. A place where children and adults alike could enjoy miniature golf, go karts, little boats, an arcade, and the intimidating batting cages. I was probably 5 years old the first time I experienced it firsthand with my brother and parents. After driving past it so many times, it already held a mythical status in my mind.

To preface my story, I must explain that I was never one for physical activities when I was little. I have always been quite the homebody and relished the technology that surrounded me. On the other hand, my brother was athletic growing up, and always enjoying outdoor hobbies such as skateboarding with his friends. This difference between brothers is significant for the rest of my story.

After these many years, some of the details are a blur and

difficult to distinguish between my imagination and my actual memories, except for one specific moment. My brother and I decided to try our luck in the batting cages. After receiving bats and helmets that were too big, my brother entered the cage first. Without warning, the machine hurled a ball over the plate. My athletic brother succeeded at hitting several in a row.

It was my turn next. I took my position at the side of the plate, pulled the bat back over my shoulder, and was terrified of the balls flying at me. And then my worse nightmare happened. A ball hit me smack dab in the shoulder. In hindsight it probably didn't hurt that badly, but to 5-year-old me, I felt like I had been cut down by gun fire while storming Normandy Beach like I saw in the movies.

My reaction was filled with all the dramatic theatrics you might expect from a 5-year-old. I made it very clear that I would never ever be on the receiving end of a pitching machine again. Aside from this horrifically traumatic event I don't remember much more about

Fun 4 All because it sadly closed in Oct 2015. I was only 7-years old.

However, the sign has remained on the property all these years. Each time I drive, it serves to remind me of the encounter with that violent pitching machine. For the rest of the children in Chula Vista, I am sure they have more positive memories of playing with family or attending birthday parties. Fun-For-All was a nice, safe place filled with excited screams and children running from one activity to the next.

When Fun 4 All closed, Chula Vista lost something unique. It was our fun center. It was a weekend go-to place for children with pockets filled with tokens. Big corporate chains such as Dave n Busters and Round 1 have tried to fill that void but will never be the same as what we had. Fun-For-All serves as a strong reminder that we need to support our favorite locally-owned restaurants, coffee shops, and places of entertainment because once they are gone, they don't come back. We are left with only our memories.

NEW BOOK RELEASES FROM

Three Past Contributors



Alfie communicates through an iPad. Lisa is observant, expressive, and a bit unsure about how to connect. Their first day of school could have been just another ordinary day...but a quiet act of curiosity transforms it into the beginning of something special. This tender and honest book, co-written by Alfonso Julian Camacho, who is nonspeaking autistic, and his best friend, Elizabeth Churchill, opens a window into communication, empathy, and the kind of friendship that changes lives. Alfie and Lisa invites readers to see the beauty of difference--and the joy of human connection.

Alfonso's award-winning journalism can be found in issues 4 and 6 of www.TheTowneLocalChulaVista.com magazine

Alfie and Lisa's First Day of School can be purchased on Amazon.



Cleto and the Magic of Music is a heartwarming bilingual children's book. It invites young readers to discover music as a universal language that connects emotions, imagination, and creativity. Inspired by the author's own children, Cleto's journey encourages curiosity, joy, and the magic of artistic expression from an early age.

Multi-talented artist and author Margarita Hanke is featured in the May 2025 issue of TheTowneLocalBonita.com magazine.

To purchase, contact: margaritahanke1@gmail.com

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The award-winning article about Faride's amazing work at Bonita Serenity Horse Therapy Center can be found in the June 2025 Issue of TheTowneLocalBonita.com magazine.

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Student Government



*Senate Members: Top row (l to r) Scott Nimmo, Clarissa Montoya, Margaret Phuss, Tim Hart, Sue Saffer, Lori Zanetta, Krissi Elrick, Teri Wyborny. Sitting: Judy Hart, Chris Daily, Tina Garguilo
Not Pictured: Debbie Leadon, Mike Burford, James DeBello, Mari Ostendorf.*

A LOOK BACK AT BONITA VISTA HIGH SCHOOL

by Elizabeth Hoffman, BVHS Class of 2027

In the fall of 1966, a new high school opened its doors on the corner of Otay Lakes Road and East H Street, adding another to Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD). At the time, Bonita Vista High School (BVHS) only had grades 10-12 available, and the home of the Barons began with Robert Geyer as its principal. Geyer had formerly served as Hilltop High School's principal, his experience in the district playing a role in his selection. David Noe would be the first Vice Principal of BVHS with Jane Mitchell serving as the first Girls' Vice Principal—a now outdated and removed position. As it has progressed, BVHS has hit

notable milestones such as in 2011 when it was recognized as the top school in SUHSD and now, in 2026, when BVHS has been recognized as a California Distinguished School.

While academic and extracurricular standards have been consistent at BVHS, the scenery of the school has shifted drastically since its opening, now having modern construction changes that impact day-to-day experiences for students and staff. Many alumni and visitors remember BVHS by the large tree in the middle of the quad, a landmark that was cut down prior to current infrastructural development.

The lockers that line the halls of BVHS also stopped being used just prior to COVID-19, so now they are empty, sitting simply as history in the halls.

For BVHS alumni Mike Dullea, class of 1990, these lockers were a source of community during the few minutes in between classes. Other forms of community, like sports, were abundant in his three years at the school, too.

“You would get assigned a locker (you didn’t get a choice), end up wherever, and have short conversations with people around your lockers,” Dullea said. “Because of the lack of technology, we were more connected with one another. There was more socialization—a different level of connectedness than you see today. There was a very positive energy.”

Amongst the community built at BVHS were traditions that students partook in together, from alleged witchcraft to rivalries. Although these superstitions and trends have withered away as time has gone on, the intensity of beliefs at BVHS decades ago was strong.

Field and Physical Education (PE) at the school, but as of a couple of years ago, a new stadium and field were built to allow for more enriching sports experiences. Thousands have run on the track since, and it has become a staple for several sports teams in their practices and matches. The stadium was built alongside the track to better accommodate sports games, allowing for thousands of spectators to gather and support athletics, from girls flag football—a newer and very successful sport at BVH—to field hockey, tackle football, soccer, and lacrosse. Solar panels were also put in the parking lot.

Developments that have yet to be completed—but are expected to be soon—include the quad, a new dance room, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) classrooms. Facilities are improving around BVHS, more strongly aligning with the reputation the school had in years past of being one of the best institutions in the area.

“Back then, BVHS was considered one of the top schools, if not the top school, in South county. A lot of



“If you went out on Prospect Road, they used to talk about monsters and devil worship. There were always superstitions, like ‘don’t go out there at night.’ And of course you’d go out there anyway. Fun stuff like that would be done,” Dullea said.

As superstitions like the aforementioned have phased out, so have certain infrastructural features of BVHS. For example, dirt used to characterize Track &

people considered it the rich man’s high school back then. Everyone envied Bonita; we were the rich school and had better resources,” Dullea said.

This idea was corroborated by alum and current BVHS teacher Marissa Medrano—formerly Marissa Rivera before marrying a fellow alum—who was in the class of 1990 with Dullea. Academics, in

particular, have had notably consistent success, with BVHS pioneering the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in SUHSD. This led to others throughout the district to look up to BVHS as an educational institution. Another way BVHS pioneered education at this time was through the Special Education department, having the first program begin in 1990.

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“BVHS was always known for its academics. We are still the only school in the district that offers both Advanced Placement (AP) and IB courses, and the number of courses available has increased since 1990! My year had three Valedictorians,” Medrano said. “I’m happy to see how involved students still are with sports and the wide range of clubs that are offered, even more so than when I was a student.”

Like BVHS’s course selection and infrastructure, prominent staff on campus have come and gone, leaving their unique marks on students. More recent principals include Dr. Jeffrey Schafer, Ramon Leyva, Bettina Batista, Roman Del Rosario, Lee Romero, and currently Dr. Alexander Salazar—former Bonita Vista Middle principal who has thus far shown strong dedication to the BVHS community. While alumni might not recognize more modern administration, the names of teachers who have been at BVHS for decades might sound more familiar. Teachers like Eric Helle and Frank Schneeman have shaped classes upon classes of BVHS alumni in courses such as English, Journalism, and Government.

Helle in specific led BVHS’s Speech & Debate team for 15 years before recently transitioning his role to English and Theater teacher Rosamaria Sias, an Eastlake High alumni. This year, BVHS Speech & Debate is sending over a dozen students to the State

Championship and seven to the National Championship, respectively. This kind of success is nothing new to the programs, something emphasized by Dullea.

“The [students] involved in Speech & Debate and academic decathlons were winning awards, particularly in English. We definitely won a big award during my time at BVHS,” Dullea said.

The Speech & Debate program now makes up around 50 of over 2,000 Barons. Hundreds of others are involved in different extracurriculars, from the acclaimed Vocal Music Department (VMD) to sports and clubs.

BVHS has historically had programs with notable performance on local, state, and even national levels. In the realm of arts, Speech & Debate, VMD’s Sound Unlimited and Music Machine, theater, mariachi, and more flourish on campus to this day. A key highlight occurred months ago when Music Machine and Sound Unlimited had their 60th anniversary, something elaborated upon in issues 9, 11, and 12 found at www.TheTowneLocalBonita.com.



BVHS Crusader newspaper staff

The Barons also show notable strength in athletics, with recent accomplishments highlighting the expertise of both coaches and athletes. Surprisingly, a controversy arose this year with boys soccer as it pertained to school administration and California Interscholastic Federation (CIF).

The strength of the team to get to its level was undeniable; on the books they won the championship, but an “administrative error” resulted in their title being rescinded. It was an occurrence that left players, parents, and BVHS at large disappointed.

On the brighter side, baseball and softball are also flourishing at BVHS, both currently having winning records and moving farther along. In the fall, girls flag football proved once again to be one of the strongest sports at BVHS and one of the strongest teams in the sport not only in SUHSD, but California in general.

One of the best ways to describe BVHS—even used in the school’s own mission statement—is diverse, with a variety of extracurriculars and experiences available for students. The Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) program at Bonita thrives alongside athletics, BVHS’s multimedia production Bonita Vista Experience (BVX), and cultural clubs like the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán club (M.E.C.h.A.).

At the end of the day, BVHS has shown dedication to fulfilling their mission statement with “rigorous, comprehensive, and enriching academic programs; diversified extra-curricular programs designed to engage and inspire all students...a culture that fosters intellectual risk-taking and the exploration of new ideas...[and] partnerships with students, staff, families, and community members.” As both Dullea and Medrano emphasize, community members

—close friends, teammates, and fellow Barons—are what truly define the high school experience at BVHS.

For Medrano, it was the recognition of this that led her to come back to BVHS to teach. Being involved in athletics like cheerleading while also maintaining strong academic connections resulted in a fulfilling high school experience—something she wanted to foster in students beyond her.

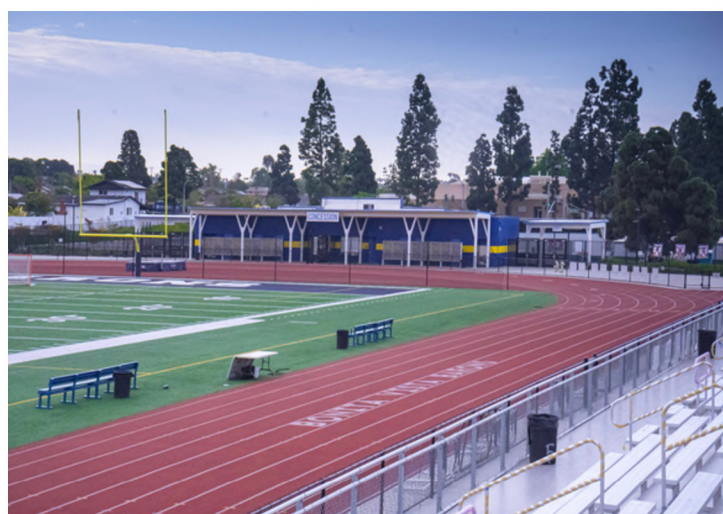
“BVHS is like home. Even after I graduated, I still visited two of my counselors that I was an aide to each year. My teachers were all great mentors! So, as I was earning my Bachelor’s and Teaching Credential, I always hoped one day I would come back “home” to teach,” Medrano said. “Once a Baron, always a Baron!”

An almost identical sentiment was shared by Dullea, who highlighted the community he found in sports to be his primary source of fulfillment in high school. Directly facilitated by the school or not, the experiences shared within the walls of BVHS have shaped generations of students.

“BVHS was a very good experience. I never really loved school—it was not my favorite thing to do—but people were very involved. You belonged to different groups, clubs, and sports teams. It was an interesting and fun time,” Dullea said. “The friendships, the bonds, and the people were by far the most meaningful thing in school. When we come across each other now, we get excited to see each other. Those memories, those shared experiences are the most important thing.”



Principal Dr. Jeffrey Schaffer



New athletic field and stadium. Photo by Leonardo Nguyen

UNIFIED ESPORTS LEAGUE:

BUILDING TEAMWORK



Society has long worried about videogames removing youths from social interaction. Hours upon hours spent at home in isolation, their eyes glued a computer screen. Matt Iske and Tony Rubino have turned a potential problem into an amazing benefit. Welcome to Unified eSports League!

Jeff Bettger: Ok guys, you have my attention and curiosity. Tell me about your program.

Tony Rubino: Thanks Jeff. It began when Matt and I met casually over coffee. He explained that eSports have become an international craze, with teams competing against each other within organized leagues. The teams meet in person to practice and to compete. They have jerseys and team names, just like any other sport. In fact, more people watched the World Championships in eSports last year than watched the Super Bowl!

My background is with Special Olympics. I told Matt that eSports would work perfectly for people with

special needs. It would give them an opportunity to come together and make friends. We agreed to meet and go to the regional center. I introduced Matt to the executive director, Mark, and explained what we were planning. Luckily, Mark was familiar with eSports because his grandson was involved. We next filed the application to become a vendor of the regional center. It took us probably a year and a half or so to find out what box we fit in and how the funding would work for the ratio. We have a 1:3 ratio, that is one coach for every three participants.

Once we got all that finalized, we started to secure some sites. Our first site was at the Abraxas School where Matt works. We asked the principal if we could use Matt's computer room after school. We would outfit it with gaming chairs and college frame jerseys and motivational signs and use the room from 3:00 to 5:00, without interrupting Matt's daytime classes. The principal agreed and we were off and running!

Matt Iske: Kids love to play eSports. Where they've introduced eSports curriculum in schools, they have found statistically that attendance and grade point averages have gone up. It's the same reason why kids go to school for football, basketball, baseball, soccer, or tennis. It gives them some identity in the school and gives them some camaraderie with their fellow students. And that's what eSports does, particularly as popular as it is worldwide.

Jeff: What are the benefits of your program?

Matt: There is a ton of evidence that shows that playing sports increases students' resilience, ability to communicate, and ability to integrate into society. The very same benefits exist in eSports, and that's what we focus on with our clients. I often say it's not really about getting better at the game. It's about learning the skills that translate through the game.

What we do with our clients in eSports is we create an education plan for each of them. Our organization invented something called the ITEP, which is similar to an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). Our ITEP is an Individualized Technology Education Plan. It's an informal document that we use to add structure and rigor to help our clients make progress towards specific goals. We work very closely with the family and with the client

Jeff: When were the first eSports tournaments held?

Matt: I would say it goes all the way back to Pac-Man and Pong and those types of games. People start getting together to compete with those games the same way that they competed in traditional sports. And then with time, the games became more and more sophisticated. Games such as Halo and Counter-Strike have more layers of strategy. Back in the day, people would bring together their computers physically because the internet wasn't fast back in the late 90s, early 2000s. People would bring their big blocky

computer tower and they'd all sit around a big table, plug in their computers, and all connect to the same network so they could play.

Then as the internet got faster, things started to spread out. You started seeing online tournaments. But during COVID, people were working and playing from home. They were not getting that in-person interaction, especially those people with special needs. They need to be able to get out of the home and get engaged with their peers. Our program gives them an opportunity for them to break down that social isolation by giving them the opportunity to make a friend, to be a part of a team, and to be a part of a community. We have lots of coaches and staff in the room to reinforce those social skills that translate directly to real life.

Jeff: How did you organize your program?

Matt: We wanted the program to allow somebody with a disability to thrive and fit in that environment. Every single game is chosen with the purpose of building a certain skill. We have a really cool game called Overcooked. It is a very simple game with just a few buttons. It's a cartoon kitchen game in which team members must chop the lettuce, chop the tomatoes, put the plates down, and wash the dishes. It forces team members to communicate the same way anybody would in a workplace or in a classroom. Players learn to take direction, give direction, and collaborate with others. We've seen tremendous success using this game in helping clients make progress towards communication and collaboration goals.

Jeff: That's fantastic! Does one team win the game?



Tony: Yes, they get points as a team and one team wins, one team loses. It's a great learning tool. Nobody likes to lose, especially those with special needs. It can be difficult for them to control their emotions. So, it's a very simple learning tool, but the ramifications are significant.

Jeff: How often do you have tournaments?

Matt: We have in-house tournaments. We have a total of 6 sites right now in San Diego and Imperial County. Those teams will have monthly tournaments with different games to practice. Now, once a year, we put on our big grand championship. The players will count down the days until the competition

Tony: We just had our big tournament in San Marcos on February 21. We had 160 people in the audience watching Super Smash Brothers on a big 20-foot screen. And Jeff, we had parents and friends watching the tournament for hours. We even had 500 people watching it on live stream. Even the CEO and CFO of the Poway Chamber of Commerce attended.

Matt: We had families drive two hours from El Centro to participate in this thing. Otherwise, most of our clients would never be able to showcase their skills and all the work they have done to improve themselves emotionally. It's a tremendous event. A lot of people in the audience walked away seeing their life differently after that event.

Jeff: Do you find that the team members communicate with each other during the week?

Matt: Absolutely! The other day, I was calling a family, just doing a regular check-in. I asked, "Hey, how's Johnny doing with the program?" The mother was excited to tell me that he had made a friend who was also 22 years old. But the friend had to leave the program. She then explained that they had exchanged phone numbers while at the program. This was the first time ever in his life that somebody outside of his close family had texted him to hang out.

"I have seen such amazing growth in my son, Max's interactions. He loves being with the older kids and rises to the challenge of fitting in with them. Coach Cameron is the best. He gets the challenge and supports him until he is able to overcome!"

Parent Testimonial: Gretchen



Jeff: Tell me more about your participants.

Matt: We work with clients ages 8 to adult, with a broad range of abilities. We have some clients with physical disabilities, some in wheelchairs, some who are otherwise high functioning. We work with people who have Asperger's, Down syndrome, autism, fragile X, and Traumatic Brain Injury. We have one client in El Cajon who has been able to participate in our program because we utilize our technology in coordination with the eye tracker technology he uses to manipulate an iPad and an Xbox. The family has told us that ours is the only program he has been able to participate in.

Jeff: What would you say is your organization's biggest need right now?

Matt: I would say communication with families. I think that the families in the special needs community don't have a lot of time to look for things. They don't have a lot of time to find opportunities. We're working on better strategies to get the word out to make families aware of not only our program, but lots of other great services and support systems. We are shocked to find out that many families don't even know about the Regional Center. It provides free physical therapy, occupational therapy, job services, living services, all sorts of stuff. There's lots of services out there that would support these families.



Jeff: I understand you will begin a league in Chula Vista?

Matt: Yes, we originally started in Poway. Then we expanded to Rancho Bernardo, Ramona, El Cajon, El Centro, and San Marcos. Physical location is important to families. We have had families pay \$100 a day to Uber their kid from Oceanside to Poway and back because there's nothing like our program in their area. But what that means is there's lots of families in Oceanside who can't afford \$100 a day for an Uber. So we're working hard to establish more sites. Chula Vista is very interesting to us. We've searched far and wide and finally found some nice data that outlines some zip codes and where people are. We've cross-referenced that with some other things and found that there's three major areas in San Diego with the highest concentration of special needs families.

Tony: Chula Vista and the South Bay are the biggest by far. Escondido is another and the third is the triangle over on the coast between Carlsbad, Oceanside and Vista. Those are the three top areas that we're really focused on, but Chula Vista is definitely #1. It has so many families that would qualify for our program for free!

Jeff: What are your long-term goals?

Matt: Our recent big tournament really added a lot of structure to what we do. Now we have teams with jerseys, everything is culminating during this big event. It also helped our

players see their own life differently. They were able to understand that getting on stage is nerve-racking for anybody, especially for them. They already have so much difficulty and for them to overcome that is very inspiring. So those competitions and those championships are key to what we do. There are 20 other regional centers in the state of California. When it's all said and done, we'll probably have 20 to 30 teams here in San Diego. That means 20 to 30 different sites where people are playing, practicing, and competing. That lays the foundation for San Diego and Imperial County to have a Southern California championship. The ultimate goal is to have a California state championship where you have 600 teams competing at Disneyland.

For more information: contact Matt Iske at mathew@unifiedesl.com or Tony Rubino at ajrubino@hotmail.com

"Best Program Ever! Carson goes 2x a week Tuesday/Thursday. Carson tries to convince me every morning it's a gaming day. Lol. He loves attending. Your TEAM goes above and beyond every day making modifications or changes whenever Carson needs them. Carson does his walking lap, cleans his controller, makes sure his helper cleans their controller, makes sure the guys put his gaming system in the locked closet (he even checks their work!) Carson has even played a couple times with other students! Carson's hardest part is leaving @5 PM but every day it's a little bit better for him knowing he can come back. Thank you!"

Parent Testimonial: Jennifer

"Before the program, I used to play at home by myself. ...I had no friends to play with. ...Now, I love to play video games here (in the UESL program) with my new friends."

Client testimonials: Ernie

TRIBE COLD PLUNGE

On the corner of Lane and Fenton, near the Amazon distribution facility and many small businesses, you will find Tribe Cold Plunge. A unique business providing cold and heat therapy run by a unique owner. Shannon Daniel is retired military with years in special forces. As such, he developed a myriad of aches and pains in his body. After seeing the benefits of a cold plunge, we were convinced it could help others.

Shannon Daniel: Originally, we opened this place to be a recovery studio for people with physical issues, inflammation, soreness, stuff like that. And then I found out real quick it also helps with anxiety, depression, mental health, PTSD, all the things that I've been fighting in the military. At first, people are hesitant to get into cold water. It is understandable that people don't want to put themselves into an uncomfortable position. I've worked with Border Patrol, the police department, and the fire departments. I have a contract with Southwestern College for their athletes.

I also run a men's group that helps with mental resilience and mental health. After we do really hard workout together on Saturday mornings, guys open up and talk about things that are going on in their life, things that they hadn't talked about to anyone else.

Jeff Bettger: Tell me about the cold plunge. So if someone walks in, what happens? How long do they stay in the water? Can you mention some of the benefits?

Shannon: Yeah, We have three different therapies here. The one that I found very beneficial to me is putting myself into very cold water. Honestly, like everybody else, I hate being cold. It's not fun, but it is life-changing once you do it. So I realized the first time I did it there's



something in a person's head. This surprised me because I've done a lot of really hard things in life. Why is cold water, of all things, causing such a huge deal mentally? So I stuck it out. You know, you can do anything you put your mind to. I stuck it out for a week. It was a difficult week, but then I realized inflammation was gone, soreness was gone, back pain was gone, shoulder pain was gone. I could wake up and I didn't feel like I was a 90-year-old man anymore. My movement, my flexibility, my joints, everything was probably the best it had been in 15 years.

I actually went on a trip to Boston a couple days after and it just all started to lock back up. So I realized as miserable as the cold is, there's definitely healing about it. So I got back in. And then with the opposite side of cold, we have saunas for heat therapy.

Jeff: So when I come in, how long do you stay in the plunge?

Shannon: We only recommend 3 to 5 minutes. It's different for everybody. I have a couple different temperatures. It depends on a lot of things, such as hydration level and body fat. I just recommend to get in until you feel that steady, slight chill. Once you get that, you can get out. Some people will stay 15 minutes. Some people do three. All I recommend is go to at least two. The first minute your body is screaming at you, your nervous system is firing, like at least two minutes. After two, your body starts to relax, you'll get your breath back, and then you can find that peace.

Jeff: Is there any person who should not, for medical reasons, get into the cold plunge?

Shannon: I'm not a doctor. That's definitely something they should consult with their doctor. I've had six-year-olds in here. I've had 95-year-old men in here. I've had the gambit. People with high blood pressure, low blood pressure. Once again, I'm not a doctor, so if you think you have some medical issues, definitely consult your doctor. It is a shock to your nervous system, so I would say if you have any kind of nervous issues definitely consult a doctor.

Jeff: What kind of reaction do you see the first time they get in the water?

Shannon: I've seen everything. I've had people hop in and they don't make a sound, they don't make a twitch. On the other hand, I have a friend who was going through a lot of challenges. He got in and it just hit him really hard. He had an emotional flood and he started crying. This actually happens quite often. I've had moments where I've cried in it and I've had moments where I've laughed in it. I guess it depends on what's happening in your life at that time. It is really a release.

Jeff: Tell me more about the heat therapy.

Shannon: Oh yeah, the other thing we have is the sauna. The sauna is amazing. It works on the complete opposite spectrum.

It is essentially like an exercise induced heat therapy. You sit in it at about 200 degrees. It's like getting an hour and a half long workout in about 15 minutes. So that's nice for people who don't have the amount of time. It's very good for longevity of health. The health benefits of a sauna go back forever. So anything with vasoconstriction and vasodilation, which is the blood moving, is going to be amazing for you. It opens stuff up. It's moving blood. It's providing oxygen to tissues that isn't normally there. It's hot enough where it releases what's called a heat shock protein. A heat shock protein is a protein that's released in your body that helps eat damaged white blood cells. Damaged white blood cells in your body are essentially cancerous. So I'm not saying it kills cancer, but there is some research that it helps fight cancer.

Jeff: That's amazing. So is it the case that you do the cold plunge and then the sauna?

Shannon: It's up to you. There are people that do contrast therapy. I do it maybe once every other month, or if something's a little off or I don't feel good. It'll shock my nervous system, then I'll kick it back up. We provided so many options for people, they can find whatever works for them. Me personally, I cannot cold plunge after noon, or I won't sleep. The dopamine spike that I have from a cold plunge is like pre-workout and coffee. It'll keep me up all day. The sauna, once I hop out of the sauna, I'm beat. I'm ready to go to bed.

Jeff: I believe you have a third type of therapy?

Shannon: Yes, we also have compression therapy. Compression therapy is for anybody that's sitting down too much and needs to move. It's essentially like a sleeve for your leg that provides a deep massage so it keeps blood flowing. They are boots with hip pads, so they push in pressure points which get blood flowing. It's great for runners and people with tendinitis in their elbows and stuff like that.

Jeff: For people to come here, do you offer memberships?

Shannon: We do. We offer a couple different ones. We have a two-week trial membership and also an unlimited membership for all of our clients. And then with the unlimited membership, we have community partners Gallegos Jiu Jitsu, Rev Body, Yoga Lab, Edge, and a few more partners coming on board soon.

Jeff: Shannon, thank you for your time and thank you for helping our neighbors improve their health. As we

all get older, those aches and pain start building up. It's nice to know that you provide solutions that can help us stay active. Tribe Cold Plunge is open Mon-Sat. at 871 Harold Place #108, Chula Vista, CA 91914. Reach them at 619-324-0076 or tribecoldplunge@yahoo.com



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