# ODTHIL

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**A Monthly Community Newspaper** 

**MARCH 2024** 

# **Milan Capital** and Orange agree to explore "alternate" uses for dump site

By Tina Richards

Milan Capital, the owner of the Mara Brandman Arena and the mounds of construction waste along Santiago Canyon Road (Sully-Miller site), entered into an agreement with the City of Orange to extend the expiration dates of two housing project applications. The "pause" will give both parties time to evaluate nonresidential uses of the property.

The agreement was approved by the city council, Feb 13. In return for the extension of staff's review of the applications and Milan's expected compliance with city requests, the property owner agrees not to sue the city.

The agreement offers a temporary "common ground" to the city and Milan, who have different interpretations of state law regarding the housing applications. At issue is the scope of the materials Milan must provide to the city, and the city's duty to process and approve the project. Milan asserts that the application must be processed pursuant to California Government Code, the so-called "builders remedy" provision. The city asserts that it doesn't.

## **Incomplete applications**

Last fall, the Mulholland Drive company filed an application to build 118 units on the arena site. Milan filed an application to build 231 units (Creekside Village) on the Sully-Miller parcel. The city responded with a request for additional information and noted, "A preliminary application shall be deemed to have been submitted when an applicant has provided all of the information listed under government code."

The applicants balked at the suggestion that a more detailed plan must be submitted, and insisted that the city was bound to approve the applications. The resulting agreement extends the relevant statutes of limitation to file applications and/or lawsuits.

"Why now?" OPA resident Dru Whitefeather asked during the council hearing. "Why is Milan looking for a good faith agreement now? It put my neighborhood through 12 years of a Supreme Court case and two referendums. For me, good faith would be donating the property to the neighborhood." Whitefeather is one of several citizens working with the Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) to compel Milan to clean up the dumpsite. He reminded the council that the Sully-Miller site is under LEA's jurisdiction, and nothing can be done Photo by Tony Richards

Treavor Saunders, sponsored by Elks Lodge 1475, was named the Duke of Orange, Feb. 17, taking over the title from JC Cortez (left), who served as the first-ever nobleman of the city. Saunders engaged the crowd in a sing-along on his way to claim the crown. See photos, page 16.

# OUSD Board overrides constituent concerns, grants license to charter school for district land

**By Tina Richards** 

The Orange Unified Board majority approved a license agreement with Orange County Classical Academy (OCCA), at its Feb. 8 meeting, giving that charter school use of a portion of the district's Peralta property for up to 25 years.

The agreement, wherein OCCA will pay the district an annual fee of \$275,000 for use of the existing gym and loosely-defined "ground space," bears all the characteristics of a lease, but entering into a lease agreement requires approval by a supermajority of the board. A supermajority on the OUSD board is five votes; only four trustees supported the OCCA deal. A license agreement requires only four votes to pass.

The four approving votes were Rick Ledesma, John Ortega, Angie Rumsey and Madison Miner, who noted that the district needs the income and that the property

is not being used right now. The dissenting votes were cast by Kris Erickson, Andrea Yamasaki and Ana Page, who suggested their colleagues were prioritizing a charter school over the best interests of the district and its students.

## **Equal opportunities**

The agreement will enable OCCA to open a high school campus to augment its current K-8 program. OUSD is using state legislation to explain its non-competitive approach to the agreement. Under Proposition 39, school districts must provide facilities to charter schools based on the number of students enrolled who would otherwise attend district schools. The goal is to provide equivalent accommodations for all district students, regardless of what school they attend.

Most districts comply by sharing space or entering into shortterm leases. Charters are expected to pay their fair share of the resources they use. OUSD entered into an in-lieu agreement with OCCA in 2021 to provide equivalent funding instead of space. This new agreement overrides

The license agreement was applauded by OCCA students, parents and staff, who attended the board meeting in full force to support the "lease." It was, however, roundly disparaged by OUSD constituents. Of the comments made during the public hearing on the agreement, not a single OUSD parent, teacher or taxpayer not affiliated with the charter supported the deal.

# Affordable housing?

The OUSD public and board minority raised a number of concerns, among them, questions about OCCA's ability to pay for

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THE BUCKS

**NEWS INSIDE** 

The list of donors to the OUSD recall campaign (both for and against) illustrates who's got the power and who's got the pluck.

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# A CENTURY OF SERVICE

Iconic Orange nonprofit approaches 100th anniversary new purpose.

See Friendly Center, page 7

# **A NIGHT AT** THE MUSEUM

Hilbert serves as a vibrant venue for Old Towne annual meeting.

See OTPA, page 8

# **MUDDY** WATERS

OUSD board majority selects contractor with questionable past for preliminary VPHS pool work.

See OUSD, page 9

# "Yes" signs stolen; "No" signs are microchipped

reports that its "Vote Yes" yard signs are being stolen at a brisk rate. Since ballots were mailed out Feb. 5, more than 100 signs have gone missing, most of them removed from private property.

A large sign erected in a back yard near Chapman Elementary was stolen by individuals who, the homeowner says, were obviously prepared. The thieves had to scale a six-foot wall and then cut the zip ties holding the banner in place with a sharp object.

'You don't need a knife to steal yard signs," she says. "This was not a random act."

The "parental rights" committee installed tracking devices in its signs. A paid consultant tracks the missing signs and calls law enforcement to help retrieve them. In one reported case, a

The OUSD Recall committee school where a known "Yes" supporter worked. The Sheriff was called and told she had stolen the sign. She was taken aside and interrogated. She did not steal the sign; it turned up in the principal's office. The principal had removed it because it had been illegally erected on school property.

In a similar case, the consultant

and Madison Miner came to a family's front door, accused them of stealing a sign and called the police, who responded. The sign, it turned out, had been posted on the homeowner's property and, therefore, taken down.

When the errant signs are tracked to an address, the consultant videotapes the "suspect."



missing sign was tracked to a A large "Yes on Recall" banner was stolen from a back yard.

# JE FAIS **JE FAIS**

wedding at VPHS is perfectly pitched by Madame Pazargadi's

See Cloches de Mariage,

**FOLLOW US at Foothills Sentry** 



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# Campaign donations illuminate the story behind the OUSD Recall

By Brian Hewes, Cerritos News

Voters are deciding whether to recall two Orange Unified School District board members, Rick Ledesma and Madison Miner, and the cash is rolling in for both

The campaign in favor of the recall, Citizens for the Recall of Ledesma, Ortega, Miner, and Rumsey, is far outpacing the committee against the recall, with nearly \$220,000 in donations as of Jan. 25, collected from over 500 donors, a large majority small amount donations.

A little over 10% of the donations were over \$1,000, with the Orange Unified Education Association donating \$15,000.

### The bucks start here

The campaign committee against the recall, "No Recall, Parents Protecting Our Kids Against the Recall of OUSD Boardmembers," (No Recall) had collected nearly \$155,000 through Jan. 2. In contrast to the donors in favor of the recall, many donors to No Recall include wealthy highpowered Orange County business owners, donations from an obscure political action committee, donations from an exclusive club known for its uber-conservative stance, and many campaign consulting companies known for their high-profile clients.

The June 30, 2023 campaign finance report showed the No Recall committee collected over \$18,000; including \$2,200 from Temescal Canyon LLC, \$1,000 from Dmitriy Chebotarev, CEO

# **Orange Santiago Creek Commission** members named

The newly formed Santiago Creek Commission welcomed seven inaugural members with an announcement delivered by Mayor Dan Slater at the Feb. 13 Orange City Council meeting.

Pamela Galera, David Hillman and Susan Tillou were appointed to a term ending June 30, 2027. Addison Adams, Robert Baca, Michael Knight, and Brendon Moeller will serve until June 30,

The randomly selected twoyear terms will allow members' four-year terms to be staggered.

The commission was created by a city ordinance adopted in 2023 and is intended to pay long overdue attention to the city's largest waterway. The commission will advise the city council on issues related to the preservation or enhancement of the creek's ecological, scenic, historical and recreational resources, excluding private property and parks. It will establish relationships with nonprofits and public/private agencies that are stakeholders in the creek area.

With input from the community, the commission will identify potential public projects in and along the creek and make recommendations to the city council. It will also advise the council on the acquisition of private property if it becomes available.

Commission meetings will be announced in advance and will be open to the public.

of Newport Beach-based Vosht Capital, and \$6,000 from attorney Shawn Steel.

The Sept. 30, 2023 report showed the No Recall committee collecting just over \$38,000, with \$15,500 of that total coming from Service First Inc. with the "other" contribution checkbox checked. Service First is owned by Mark Bucher, who also heads the California Policy Center and the Family Action PAC. Bucher is also affiliated with the Orange County Classical Academy charter school.

### Local check mates

By Dec. 31, 2023, No Recall had collected \$65,000 in donations; the largest was \$5,000 from Mesa Management, \$5,000 from attorney and Orange resident Fred Whitaker, and \$2,500 from Villa Park resident Denise Bittel.

2024 saw a marked increase in donations to No Recall, the committee collecting \$38,100 in just 20 days. An eye-opening \$30,500, 78%, was donated by the Lincoln Club of Orange County State PAC. The average age of a Lincoln Club member is 60 years old, but here was the Club donating big money to a lo- Board Member Madison Miner in cal school district recall. Its website states, "The Lincoln Club of Orange County is the oldest and largest conservative major donor organization in California."

But that was only the beginning of the high-powered money spigot.

To ensure transparency in all elections, when donations to any committee exceed \$1,000, the committee must file a Form 497 with the Fair Political Practices Commission within 48 hours of receiving the contribution.

Records show that on Jan. 23, 2024, three days after the first January reporting period, the Lincoln Club donated \$10,000 to No Recall; the club's donations now totaled \$40,500.

### **Out-of-towners**

But then an obscure political action committee started giving to the No Recall committee. The Family Action PAC Committee, ID# 1225424 is headed by Mark

Started in 2021, The Family PAC garnered thousands of dollars in donations, eventually giving \$7,400 to current OUSD

October 2022.

In December 2023, California Secretary of State records show the PAC took in \$9,100 each from five wealthy donors for a total of

The donors included Larry Smith of MHI Real Estate in Newport Beach; Kim C. Bengard, a "homemaker" from San Clemente; Thomas Bengard, a "Self-Employed Investor" from San Clemente; and John D. Lewis and Nancy Lewis of J. Derek Lewis & Associates in Newport Beach.

In prior years, Family PAC reported an inordinate amount of donors listing their businesses in Newport Beach, which is miles from Orange Unified boundaries.

A few weeks later, on Jan. 25, the Family PAC turned around and donated \$15,500 to the No Recall committee. On Feb. 6, the Family PAC took in another \$45,000 from three current Orange County Board of Education Board Members: 1st District Trustee Jorge Valdes, 2nd District Trustee Mari Barke and 4th District Trustee Tim Shaw donated \$15,000 each from their respective campaign committees.

# **Assistance** League to embrace Orange

Assistance League of Orange invites the community to the Embrace Orange fundraiser, themed "Squeeze the Spirit of Giving," to be held Sunday, April 14, from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach.

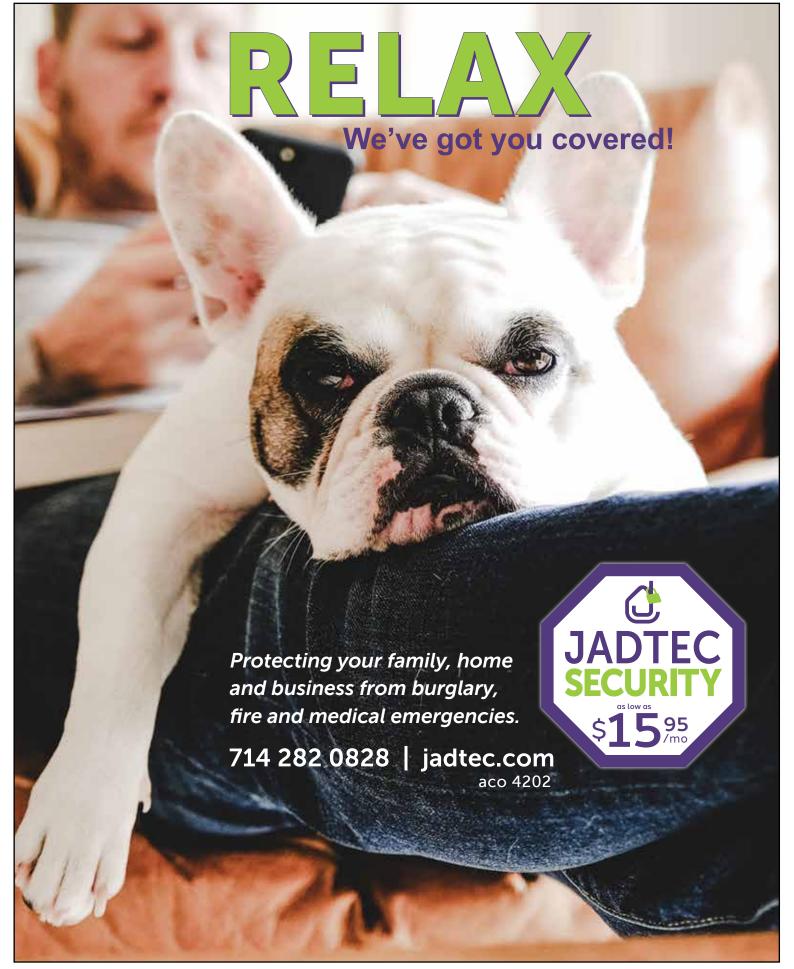
Join the league for an evening of cocktails and an elegant dinner with live music and dancing.

The Community Circle Award will be given to Ambassador Gaddi Vasquez.

Guests can participate in the extensive silent and live auctions of unique travel destinations, luxury goods, a wine wall and local merchandise that help to support the numerous philanthropic programs that touch veterans, seniors, students, families and children within the greater Orange community.

Visit the Assistance League of Orange website for details; click on events. Credit card and online reservations can be made at alorange.org.

For more information, please email Deena Arnold at deena@ seahospitality.com.



# Elks door opens to the community



Left to right, Elks Lisa Ackerman, JC Cortez and OCHS President Car-

The Orange Community Historical Society stopped by Orange Elks Lodge 1475 to find out "what is behind the secret door" that is open to Elks and their guests.

The Orange Elks hosted the Orange Community Historical Society (OCHS) for brunch and a tour of the historic lodge. The OCHS provided information about the City of Orange. Elks members prepared and served breakfast, and explained the lodge's role in the community and the projects in

The Orange Community Historical Society was kind enough to donate \$200 to the Lodge.

# **OPAWL** garage sale slated

The Orange Park Acres Women's League will hold a fundraising garage sale, March 9 and 10 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at 7229 Clydesdale. Proceeds from the sale of clothing, housewares, furniture and antiques will benefit the

# See "OUSD Board" continued from page 1

it. "You didn't do any due diligence regarding the charter's finances," Erickson pointed out. "They already owe us \$1.5 million and have a \$700,000 payment due next month. We know they have cash-flow problems. OCCA claims that it will make improvements to the property using its own money, but it looks like they'll be using ours."

It is apparent in the language of the agreement that OCCA will have to borrow money to pay for the classroom trailers it intends to install on the property. The collateral for that loan will be the license itself. If OCCA defaults on the loan, the mortgage holder will get the rights to the property. That third party can, in turn, extend the license to a fourth party to continue operating on the site. The agreement stresses that OUSD must approve any resulting licensee or subsequent use of the property.

"We are giving them the right

**Doug Hamilton** 

(714)325-0060

Lic. 00963833

36 years!

**Matt Hamilton** 

(714)328-7766

Lic. 01881070

to mortgage our property," Erickson advised. "That is a huge issue. We won't be able to lease, sell, or use that property."

### **Competing interests**

OCCA, it turns out, wasn't the only game in town. Orange Lutheran High School had, since last June, been talking to district staff about leasing the property for a sports complex that could be used by both OLu and OUSD students. That school submitted a formal proposal in October, but it never reached the board. Trustees found out about it only when they received an email from OLu's president asking them to consider its proposal before voting on the OCCA agreement. The OLu proposal has never been acknowledged or discussed in an open meeting.

Santiago Community College (SCC) Board Trustee Tina Arias Miller attended the Feb. 8 meeting to tell the board that it, too, was interested in the property. SCC, she said, would like to partner with OUSD and put a middle college school on the Peralta site. A middle college school allows students to take advanced courses along with required high school classes, enabling them to graduate with (or almost with) an AA degree. "It would be a gamechanger for enrollment," she said.

"It's good there are other interests in the property," a public speaker remarked. "First OLu, now SCC. It's time to look out for OUSD and not take the first bite you are offered. But you will, the OCCA lease seems predetermined."

# Too little, too late

"Now there's a third competing bid," another speaker observed. "You should pull as much value from the property as possible. Have you asked why no one knew about OLu's competing offer? Is it normal to allow leased land to be collateral for debt?"

Asked why the board wouldn't take the time to even consider those other options, John Ortega summarily dismissed them, saying, "All of a sudden, others are interested in Peralta. Where have they been for the past three or four years?"

Rick Ledesma agreed. "Now it's come up that this is an amazing property," he said. "This agreement is on a small portion of the property. There's still 16 acres that can be used for other ideas. And the money issue came up when we authorized this charter. We were told they'd soon be out of business. Instead, they have thrived. I don't think finances are an issue for them [OCCA]."

### Refuse to recuse

Madison Miner's children attend OCCA, and one of them appeared at the last board meeting to urge a "yes" vote on the license agreement. Andrea Yamasaki noted that, and read the board bylaws pertaining to conflict of interest. "No Board member shall participate in the making of any decision for the district when the decision will or may be affected by his/her financial, family, or other personal interest or consideration. In accordance with law, Board members shall, as necessary, abstain from participating in the decision."

She asked Miner to recuse herself. "She doesn't have to recuse," Ortega thundered. "The attorney said she didn't have to."

"I'm not saying she has to recuse," Yamasaki responded. "I'm just asking her to. Her family will clearly benefit from this vote. It would be the right thing to do."

"That's enough," Ortega shouted. "It's legal. She doesn't have to recuse."

Ana Page bolstered Yamasaki's position, noting that she had abstained from decisions regarding Fletcher Elementary, where her children attend, not because she was compelled to, but to avoid the perception of any conflict.

Regarding the new information about OLu's and SCC's interest in Peralta, she said, "There's a lot to think about. Is it plausible that OCCA can open high school on their time line (August)? Why is this vote an emergency? We have no legal prerogative to OK this. We are a board that serves students in our district. I want to go on record that this decision is rushed."



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# LETTERS to the EDITOR



# Parents write

### **Dear Editor:**

I am a parent of two OUSD students, and appalled at the claims of the "No Recall" group. I have been an active volunteer with the Recall, and can attest that the volunteers working on the Recall campaign are made up of OUSD parents, teachers, grandparents and community members. We are not a group of "local cronies," as the "No Recall" group would have you believe, and we are not being controlled by "Sacramento politicians."

We are a group of volunteers who have given our own money and countless hours of our time in order to save our district from this destructive board majority. Many of the volunteers, including myself, are participating in a campaign for the first time. I was inspired to be an active volunteer by my shock at the clear lack of fiscal responsibility and lack of support for public schools, teachers and students by this board majority. They claim to support parents' rights, but they only support a minority group of parents' rights.

Rick Ledesma has been on the board for 20 years, and has overseen the hiring of personnel and implementation of curriculum and policies that he now claims to be opposed to. Madison Miner brags that she visited all of the OUSD schools in her first year on the board and sang praises of every school, yet claims that OUSD is a failed district. As a proud par-



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1107 E. Chapman Ave., #207 Orange, CA 92866 °Foothills Sentry 2024 ent of two OUSD students, I am constantly impressed by the services and programs offered within OUSD. Certainly, there is always room for improvement, but firing a superintendent in the middle of a school year, spending money on projects we can't afford, and focusing on policies that equate to political theater, and have nothing to do with academics, are no way to improve OUSD. I will be voting YES to recall Rick Ledesma and Madison Miner!

Sarah Kustra Orange

### Dear Editor:

I am a mother of two children in OUSD schools. I am a homeowner and taxpayer. I am native to the City of Orange, born at St. Joseph Hospital. I am a nonprofit Human Resources Director in our neighboring city of Santa Ana. I attend a local church in Orange. My family has made Orange our home since 2010. My children initially attended private school -- my oldest through 8th grade --before they transitioned to high school, and our youngest through 6th grade before they transitioned to middle school. I believe in school choice. Thanks to open enrollment, my children attend the schools of our choice.

I never paid a lot of attention to the business of OUSD before we decided, as a family, that our oldest would go to a public high school. I believe in public schools, and I had heard so many wonderful things about OUSD schools. Our private school no longer was a good fit for our family, and we desired to make a change. It wasn't until I started reading some things online in early 2023 that I became interested in what might be going on within OUSD leadership.

I have been an active Recall volunteer since the summer of 2023, signature-gathering and now canvassing, talking to local voters about what is happening at OUSD. This is the first time in my life that I have ever become involved in a political campaign; it has been a very rewarding experience. I have enjoyed meeting other parent volunteers in the district, while walking and talking to voters. They, like me, care deeply about their children's education.

I am gravely disappointed at the decisions being made by the board majority: decisions they make that have a direct impact on the fiscal health of the district, open us up to litigation for discriminatory policies, that focus on pet projects, that focus on non-OUSD charter schools, and are overly focused on what conservative financial backers want them to accomplish. They have demonstrated their desire to place priorities in the wrong places, hurting OUSD students and families.

The No Recall group would have you believe that I am some type of "radical" with a negative connotation. What I can say is, that I believe that I am a reasonable mother and citizen of Orange who is demanding better for my children. I believe in school choice, fiscal responsibility, respectful/thoughtful leadership, parental rights for all parents regardless of belief system, access to age-appropriate books, diversity/equity/inclusion... I could go on and on.

Watch a meeting for yourself. Take the time to make an informed decision. Please vote Yes on March 5.

Jennifer Medina Orange

### Dear Editor:

Despite owing OUSD approximately \$1 million, the board approved a long-term license with the Financially strapped OCCA. This is clearly a conflict of interest and self-dealing because Madison Miner's kids attend OCCA.

Elected officials are often sent to prison for self-dealing and conflict of interest transactions. There is not a commercial landlord in the world that would sign a new lease with a tenant that owes them \$1 million. Additionally, the OUSD board will allow OCCA to put debt on the Peralta site that is currently debt-free. This arrangement will be an unmitigated disaster for the district and taxpayers, should OCCA default on a future loan.

The OUSD board ignored Orange Lutheran's interest in the Peralta site. OLu has strong financial resources, and its proposed use of the property would have benefited the entire Orange community, instead of just one group.

It is incumbent on the OUSD board to make decisions that benefit the community, and are the best financial option. The OCCA deal does neither.

The Orange County Board of Education has oversight responsibility for OCCA, but did not intervene with the financially questionable OCCA/Peralta transaction. The reason for its hands-off approach is simple: Jeff and Mari Barke are the founders of OCCA, and Mari Barke is a trustee on the OC Board of Education. This is yet another example of the corruption and conflict of interest with OUSD, OCCA and the OC Board of Education.

Steve Palmer Orange

# Dear Editor:

As a product of OUSD, as an Orange homeowner, as a trustee of our local libraries, as an OUSD Recall volunteer, as an EMHS Nature Center volunteer, I am appalled at the unprofessional and offensive behavior, not just allowed, but encouraged by OUSD Board Members Madison Miner and Rick Ledesma at district board meetings.

Outsider far-right activists invaded and disrupted the board meeting as early as September 2023. These individuals are not community members, but imported chaos builders. They were invited to cause chaotic distractions, and interrupt legitimate board business.

Board Member Kris Erickson, while trying to conduct legitimate board business, was screamed at, threatened with violence and not allowed to speak. Furthermore, these criminals continue to threaten Erickson online to this day!

Every member of the public who speaks to the board is required to complete their comments within three minutes. This right-wing hoodlum was not restrained, detained or chastised in any way for not following board protocol, but was allowed to disrupt the meeting in excess of 10 minutes. President Ledesma, gavel in hand, did nothing. Miner looked on in glee.

This behavior has continued for

six months, allowing outsiders to delay legitimate district business, threaten board members, disrupt meetings by screaming and yelling and STILL the board majority allows/encourages this behavior.

Do you want these incompetent, grandstanding, foolish and dangerous "leaders" on our school board?

I do not! Vote Yes on the Recall

Peggy L. Calvert Orange

### **Dear Editor:**

I attended the Orange Unified School Board meeting on Feb. 8, and sat in the front row next to a row of YES on Recall parents. After the pool supporters left the meeting, the rows behind me were filled with the usual attendees that show up at every meeting in support of OCCA. How do I know this? I have watched every single meeting since Jan. 5, 2023. This time, the topic on the agenda was the "license" use of Peralta instead of the blatant takeover attempt of Esplanade. I am writing to express my outrage at the vile and obscene comments I heard uttered, some louder than others, behind me from the OCCA supporters about every single speaker who spoke against the OCCA "license." We've heard over and over the past year how OCCA teaches "moral character and civic virtue." Their students may model it in their eloquent speeches, but their parents and supporters definitely don't -- and

Although my list of reasons is long, I'm voting Yes on the Recall primarily because I want board members who prioritize the needs of ALL OUSD students above petty projects and special interests. I want fiscally responsible board members who work in the best interest of equal and inclusive education for ALL OUSD students. Not those who have WASTED thousands of dollars, dollars that should have been spent on classrooms, thanks to their firing of our award-winning superintendent without cause and without notice. Dr. Hansen was MY superintendent for many years, and she was hired quickly by a neighboring district. Who am I? I'm a retired OUSD teacher of 22 years, a former parent, a current grandparent, and a taxpayer that has lived in Orange for over 30 years, who pays attention -and I know I'm not the only one. VOTE YES to recall Ledesma and Miner.

Teresa Andrade Orange

## Dear Editor:

I am writing to give my full support to the Recall effort to remove Rick Ledesma and Madison Miner from the Orange Unified School District Board. As a parent and resident who didn't give much thought to the board before, I have been both shocked and dismayed at the behavior of this current board majority. They are fiscally irresponsible, including rushing through a leasing deal directly benefitting Miner's family, who did not recuse herself from discussion or voting. The sweetheart deal could ultimately put the district in financial jeopardy. They do not follow their own rules of order, and have invited outside agitators to disrupt and intimidate OUSD parents and stakeholders at the meetings. They talk about "parent's rights" while trampling the rights of the parents they disagree with. I don't want anyone other than a qualified librarian and/or teacher choosing books for students. I don't want teachers or administrators to become "the gender police." Let teachers do their jobs, and let kids learn in a safe environment. Yes on the Recall.

Kat Schroeder Orange

### Dear Editor:

The Orange Unified School District (OUSD) is at it again. At the last board meeting, they voted to "license" the former Peralta school site and turn about 25% of the area over to a charter school called Orange County Classical Academy (OCCA).

The Save Peralta group has great concerns about this agreement. The group was formed to stop a similar back-room type deal hatched by the OUSD. The community organized to focus on proper land use for the former Peralta school site.

The issue at hand is that OUSD is using a "license agreement" for up to 25 years, which only requires a majority vote. The license was approved with a 4 to 3 vote. This avoids a higher vote count than would be required to approve a similar "lease agreement." There are currently not enough votes on the OUSD Board to pass a lease. This appears to many people to be an end run around what should be required of a school board that truly represents the community's best interest.

The Peralta site warrants a much larger community-based discussion to determine the best long-term use for this site. This is not an issue limited only to those within the North Tustin Street Corridor focus area. That site impacts the entire City of Orange.

I've had several people say that our "opposition will hurt the kids." My response is, "which kids?" I've heard it said that OCCA will be paying about half the rent, as compared to the prior occupant, Olive Crest. This hurts OUSD budgets, programs and much-needed school renovations, and it certainly hurts OUSD kids. The OUSD Board was elected to represent the best interests of OUSD, not a charter school called OCCA.

Is OCCA a good risk? The license agreement appears to contain tremendous risk. If you go to the OCCA website and listen to its online video, it talks about having financial troubles. It's anticipated that OCCA will probably tap the value of the license agreement with some sort of a loan, as per the terms buried in the license agreement. It was stated at OUSD's board meeting that OCCA owes OUSD approximately \$1.5 million and a payment of \$700,000 is due shortly. Will OCCA get a loan against a possibly below market license agreement and repay the \$700,000 due OUSD with money from what has been described as a below market deal? Could a loan be used to pay off debt created at their other charter school location? It is said that the Peralta site could be worth \$50 million. Is there a limit to how much money OCCA can borrow on the value of their license? If this charter school fails, will Orange Unified be left holding the bag in some way?

And how could the "license agreement" affect the value of the Peralta site? Because of my back-

ground, (legally required disclosure, I'm a real estate broker Lic. #00963833), I understand the possible consequences of what a long-term license or lease can do to the value of the Peralta site.

A long-term encumbrance, with possibly below market rent, can devalue the entire Peralta site for many other potential users. A good example of this is what happened across the street to the family that owned the former Sears

Their realtor contacted me about a year ago to discuss the site; he told me that the value of the property was between \$50 and \$60 million. He stated that the long-term leaseholder on the Sears site offered them \$10 million, and basically told them to take it or leave it. The family ultimately sold the property last June for \$15 million dollars, \$35 to \$45 million below their broker's stated market value. The License Agreement with OCCA may have the very same effect on the value of the former Peralta site for the next 25 years.

This is not political for me, it's just about good business. I was at that board meeting, and was told that speaking opportunities had been given away via a lottery when the board room doors first opened; I did not arrive late. These are the questions that I would have asked, had there been a fair opportunity for the voting public to speak.

**Doug Hamilton** Orange

# Sound off

### **Dear Editor:**

I recently read an editorial about the Recall. The following is my take:

Last January, a newly elected board fired Superintendent Gunn Marie Hansen. Hansen had a contract with OUSD that did not require any explanation upon termination. Simply, she served at the pleasure of the elected board. While some have made note that the respected superintendent was an award-winning employee of the district, this would not, nor should not, make any employee immune from decisions the board would make.

As with any contract, Hansen was paid for her contract's duration. Not unexpectedly for an award-winning superintendent, she secured gainful employment shortly after at another district. Hansen is not really the issue here; the initial Recall impetus came from Recall proponents accusing the board and certain members of violating the Brown Act.

proponents sought Recall the assistance of OC DA Todd Spitzer's Office to investigate this violation of the Brown Act. After the requested investigation, the OC office concluded that Trustees Ledesma, Miner, and the board had not violated the Brown Act, and exonerated them. Spitzer's office did find that Trustee Erickson violated the Brown Act; the DA's office required Erickson to review the Brown Act rather than pursue legal action.

This brings me to the Recall's mission statement: Choose Competence, not Chaos. Seems like the chaos was in the genesis of the Recall. This Recall is actually born from the votes and voices of voters that elected new trustees that the old guard refused to acknowledge. Parents, relatives and concerned citizens wanted parental rights. They chose a priority of basic education over liberal ideology, they rejected control from a union and these voters accepted the failure of education in California and wanted a new path.

Chaos? Really? Schools opened on time, bus drivers safely delivered children to school and home, cafeteria employees provided food and love, maintenance support did their jobs. There were no walkouts by teachers, no refusal to work and teach, no protests and no disruption of the school year.

Vote No on the Recall.

Patrick Trujillo Anaheim

### Dear Editor:

You would assume that supporters of the OUSD Recall have limits as to whom or how they criticize—wrong. The vitriol that they display towards the stakeholders of this community is distasteful at best and disgusting at worst. Having the opportunity to sit on the dais, I see this constantly, with some of them cussing out supporters of the board majority and even President Rick Ledesma himself. Their acrimony extends well beyond the board meeting room, as Trustee Madison Miner was followed home and her kid's soccer practice encroached upon. For Trustee John Ortega, it was their supporters that also attempted to encroach on his familial life, solely based on a political narrative concerning a broken down

During my several month tenure as a student board member,

attempts have been made to silence and even oust me, simply for disagreeing with their political views. Within the first two meetings I attended, the 2014 former California Teacher of the Year called on Villa Park students to initiate a recall against me. Even worse was the OUEA vice president calling Ledesma and Miner profane terms in a private social media group. At our board meetings, the Recall supporters laud these individuals, applauding them for "fighting the good fight." They come and clamor to the board majority that "we are OUSD" and "you are not." And to be frank, the Recall supporters are right—they are everything wrong with it. As an OUSD student, I will say this: their overzealousness and acrimony are disdainful to this district, themselves, and whatever they believe in (if they do). I condemn their hate; I condemn their divisiveness; and I condemn this Recall.

Alexander Tran **OUSD Student Board Member** Orange

### Honest brokers

### **Dear Editor:**

The Central OC Democratic Club has been receiving emails and texts from club and community members over the latest shocking mailer from Joe Kerr's campaign for CA40 House of Representatives. Because the mailer aims to mislead voters, our Board of Directors feels compelled to address it. After all, the accusations against Allyson Muñiz Damikolas, his opponent, are applicable to most of us. It is an over-the-top political hit piece that would be laughable if it were not so appalling.

Joe's mailer brands Allyson as 'The Hypocrite," claiming she funds big pharma, big oil and Republican candidates and organizations. How does Joe justify this outrageous smear? He cherry picks from a long list of mutual funds in Allyson's IRA/401K accounts to find those which have invested in fossil fuel or pharma companies or companies like Fidelity that have made donations to Republicans. This ludicrously argues that by owning shares in a mutual fund, usually in relatively small amounts, Allyson personally funds fossil fuel, big pharma and Republicans and questions whether Allyson is really a Dem-

Every voter who has an IRA or 401K account invested in large mutual funds or ETFs managed by companies like Vanguard, Fidelity or BlackRock would be subject to the same ridiculous smear that Joe has made about Allyson. Neither Allyson nor any of us who have retirement accounts have any control over the individual investments made in these funds or the political contributions (to both parties) made by these fund managers. Are we "hypocrites" or only "claiming" to be Democrats because we have retirement accounts? Obviously not, and Joe undoubtedly knows

Joe portrays himself heroically in the fictitious mailer as having "passed over 200 bills" signed into law by five governors and two presidents. His claim is misleading. Despite running twice, he has never been elected. He has never had the opportunity to vote "yea" or "nay." He may have supported bills, but he never passed

And how does Joe get the information to be able to mail this ridiculous caricature of Allyson? Unlike Joe, Allyson is an officeholder, so her financial holdings are a public record. If Joe had been an officeholder when supposedly passing those 200 bills, he would have had to disclose his own investments. We wonder how many of the sponsors of his mutual funds could be scoured to see whether they had ever donated to Republicans.

As of the most recent FEC filings, Joe Kerr, despite being a longtime politician, had only raised \$109,000 from 75 itemized donors, despite being endorsed by "hundreds of unions across the country." Allyson, on the other hand, has raised over \$350,000 from hundreds of itemized do-

So where does Joe get all the money to run TV ads and send outrageously false mailers? It turns out he loaned over \$725,000 of less than \$880,000 his campaign has raised.

How has Joe been able to gar-

ner the endorsements listed on the mailer? After all, he has the support of fewer than 10 local elected officials while Allyson has been endorsed by over 40 local elected officials, more than 10 progressive PACs, and has the support of all the Democratic clubs in CA40 who have voted to support a candidate. Don't be fooled. Joe used to be president of a labor union. Elected officials often stand with unions who support their campaigns.

We condemn the campaign smear tactics employed by candidate Joe Kerr against fellow Democrat Allyson Muñiz Damikolas. The clearly false claims are an embarrassment and fall far below the standards we should, as Democrats, hold ourselves to. These smear tactics create a diversion that makes it more difficult, as a local Democratic club, to fulfill our mission of electing Democrats up and down the ballot.

Frank Gomez, Chair Central Orange County Democratic Club

# Safe and sane fireworks may return to Orange

The City of Orange may allow safe and sane fireworks to be sold and used within its boundaries depending on the results of a staff study and public preference.

City Manager Tom Kisela raised the issue at the Feb. 13 city council meeting, noting some residents want to bring them back, and asked the council if it had any interest in the topic.

Councilman Denis Bilodeau recollected that he had tried to bring them back about 10 years ago, but couldn't muster any interest. Every city around Orange sells fireworks, he said, so residents just buy them there. Orange nonprofits are losing out on sales revenue and "its kind of silly that they are prohibited here."

He also noted that making safe and sane fireworks legal was a ballot question sometime in the 1990s and Orange voters rejected the idea. "If we want to bring them back, do we have to go back to the voters?" Bilodeau inquired. That's something, Kisela advised, that staff could look into.

City Fire Chief Sean de-Metropolis said that his department would agree to legalizing safe fireworks as long as it didn't extend too far east. Hewes Street might be a suitable boundary.

Arianna Barrios reported that fireworks is the number one message she gets from residents. "Illegal fireworks are what's causing the problems," she said. "I'd like to see data on the use of legal versus illegal fireworks."

Jon Dumitru advised that he would support a repeal of the safe and sane fireworks ban, adding that it criminalizes people who are obeying the law. He acknowledged that he "buys them in Villa Park and shoots them off in Santa Ana."

Mayor Dan Slater agreed that what the city does now regarding fireworks "isn't working." Paying for enforcement comes out of the general fund and safe and sane sales in the city could bring some of that money back, he suggested. Even though the city put up a lot of signs advising people fireworks were illegal, "it was like a war zone," he conceded. "I'm convinced it's not practical to enforce the use of safe and sane fireworks. It's like prohibition. And, you have to catch someone lighting them before you can arrest them."

The council directed city staff to look into it, collect data and determine if it has to go back to the voters.

# Save the date for tortoises

The California Turtle and Tortoise Club of Orange County will host a Tortoise Show on Saturday, May 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the First Christian Church of Orange, 1130 East Walnut in Orange. There will be live animals, vendors, microchipping, and all things turtle and tortoise.

The group, which strives to

# See "Agreement" continued from page 1

diction and nothing can be done there until the agency releases it.

## Wait and see

Under the Feb. 13 agreement, Milan will evaluate non-residential uses for the "Brandman site" and the "Creekside Village site," including, "recreational and sport uses, educational institution uses, acquisition by the city or a third party, that may be acceptable to

Negotiations will be conduct-

educate, raise awareness and promote the preservation and conservation of turtles and tortoises holds monthly meetings on the first Friday of each month, with guest speakers sharing information, workshops, food and fun.

For further information, including adoption applications, see tortoise.org/orangecounty.

ed by a city ad hoc committee composed of Mayor Dan Slater, Councilmembers Ana Gutierrez and John Gyllenhammer. The committee meetings be open to the public.

The council voted 5-1-0 to accept the agreement. Gutierrez was absent and Councilmember Arianna Barrios voted no. "We've discussed this situation ad nauseum," she said. "I'm really uncomfortable with this. The city has been put through a great deal of turmoil over these properties, and this is insulting."



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both parties."



# **Caution: cat** crossing

A local mountain lion was accidentally struck and killed by a car, Jan. 18, when she tried to cross the road near Cook's Corner. Scientists had fitted her with a GPS collar in 2022 when she was two years old, according to the Jan. 25 Saddleback Valley News.

Officially known as F312 to the UC Davis team studying mountain lions in our area, she was nicknamed Uno by wildlife photographer Mark Girardeau because of an injured right eye. Veterinarian Winston Vickers said that being killed while crossing roads and highways is the most common cause of death for local mountain lions.

Unlike in northern California, lions in the Santa Ana and Santa Monica Mountains have a particularly tough time surviving because they need a lot of territory for hunting, and they are increasingly hemmed in by roads and houses. Isolated lion groups also develop health problems associated with inbreeding.

It has been estimated that we currently have around 20 moun-

tain lions in the Santa Ana Mountains. It has also been estimated that in less than 15 years, we might not have any. So the local lion population is now a candidate for state threatened or endangered species status.

Saddened by the death of Uno, but inspired by the story of mountain lion P-22 in Los Angeles, Silverado resident Julie Williams proposed formation of a local mountain lion advocacy group at the Feb. 6 meeting of the Inter-Canyon League (ICL). She was promptly "volunteered" to head a new mountain lion committee.

Williams said that the Environmental Nature Center, which runs Modjeska's Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary, has agreed to hold an event on March 21 featuring veterinarian and lion researcher Dr. Jessica Sanchez. Williams is eager to hear from other big cat fans, and can be reached at julie. williams1@cox.net.

## Phone phacts

AT&T wants to abandon traditional landlines due to declining demand, and focus on wireless and Internet-based service instead. In California, though, AT&T is the Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) in much of its territory, so it is asking the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to no longer require it to provide service where alternative voice service exists.

Opposition to AT&T's request is especially strong in rural areas where cellular or Voice over IP (VoIP) service, if available at all, is viewed as less reliable than copper wire-based Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS). Traditional wired phones do not need electrical outlets because they are powered by the phone line.

When the Bond Fire of 2020 broke out in Silverado, AT&T landlines continued to work after SCE cut power to Cox and Verizon. Eventually some telephone poles burned also, but would that have happened if someone could have called 911 earlier, instead of having to drive to a fire station to report the fire?

For more information about AT&T's COLR proposal and a related Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) application, see cpuc.ca.gov/industries-andtopics/internet-and-phone/attcolr-etc-proceedings.

To read or submit public comments on the COLR proposal, see apps.cpuc.ca.gov/c/A2303003.

# Be prepared

Naloxone is an opioid antidote

that can save the life of someone experiencing an overdose of fentanyl, heroin, morphine or related drugs. First responders like OC Sheriff deputies and firefighters now carry it, and it is available over-the-counter at drugstores, branded as Narcan and Kloxxado.

In return for a donation of naloxone for neighborhood emergency use, Inter-Canyon League block captains received training on administering the drug from the OC Health Care Agency, with support from Third District Supervisor Don Wagner. There are also YouTube videos that explain how to administer the drug.

Although naloxone is not effective against non-opioid drugs like cocaine, it does no harm if given to someone not overdosing on

### Have you seen this plant?

A small group of Ladd Canyon wildflowers has not been seen for some time, and neighboring plants are concerned.

California peony, also known as wild peony, is a native subshrub no more than a foot or two tall. Its downward-facing pingpong-ball-size flowers may look ready to burst forth in dazzling maroon at any moment, but actually they never completely open.

Since California peony is an

early bloomer that goes dormant in hot weather, nearby plants are accustomed to not seeing it for much of the year. But this year seems different, according to one sagebrush, speaking through an interpreter: "By the time a lot of us wake up in the spring, the peonies have already been up, made coffee, started blooming, and begun waiting for a little bee action. But where are they now? If someone uprooted our neighbors, are we next?"

Anyone spotting a missing peony is urged to contact the Canyon Beat FBI (Flower Bureau of Investigation). Authorities doubt that birds seeking seeds killed the plants, but they haven't completely ruled out fowl play.



California peony

# **Orange Park Association elects board members**



The Orange Park Association reelected three board members to continue their service for another three years. David Hillman, Kate Bonnaud and Kelley Chaplin rejoined the board, following a membership vote Jan. 27 at the annual association meeting. The board members are, front row from left, Kate Bonnaud, Sherry Panttaja, David Clemson, Jim Jackman, Cindy Reina, Laura Thomas. Top row, Nancy Flathers, David Hillman and Kelley Chaplin. The meeting also featured remarks from County Supervisor Don Wagner and Mayor Dan Slater.





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We're all in this together.



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# Friendly Center gears up for centennial celebration with vision of transforming futures



The Friendly Center began in 1924 to help impoverished farm workers and their families.

### By Mariah Martinez

The Friendly Center turns 100 years old this April, celebrating a proud history and a promising future. The City of Orange has designated April 8 as "Friendly Center Day," and the organization will honor its legacy on Sept. 28 at its annual One Heart Gala held at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

Friendly Center has provided support for impoverished individuals and families in Orange County since its establishment in 1924. This century-long commitment has allowed it to evolve into the longest-standing nonprofit and community center in the area.

### Born in a Bible class

Friendly Center was born from the Men's Community Bible Class of Orange, led by Presbyterian minister, Rev. M. L. Pearson. Recognizing the desperate conditions faced by the area's citrus packinghouse workers and their families, they launched Friendly Center to offer resources and aid. The community center building was established by donor J. F. Lewis on North Cypress Street.

By 1967, Friendly Center had progressed beyond its role as a community hub and become an independent nonprofit corporation, Friendly Center, Inc., an accomplishment aided by a charitable group known as the Friends of the Friendly Center. The organization then focused on improving education and housing conditions through initiatives like the first-ever Rent Supplement Housing Program in Orange County. Eventually, Friendly Center emerged as a United Way Agency.

Evolving and expanding throughout the years, Friendly Center stuck true to its mission of providing stability, opportunity and hope to children and families, working to end the cycle of generational poverty in Orange County. This steadfast service was acknowledged in 2007 when the California Family Resource Association named it as one of the top four Family Resource Centers in California.

## Growing to meet the need

Today, the Friendly Center runs more than 15 distinct programs, serving thousands of individuals every year, emphasizing family support, education and food support. In the last year alone, it impacted over 3,000 lives and distributed more than 300,000 pounds of food to the needy. With new leadership under Kenia Cueto, academician and visionary, Friendly Center ushers in a new



The Friendly Center will manage OC District 4's Emergency Rental Assistance Program. From left, Executive Director of CalAIM and MediCal at CalOptima Kelly Bruno-Nelson; Fourth District Supervisor Doug Chaffee; Friendly Center President/CEO Kenia Cueto; Friendly Center Family Support Advocate Luis Estrada; Friendly Center Executive Director Jessica Ruelas.

era. Her experience in education is expected to seamlessly align with Friendly Center's commitment to serve Orange County's diverse community.

### Heading off homelessness

With its forthcoming 100-year celebration, Friendly Center has demonstrated its readiness to tackle homelessness in Orange County. It was recently chosen by Supervisor Doug Chaffee to manage a \$500,000 pilot program of District Four's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), offering rent assistance paired with case management to families at risk of becoming homeless.

In outlining the organization's vision for the next century, Cueto highlighted a strategy that emphasizes not just the growth of current programs, but the pivoting of traditional education to career technical education for both children and adults.

"Looking forward to the next 100 years," she says, "our ambition extends beyond mere growth; it seeks to redefine our contribution to society. By interweaving advanced technology and innovative educational programs, we aim to close the generational poverty gap with a commitment to serving communities through equity and access for all.

"Our strategy involves technical education tailored to the needs of both children and adults, preparing them to thrive in a digital age. Our goal is to ensure that our actions today pave the way for a future of social mobility for all. This means leveraging and creating partnerships with our community, educational entities, industry, non-profits, workforce development and governmental agencies.

"We cannot do this alone, but we promise to do our part in serving our region with dignity, respect, and humanity."

As it moves towards a brighter future and its next hundred years, Friendly Center carries the hope and support of the Orange community.

If you would like to support the mission and vision of Friendly Center through volunteering, donating, or becoming a member of the exclusive "Friends of Friendly Center" community, please visit friendlycenter.org.

You can

STOP THE SPREAD OF THE



Milan Capital has begun testing on 67 acres of illegal waste material piled high off of Santiago Canyon Road to determine what, if any, contaminants are present. The analytical test finally began after almost two years of negotiations between the landowner and the Local Enforcement Agency. Borings must be conducted at five-foot intervals. Samples must be collected from the surface, interior and bottom of the stockpile. Subsurface samples should be collected down to native soil. Material deemed to be uncontaminated cannot be moved to another site without a workplan submitted to LEA for review. If hazardous materials are found, a clean-up plan will be required. Testing criteria is based on non-commercial or non-residential use.

# Cowboy Easter Service coming to OPA

Pastor Larry Day will preside over the traditional Easter Sonrise service on Sunday, March 31, at the Mara Brandman Horse Arena.

All are welcome, including, as Day says, "your dog, horse or any other companion."

As always, Margaret Steinberg and her Blue Grass Friends will play. There will be free Bibles, donuts and coffee. The service begins at 7 a.m.

# Life-changing moments start with Assistance League

The Assistance League of Orange offers opportunities to change a life.

Student scholarships — The on-line application portal (at assitanceleague.org/Orange/Scholarships) is open for high school seniors who attend an Orange Unified School District school or reside in the OUSD attendance boundaries. Over 25 scholarships, amounting to \$58,000, were awarded in 2023. Scholarships for the arts, general studies, health fields, trade and technical studies and special needs are available. The last day to submit an application is April 3.

Embrace the spirit of giving – at Embrace Orange on April 14 at the Balboa Bay Resort. Reserve your seats at assistanceleague. org/Orange by March 31.

Explore membership – Learn more about membership on Thursday, April 25, from 5-7 p.m. at 124 S. Orange Street. Learn what Assistance League of Orange does for the community, receive an overview of many philanthropic programs and have opportunities to earn some "Thrift Shop Bucks." Light refreshments will be served. Bring a friend!

Honor future military members – at the Salute to Service dinner celebration Wednesday, May 15 at 4:30 p.m. The program recognizes students who will begin basic training in all branches of the U.S. military or attend military academies. Students may contact their high school counselor for information.

For more information see assistanceleague.org/Orange.

North Tustin resident Joe Ball has been named chief operating officer of Lutheran Social Services of Southern California, based in the City of Orange. Ball has over 20 years of operations, finance and quality management experience in for-profit technical manufacturing and nonprofit social service environment. He holds a bachelor's degree in management and an MBA from Pepperdine University.



# Inspect.

Inspect your trees, Coast Live Oak, Canyon Live Oak and California Black Oak.

Look for D-shaped holes 2-4 mm wide in the bark.

# Identify.

The larvae are in the bark. They are 2 cm long, white and legless.

Adults are 1 cm in length, bullet shaped with gold spots.

## Treat.

Contact Mike Boeck at rockdad@cox.net.

Information at ucanr.edu/sites/gsobinfo









Joe Ball

# OTPA annual meeting offers sneak preview of new Hilbert Museum

The 38th annual general meeting of the Old Towne Preservation Association (OTPA), held Feb. 18, was highlighted by several firsts.

The meeting was held at the newly expanded Hilbert Museum of California Art, treating OTPA members to the first public viewing of the facility. The meeting was the first community gathering held at the museum and the first to take advantage of the new Burra Family Community Room.

OTPA President Rob Boice reported that attendance at this meeting was the largest ever and that it complemented the association's growing membership, which is now the largest in its history.

Orange Mayor Dan Slater recalled that the first official ceremony he attended after being sworn in as mayor was the groundbreaking for the Hilbert expansion. He also assured the audience that the plaza fountain would open next month. The year-long repair was plagued with delays, the last being the specially ordered tiles arriving in the wrong color. "The color was close," he said, "but it had to be right."

President Boice summarized OTPA's achievements over the past decades, including establishing the area as a historic district and establishing Old Towne Orange standards. An unexpected return on the association's vision

is the increase in property values, something the founders never considered. As for the founders, he said, three are still involved in OTPA: Russ and Pat Barrios and Tita Smith.

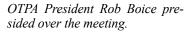
Boice also noted that a federal seismic retrofit program, available only to certain zip codes, originally did not include Old Towne Orange. The community's zip code is now on the list; OTPA is forming a committee to research the program and share their findings with members.

The meeting adjourned to a wine reception held in the breeze-way between the two Hilbert Buildings. OTPA was, again, the first community group to gather there.



Beata Lichtenstein and Jill Young admire one of the museum's displays.







Mary Platt, executive director of the Hilbert, welcomed residents to the museum. The Hilbert officially opened to the public, Feb. 23. Platt advises visitors to make reservations for the first few weeks as the galleries are expected to be crowded.

# **DAN SLATER**

# Spring is almost here!

dan@DanSlater.com 714-744-2202

1537 E. Chapman Ave. Orange, CA 92866





# OUSD board majority awards preliminary contract for Villa Park High pool despite board minority concerns

By Tina Richards

A preconstruction and lease leaseback (LLB) service agreement for a 50m pool at Villa Park High School project was approved by the Orange Unified Board majority, Feb. 8.

The \$45,000 contract authorizes the preconstruction phase of the project and initiates a lease leaseback delivery method, which many school districts now employ to build new facilities. This delivery method allows the pool designer selected by OUSD to partner with a general contractor to develop construction documents and plans together. Once plans are approved by the district, the contractor submits them to the state architect, the agency that must approve school construction projects, and works directly with that regulator to ensure requirements are met. That collaboration reduces the number of change orders on projects and establishes a guaranteed maximum price before construction begins.

The guaranteed maximum price for the Villa Park pool construction is \$13 million. The estimated cost of the overall project is \$18 million. Under the LLB, the district leases the project site to the contractor for \$1. The district then subleases it from the contractor for 5% of the guaranteed maximum price. In this case, the sublease principal payment is included as part of the budgeted \$13 million. The sublease commenced on Feb. 9 and will continue for up to six months following project completion.

## Construction to come later

It was made clear during board deliberations on the contract that the work is preliminary only, that actual construction of the pool would not begin without further board direction once the design is approved. It was noted that four companies responded to the request for proposals and of those, three were considered finalists. Neff Construction was ultimately selected because it offered the "best combination of price and qualifications."

The details of the contract and the selection of Neff were presented to the board by Douglas Yeoman, an attorney with Parker and Covert, the firm representing the district on that matter.

John Ortega motioned to approve the contract award and Rick Ledesma seconded. Several of their colleagues, however, had concerns. During the board meeting, it was revealed that Neff Construction had been implicated in a fraud case in Riverside County. In that case, Ted Rozzi, an as-

sistant superintendent of the Corona Norco School District, was charged with embezzling some \$2 million via checks issued by Neff Construction.

### It could look bad

A 2019 investigation conducted by the state Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) found that Neff had written 38 checks payable to Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Union and Citibank credit card accounts that turned out to be Rozzi's. The checks were issued at Rozzi's request, sometimes in the form of emails. While he indicated which school construction projects the checks should reference, the FCMAT report found little documentation to support the payments.

The questionable checks were drafted from January 2011 to September 2014. Ted Rozzi pled guilty in 2021 and was sentenced to two years in prison. During his pleading, he insisted that Neff Construction had no knowledge of the fraud, that the company was "an innocent bystander." The Riverside County District Attorney subsequently dismissed the criminal charges against the company and its principal Ed Mierau.

"'I'm concerned about the report of contractor involvement in fraud," Kris Erickson said. "Why are we working with a company suspected of fraud? Something funny happened. It's important to at least talk about it."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Andrea Yamasaki asked Attorney Yeoman, who had represented the Corona Norco School District during the fraud investigation. Yeoman replied that he said nothing about it because it happened some time ago, there was no legal basis to exclude Neff Construction, and he had no concerns about it.

"You should have told us," Yamasaki responded. "It's something we should have known."

Both Ortega and Ledesma stressed that the criminal charges against Neff had been dropped, and there was no reason to talk about it.

## Nothing to see here

"There's a difference between criminal charges being dropped and being implicated. Criminal charges require a higher standard of proof." Erickson advised. "It doesn't mean nothing happened."

Neither Ortega nor Ledesma wanted to talk about it, with both noting that Neff agreed to a guaranteed maximum price -- which is what the district was after.

Neff was approved with a four (Ortega, Ledesma, Angie Rum-

sey, Madison Miner) to three (Erickson, Yamasaki, Ana Page)

At that same meeting, the board agreed, 7-0, to order a Myrtha pool for the Villa Park project. While a Myrtha pool initially costs a little more than a concrete structure, maintenance is cheaper and, therefore, more cost effective in the long run. A down payment of 20% of the \$1.1 million cost is due in March.

The district opted to purchase the pool, rather than pay the markup if a contractor placed the order. The pool is fabricated in Italy and takes about 150 days to build. It should be ready by August, about the same time the preliminary construction phase is completed.

# Orange Art Association features technique demos

The Orange Art Association will feature Laguna-based artist Elizabeth McGhee demonstrating work with color pencils at its Monday, March 11 meeting.

Davy Lieu, a former Disney illustrator and author/illustrator, will demonstrate his craft on Monday, April 8.

The Art Association meets at the Community of Christ Church, 395 So. Tustin Avenue. Monthly competitions begin at 7 p.m., and the artist demonstrations at 7:30 p.m.

OAA welcomes new members. Yearly dues are \$35. For further information, call Pat at (714) 538-8069.

# Young Women of the Month named by TAWC



Kimberly Velazquez

Kimberly Velazquez of Tustin High School and Kiara Eng of Foothill were named Young Women of the Month for February by the Tustin Area Woman's Club.

Kimberly Velazquez has spent most of her high school career on the Tustin Dance Team as a member of the performance and competition teams. The team's hip-hop routine won first place at nationals for the first time since 2020. Velazquez is also a marketing intern with CEO Leadership Alliance Orange County, working with a subsidiary company known as OC Fellows. Her involvement in this area has inspired her to pursue a business economics major at the University of California or California



Kiara Eng

State University.

Kiara Eng is currently an International Baccalaureate candidate. She has been on the Principal's High Honor Roll all four years of high school, and received the AP Scholar Award. Eng is the historian for the FHS National Honor Society and a member of the California Scholarship Federation. She founded, and is president, of the Neuroscience Club. She is a three-year varsity volleyball player and is currently the team captain. She helped her team win two league championships. Kiara plans to major in psychology or neuroscience in college.

Keila Medina of Beckman High School and Nina Ryan of Legacy Magnet Academy were also recognized.

# Central Dems to evaluate primary results

The Central Orange County Democratic Club will discuss two important issues at its Wednesday, March 27 meeting.

Topics include an evaluation of the March primary results, their implications and the road to victory in November. A report on the rise of fascism in OC from electeds and citizens who are addressing these issues will follow.

Doors open, snacks and chats

at 6:30 p.m., and general meeting at 7 p.m. An RSVP via Mobilize or the club website, CentralOC-Dems.com, is required to attend.

Central OC Dems includes Tustin, Tustin Hills, Orange and Villa Park, though all in OC are welcome. Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month at St. Paul's Episcopal Church,1221 Wass St. in Tustin, which is not affiliated with the organization.

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# Elks honor Orange police and fire



Left to right, Elk Event Co-chair Janine Storm; Sheriffs Brian Gunsolley and Jacob Bieker, OFD Javier Soto, and Alan Velasco; District Attorney investigator Jose Flores; CHP officer Elias Granado; Miss Orange Elizabeth Raburn; OPD Conner Jones, Tyler Venturelli and Yash Patel; and Elks Co-chair Jennifer Weeheim.

Each year, the Orange Elks honor Orange law enforcement and firefighter personnel at an Appreciation Night, which includes a dinner and awards ceremony.

This event extends appreciation to those heroes who risk their lives to protect the citizens of the City of Orange and making Orange a better and safer place to live.

Elks event Co-chairs Jennifer Weeheim and Janine Storm welcomed everyone, after which Boy and Girl Scout Troops presented the colors and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Orange Elks member Clarke Balvanz started a new program to help the Orange City Fire Department acquire therapy dogs. Balvanz introduced Ember, who will help firefighters deal with the stress of the job, and may also be used on calls where residents could use a little puppy love.

Fire Chief Sean deMetropolis presented awards to Javier Soto, Fire Cadet of the Year; Mohamad Hijazi, Fire Reserve of the Year; and Alan Velasco, Manager of the Year.

Orange Police Chief Dan Adams presented awards to Officer Yash Patel, Officer Tyler Venturelli and Detective Conner Jones.

Elks Drug Awareness Chairman Mike Cash introduced the nominees for consideration for the Enrique Camarena Award,

which will be presented at the Elks Grand Lodge Convention in July.

Enrique Camarena was an 11-year DEA agent who was kid-napped, brutally tortured and murdered in Mexico in 1985. The award is given to a law enforcement officer who has made a significant contribution in drug prevention and who personifies Enrique's belief that one person can make a difference.

This year, Orange County Sheriff deputy Jacob Bieker, Orange County Sheriff Sargent Brian Gunsolley, CHP K-9 Officer Elias Granado and Orange County District Attorney Investigator Jose Flores will be considered for the Enrique Camarena Award.



# Santiago Canyon College Foundation 2024 Golf Tournament Pelican Hill Golf Club | March 28, 2024 | 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

The Santiago Canyon College Foundation is excited to announce its 22nd Annual Golf Tournament, a fantastic opportunity for golf enthusiasts and supporters of higher education to come together and make a meaningful impact. Join us for a day of hitting the links and building futures as we raise money to support student programs and scholarships.

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# Covenant to showcase Praise Ensemble



Praise Ensemble

The Praise Ensemble will perform for Covenant's Women's Fellowship Luncheon and Easter program on Thursday, March 21.

The program, "He Is Risen," will feature hymns and special music arrangements, a slide presentation and narrative that tells the unfolding story of God's grace and plan for redemption. The story of Jesus' birth, life, crucifixion and resurrection will be depicted in music selected for its beauty and strong Christian message.

The luncheon is open to the community, and will be in St. Andrew's Hall, 1855 N. Orange-Olive Road. Men are welcome to attend. Doors open at 11 a.m. and the program begins at 11:30 a.m.

A catered luncheon is \$15 per person, payable in advance; reservations are required by Friday, March 15, by calling Linda at (951) 237-9888. Reservations are also required to attend the program only at 12:30 p.m.; the cost is \$5, payable at the door.

# February storm boosts local water supply



Maintenance staff repair the trash rake at the primary location where OCWD diverts water out of the Santa Ana River for recharging into the Groundwater Basin. There is a system in place to capture and remove large debris (plant material, trash, balls). The system includes a mechanical claw (the trash rake) that descends on cables to grab the debris and transport it to a holding location away from the water. During the storm event, the rake sensors were misaligned due to impact with large debris. The quick repair allowed OCWD to capture an additional 97 million gallons per day.

Orange County Water District (OCWD) has successfully captured 25,500 acre-feet of water during February storms, equivalent to 8.3 billion gallons—enough water for 204,000 people for a year. This significant achievement comes in the wake of a powerful series of storms that brought 7.28 inches of rain to the region, totaling 13.54 inches of rain since July 1, the beginning of the water year.

OCWD's ability to capture this water stems from substantial investments in water infrastructure, a robust partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the dedication of its staff, who worked tirelessly through inclement weather to ensure the maximum capture of stormwater.

Stormwater capture has been by OCWD.

integral to OCWD's diverse water supply portfolio for decades and accounts for 17% of water recharged annually into the basin enough water for 453,000 people.

Given the amount of rain received to date, OCWD expects to recharge even more stormwater this water year.

To further enhance its capture capabilities, OCWD is testing Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) at Prado Dam in Riverside County. FIRO aims to boost water storage levels behind the dam by leveraging improved weather forecasting to allow for more precise dam operations. Through its partnership with the Corps, water behind Prado Dam is strategically pooled and released to be captured downstream by OCWD.

# Conservative Patriots announce March meeting

The Conservative Patriots of Orange County (CPOC) will discuss future volunteer opportunities to work the polls at its meeting Thursday, March 21.

The February meeting was lively, with members and guests meeting and asking questions of candidates running in the March Primary.

They included Orange County judicial candidates Jason Baez, Office No. 3; Whitney Bokosky, Office No. 35; Binh Dang, Office No. 16; Daniel Kern, Office No. 35; Richard Zimmer, Office No. 16; and 37th District State Senate candidate Guy Selleck, business owner.

The Hold the Line recipients honored for February were Martha and Doug Ming. Martha serves as Vice President, Ways and Means. Both she and Doug orchestrate the 50/50 drawing at every CPOC event.

The March meeting will be held at the Santa Ana Elks Lodge, 1751 Elk St. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. A buffet dinner is available for \$30 per person with advance purchase online, conservative patriotsofoc.org, or contact Peggy Baranyay, (714) 828-1289/swtmthr@sbcglobal.net. Tickets at the door are \$30 for members, \$35 for non-members.

# **VPHS hosts Cloches de Mariage**

It was the 18th wedding for Madame Fatima Pazargadi. Each one has been unique, beautiful and expansive – and completely in French.

The Villa Park High School French teacher annually challenges her language students to coordinate a lavish ceremony and reception to celebrate love and marriage, replete with gowns, flowers, food and music. (It is rumored that Madame finances the majority of the wedding costs, with a new dress and veil for each bride, and bridesmaids' dresses.)

The entire student body looks forward to the annual tradition, and many are involved.

Madame selects exemplary students to participate in the wedding. Claire von Ting was designated as the bride, escorted down the aisle by Principal Dennis McCuistion to meet her groom, Louis Hermann.

French Club President and Wedding Planner Madeline Valenta welcomed the student guests and officials. The Orange High JROTC presented the colors and, after the ceremony, formed a regal arch with their sabers for

the "newlyweds" to walk under.

VPHS Madrigals sang the national anthem, while students Eva Camera and Sadie Clemmons sang "La Marseillaise." Katie Dannenbring acted as the priest. The maid of honor was Natalie Kaufman; James Falk, the best man. Kat Tighe, Aubrey Pellegrino, Kristen Lambert, Charlie Herrera and Piper Yohman were bridesmaids in ice blue. Ben Brown, Jason Trinh, Youssef Badr, Brian Wilson and Ryan Gerger were groomsmen. Garland holders were Zoe Weichselberger, Kiana Ramirez, Isabella Camera, Yvonne Vu, Violet Shaw and Joy Aguillar. Flower Girls were Reagan and Vivian Vandercook, and TJ Clemmons was ring bearer. Madame Katie Marx from Cerro Villa Middle School was mother of the groom.

The event has all of the pageantry and ceremony of a "real" wedding, with the couple lighting a unity candle, the cutting of a three-tiered wedding cake, crepes by Crepes de Paris, toasts, music, a first dance and a red Thunderbird convertible sporting "Just Married" signs.



Bride Claire von Ting and groom Louis Hermann



# **OUSD Visual Arts programs** showcased at free concert

The Orange Unified Public Schools Foundation is teaming with Chapman University to present the OUSD honor band and orchestra in a free concert on Tuesday, March 19.

Supporting the district's Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) programs is a key component of OUPSF's mission, along with student mental wellness/social emotional health and teacher grants. Chapman University is providing the venue, Memorial Hall, parking and other resources to help with the performance.

The OUSD Honor Band and Orchestra (two separate groups) are created from teacher recommendations and auditions by student musicians in grades 5-12. All schools are represented.

Memorial Hall is located at 321 E. Palm Avenue. The Honor Orchestra will perform at 6 p.m.; the Honor Band will begin at 7:30 p.m. While there is no charge for admission, donations are wel-

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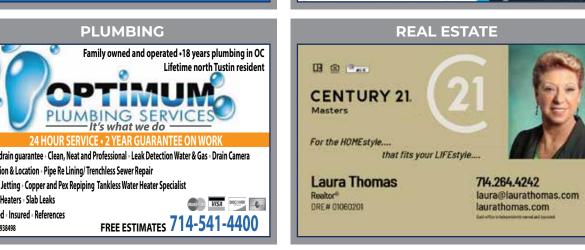
















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# SCC ranked #13 best community college in **California**

Santiago Canyon College (SCC) begins the Spring 2024 semester as one of the highest-ranked community colleges in California.

Independent college ranking research outlet BestValue-Schools.org ranked SCC as the 13th-best out of 116 community colleges throughout the state for 2024 and the sixthbest community college in Southern California.

Cited were the college's retention rate, completion/ graduation rate, the ongoing success of transfer or graduation rate, as well as the strong rate of employment and salary upon program completion. SCC was recognized as a "student-focused college that has thrived in the tight-knit community of which it is a part ... SCC offers flexible online courses that change the student's experience, but the student still receives plenty of support and guidance from intelligent, caring faculty."

The recognition comes on the heels of recent 2024 rankings from EDsmart.org, which ranked SCC #8, Intelligent. com (#13) and Niche.com (#16) in California.

SCC is also ranked #13 in the U.S. and #3 in California in CollegeChoice.net's most current ranking, and #7 in California in BestCollege.com.

To learn more about SCC, visit sccollege.edu.

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# **OUPSF** invests in students



From left, Todd Hanson, Nicol Jones, Frank Tucker, Wendi Forrest, Anne Truex and Kennedy Schaal present grants to OUSD teachers and staff.



OUSD Superintendent Ernie Gonzalez, with, left to right, Nicol Jones, Frank Tucker, Amy Case, Wendi Forrest, Anne Truex, Kennedy Schaal present a check to ElMo music instruct Brian Glahn (center).

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The Orange Unified Public Schools Foundation (OUPSF) had a successful year in its mission to "Invest in our students. Transform our community." Grants totalling \$44,050 were distributed to teachers and staff across 27 schools, benefiting 18,000 students.

OUPSF provided \$14,258 to expand the district's visual and performing arts programs.

The OUPSF board includes President Frank Tucker; Vice President Anne Truex; Treasurer Todd Hanson; Secretary Amy Case; Parliamentarian Nicol Jones; and Whitney Amsbary, Cheryl Carter, Christine Deihl, Ron Esparza, Wendi Forrest and Kennedy Schaal as directors.

# Large donors boost Chapman University's math, philosophy and physics program

ment to interdisciplinary educa- and physics. tion received a significant boost with two gifts totaling \$5.5 million. These contributions will provide support to students within the doctor of science in math, philosophy and physics (MPP) program.

The first gift, \$2.5 million, establishes the Anne and Chris Flowers Family Endowed Doctoral Fellowship, enabling students to pursue groundbreaking research at the nexus of mathematics, philosophy and physics. Anne and Chris Flowers, proud parents of two Chapman alumnae, expressed their enthusiasm for the program's forward-thinking approach and its potential to shape future leaders in the sciences.

The second gift, totaling \$3 million, was bestowed by Chapman Board of Trustees Chair Parker S. Kennedy. This contribution establishes endowed chairs in each of the MPP disci-

Chapman University's commit-plines—mathematics, philosophy

The MPP Ph.D.-equivalent degree and emphasizes the connection between mathematics, philosophy and the physical sciences. While some universities pair two of these subjects in a single degree, Chapman's program may be one of the few of its kind.

The degree offers a number of unique benefits, including a smaller course load that enables students to focus on their dissertations. The program also equips students with an interdisciplinary perspective that is invaluable when confronting important philosophical concepts.

These generous donations not only propel the MPP program to new heights, but also bolster Chapman University's strategic plan goal to raise \$500 million through its Inspire campaign. With a total of \$370 million raised so far, the university is well on its way to achieving this objective.



# **OCADA 2023-**24 Athletes of Character **Awards** announced

The Orange County Athletic Directors Association presented its Athletes of Character Awards on Jan. 22 at Servite High School.

Awardees are honored for their sportsmanship, teamwork and integrity.

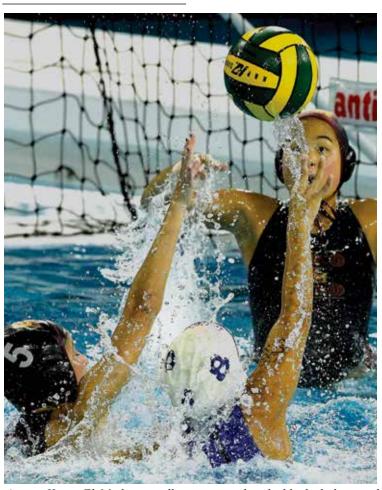
From Canyon High School were Karys McKinney, girls soccer, track; and Luke Kornely, water polo, swim. From Villa Park High were Katarina Carcich, tennis and water polo; and Justin Tims, baseball. From El Modena High were Jolie Khalil, tennis; and Greg Koutures, football. From Foothill High were Kate Jensen, tennis; and Aaron Mitchell, football. From Orange Lutheran High School were Samantha Kim, swim and dive; and Peter Thompson, wrestling. From Orange High were Kimberly Linon, girls basketball; and Joseph Carrillo, football.



Zulema Andrade from El Modena High (with ball) led her team with five goals in an 11-8 quarterfinal win over Segerstrom High.



Alina Casares from El Modena scores over the block attempt in the quarterfinals.



Ariana Kang, El Modena goalkeeper, posted eight blocked shots and four saves in the finals.



Canyon goalkeeper Brighton Denes (1) gets an assist from Jordan Simmons to get a leg up on the play. Canyon High defeated Villa Park High, 17-5. Canyon entered the CIF girls water polo playoffs; the team was eliminated in the quarterfinals.

# El Modena girls water polo team goes deep into the playoffs

The El Modena girls water polo team entered the playoffs as a wild card entry, and drew Cade High School. First round, El Modena eliminated Cade. Then, four goals by Danica Claxton and five goals by Zulema Andrade led El Modena to an 11-8 win over Segerstrom High. A 12-6 win over La Quinta advanced El Modena to the Division 6 CIF-SS Finals for the first time in school history, with only Indio High School standing in the way.

Indio was an early season victim, but jumped out to a 3-0 lead. Vanessa Soto found the cage, with an assist from Brianna Soberano, to start the second quarter. El Modena shooting was cold up to that point. The first 10 shots didn't fall. Soberano and Soto added a goal each to trail by a one at the half, 3-4. Overall El Modena shot 24%, 8 for 33.

El Modena was awarded a penalty shot to Brianna Soberano to tie the game at 4-4 to start the third quarter. Soto and Samantha Simmons scored a goal each to take a two-point lead, 6-4. The lead changed hands seven times from there. Indio tied the score, 8-8, and held the lead with 20 seconds remaining to claim victory. El Modena's championship run ended.

Scoring recap: Simons (three goals), Soto (three goals), Casares, Andrade (one goal each), Kang (six blocks, two saves).

# Rugby starts at Villa Park High

The Villa Park High School rugby team opened the season with an eight-game schedule, and has a roster of 18 players, seven of whom are freshman, five sophomores, four juniors and three seniors.



Samantha Simmons from El Modena assists on the play for the goal.



Jeremy Loreto (14) from Canyon High goes in for the layup against Rancho Cucamonga High. Canyon won the game, 61-59, with two clutch free throws



Canyon High's Mustafa Yilmaturk (0) teams up with Jeremy Loreto (14) and Zach Cutler (43) for the rebound.

# In other CIF winter playoffs, the qualifiers:

and girls soccer and girls water Canyon High qualified five teams polo entered the CIF State Tour- for CIF-SS finals, including boys

Villa Park's girls soccer and

Foothill boys basketball, boys basketball advanced to the finals. and girls soccer, girls water polo, boys and girls basketball.



Vanessa Soto from El Modena gets the pass off, despite being double-

# **OMMUNITY SPORTS** BY CLIFF ROBBINS AND CHAD CLINE



Bailey Roczey (12) from Villa Park gets open from the 3-pt. line against Dana Hills.

Villa Park's Olivia Sturdivant (11) drives the lane and draws the shooting foul in the semi-final game against Dana Hills.



Brandice Cutspec

# **Meet Coach Brandice Cutspec**

Brandice Cutspec returns to the coaching staff at Santiago Canyon College and inherits a championship softball team after Head Coach Lisa Camargo stepped down after 12 seasons.

Cutspec coached four seasons with the Hawks (2014-17). During that span, she was a member of the first team to earn a bid to the Community College Athletic Association State Championships in 2014. She returned two years later as a member of the coaching staff that won a 2016 CCCAA Championship. Cutspec was also

part of the 2016 NFCA CalJC National Coaching Staff of the Year.

When at Santiago Canyon College, Cutspec was inspirational, claiming many awards: NFCA CalJC National Coaching Staff of the Year, 2016; OEC Coach of the Year, 2014; OEC Academic Team Champion Award, 2016; State Championship Appearance, 2014, 2016; Super Regional Appearance, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017; Regional Appearance, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017; OEC Champions, 2014; State Champions, 2016.



Samuel Fonua from Orange Lutheran High patrols the backfield for the North All-Stars from his linebacker position.



Carter Christie (12) from Villa Park High breaks through the South line in the North-South All-Star Classic football game. The South won for the ninth consecutive year.

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# Duke of Orange crowned following solemn ceremony befitting the title

The second annual Duke of Orange pageant attracted 14 contestants who sang, danced, crooned, cracked jokes and charmed the audience. The event, sponsored by the Orange Chamber of Com-

merce and The Duchess on Cambridge, was sold out. The designated Duke receives \$1,000 for the nonprofit of his choice and an engraved beer stein. Runners up take home beer stein trophies.



Mayor Dan Slater congratulates Duke Treavor Saunders.



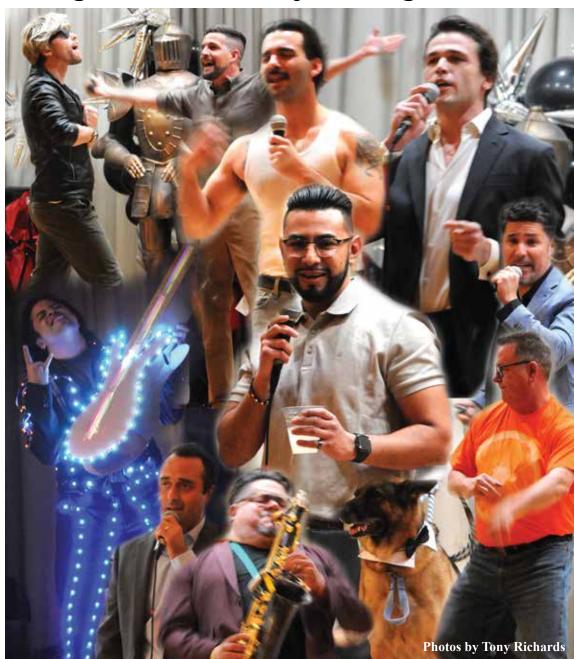
Aaron Gosa won the People's Choice award, reaping \$500 for his favorite charity. He revved up the audience with Michael Jackson's "Rock With You."



Justin Ladd was named first runner-up. His juggling act wowed the crowd, even though no one could see the balls.



The Orange Rotary's Schad Gibbons walked away with second runner up honors. He amazed the audience with magic tricks that defied explanation.



The contenders were, clockwise from top left, Cameron Geringer-Pate, Dan Parks, Max McCarthy, Anatolii Shtapenko, Mike Salas, Dave Simpson, Gunner the German Shepherd (performing with Salas), Saul Lopez, Adrian Olmos, Dyson Posey and Benjamin Finley.



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