

Daily Pilot

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Photos by Susan Hoffman

OFFICERS FROM the Huntington Beach Police Air Support Unit were among the attendees, along with police and fire departments during the Nicholas Vella plaque dedication held Sunday at Marina Park. The Huntington Beach police officer died in a helicopter crash one year ago.

Fallen officer remembered a year after helicopter crash

BY MATT SZABO

Hundreds gathered Sunday morning in Newport Beach for the unveiling of a memorial plaque honoring late Huntington Beach Police Officer Nicholas Vella.

A year to the day after Vella's death, the plaque was installed on the seawall at Marina Park on the Balboa Peninsula.

Vella, a 14-year veteran of the HBPD, died in a helicopter crash responding to a call for service off the waters of Newport Beach.

Speakers on Sunday included Huntington Beach Police Chief Eric Parra and Mayor Tony Strickland, as well as Newport Beach acting Police Chief Joseph Cartwright and Newport Beach Mayor Noah Blom.

"One year has passed, and there are still no words that can adequately express this loss," Parra said. "We will always remember Nick on this day. He was a selfless and driven police officer and man who we were blessed to have known."

Vella started his law enforcement career with the Laguna Beach Police Department and joined the HBPD in 2008. He worked a variety of assignments there, including patrol, beach detail, SWAT and tactical flight officer, as an ancillary duty while still working patrol.

Vella was assigned to the Air Support Unit in 2016, and earned the positions of police helicopter pilot and certified flight instructor.

"Our Huntington Beach community takes great pride in our police department and the phenomenal work our police heroes do for Huntington Beach and the surrounding area," Strickland said. "While I didn't have the honor of meeting Nick, the many stories I have heard about his dedication to our city, his family, and his law enforcement brothers and sisters make clear what a tremendous father, husband, son, friend and officer he was."

The plaque dedication came two weeks after a 3-mile stretch of Beach Boulevard was designated as the Officer Nicholas Vella Memorial Highway.

Susan Hoffman contributed to this story.

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THE NEWLY INSTALLED plaque on the seawall at Marina Park was dedicated Sunday in honor of late HBPD Officer Nicholas Vella.



KRISTI VELLA places a white rose on the newly dedicated plaque installed on the seawall at Marina Park on Sunday, in honor of her late husband and Huntington Beach Police Officer, Nicholas Vella.

Laguna Beach finalizes ban on balloons

Council members on Tuesday night adopted an ordinance prohibiting the sale, public use and distribution of balloons.

BY ANDREW TURNER

Laguna Beach adopted an ordinance prohibiting the sale, public use and distribution of balloons with a second reading at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

The ban prohibits balloons from being used at city events or on public property, from being released into the air and from being disposed of except where they are contained with a lid.

The ordinance has a long built-in grace period, as it will become effective when the calendar turns to 2024.

Violations of the new restrictions can result in fines of up to \$100 for a first offense, \$200 for the second, and \$500 for each successive violation within one year.

In addition, a business license may be revoked by the city manager, or a designee, in the event a business commits four or more

See **Balloons**, page A2

Border agents respond to boat on H.B. shore

11 passengers aboard a pleasure craft that landed near Lifeguard Tower 14 have been detained, city officials report.

BY SARA CARDINE

U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officers are investigating an incident that occurred in Huntington Beach Monday night, when a vessel carrying 11 passengers washed ashore near Lifeguard Tower 14, resulting in the detention of all on board.

The incident took place shortly before 9:30 p.m. on a portion of the beach near the intersection of Pacific Coast Highway and 17th Street, according to Jennifer Carey, public affairs manager for the city.

Department of Homeland Security spokesman Jaime Ruiz confirmed Tuesday a 23-foot pleasure craft carrying two adult Mexican women and nine adult

See **Border**, page A2

New app helps athletes stay 'surf ready' even when on the go

BY MATT SZABO

Paul Norris has been training surfers in fitness for more than 15 years and at his current Surf Ready Fitness location in west-side Costa Mesa for 11 years.

In that time, he's seen the evolution of surf fitness.

"When I first started training surfers in Huntington [Beach] 15 years ago, I don't want to say it was looked down upon, but nobody believed in it outside of our circle," Norris said. "A lot of the old surf coaches would just say to surf more to surf better. But I knew from my background in sports performance training that there were things that we could do on land to help them in the water."

Norris, who lives in Newport Beach, built a successful busi-

ness working with future stars like two-time U.S. Open of Surfing champion and Huntington Beach native Kanoa Igarashi. Soon he started getting emails and direct messages from surfers all over the world.

They were asking how they could take advantage of the workouts and exercises that the gym provides, and Norris didn't have a good answer.

"Back in the day I would create a PDF profile, with photos of exercises, and try to get that out to people," he said. "I never had the right system set up. Last year I decided I wanted to create an app that surfers could use, kind of a one-stop shop for surf fitness, with programs and workouts and exercises that I've come

See **App**, page A4



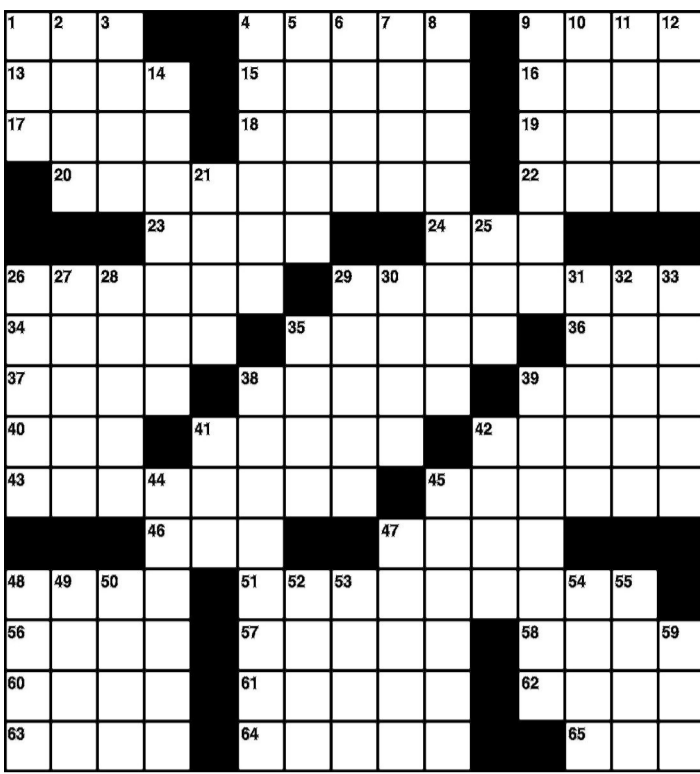
TYLER GUNTER, a pro surfer from Newport Beach, works out in Surf Ready Fitness gym.

Don Leach

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

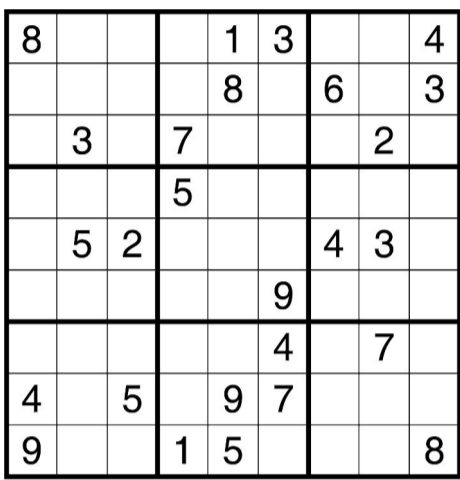
- ACROSS**
 1 TV's " _ : Vegas"
 4 Boutonniere's place
 9 Egyptian biters
 13 On the _; not getting along
 15 As dry as _
 16 Antiaircraft fire
 17 Computer expert, for short
 18 Mails
 19 Intense anger
 20 Lazy
 22 Vexes
 23 Rod and _; fishing gear
 24 Pitcher part
 26 Supported
 29 Individually crafted
 34 Went astray
 35 Made clothes
 36 _ Gatos, CA
 37 No longer youthful
 38 Unchangeable
 39 "A _ home is his castle"
 40 Signal to an actor
 41 All _ up; enthusiastic
 42 Pacific Island group
 43 Up the creek without a paddle
 45 Bob Hope's "Thanks for the _"
 46 5th-century barbarian
 47 Common tear site
 48 _ Strip; Palestinian territory
 51 Advanced degree
 56 Needs to pay back
 57 Relative by marriage
 58 Drawn-out
 60 Oxen harness
 61 Keep a fire going
 62 Put money in the bank
 63 Thirst quenchers
 64 Didn't despair
 65 Go blonde



SUDOKU

By the Mephram Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk.



For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A3.

DOWN

- 1 Fold-up bed
 2 Seeks restitution
 3 Symptom of athlete's foot
 4 Went on and on
 5 Rings _; sounds familiar
 6 Cornbread
 7 Says no more

- 8 Diminished
 9 Validate
 10 Disparaging remark
 11 Yosemite National _
 12 "The _ the limit"
 14 Dodged, as one's duty

- 21 Chicken _; measly sum
 25 Didn't _ up; made no sense
 26 Sandy area
 27 Bicker
 28 Wicker basket
 29 Witch's spells
 30 Flabbergasted
 31 Texas tourist site
 32 Generous one
 33 Prose writing
 35 Letter opener of old
 38 Diabolical
 39 Weasels, wolves & walrus
 41 Reason to call in sick
 42 Burn
 44 _ out; eliminates slowly
 45 Cried for a bowl of milk
 47 At _; being risked
 48 Artist Francisco

- 49 Base absentee, for short
 50 Ezekiel's nickname
 52 Hold _; keep
 53 Clippety-_
 54 Hopping animal
 55 1 of 7 deadly sins
 59 "Golly!"

Tribune Media Services

Hit-and-run crash injures 5 ballet dancers in Seal Beach

BY ERIC LICAS

A man identified as a suspect in a hit-and-run collision that injured five people in Seal Beach turned himself in to police on Sunday.

The crash happened round 7 p.m. on Feb. 11 at the intersection of Pacific Coast Highway and Main Street, Seal Beach police said in a news release. Investigators suspect it had been caused by the driver of a Mercedes Benz 300D who may have been speeding at the time.

The two women and three 17-year-old-girls in the vehicle that was struck were taken to a hospital. Meanwhile, the driver of the Mercedes Benz fled on foot into a nearby neighborhood.

Investigators reviewed surveillance footage and identified Jahson Imgrund, 23, of Lake Forest, as the driver of the Mercedes Benz in the crash. He submitted himself into the custody of Seal Beach on Sunday and was booked on suspicion of felony hit-and-run with serious bodily injury. He was free as of Tuesday while Orange County District Attorney's officials determine what charges might be appropriate to file against him.

The adults who were hurt in the collision were released from treatment over the weekend. One of the teens has also been discharged, while two remained in a hospital as of Tuesday, Seal Beach police Lt. Julia Clasby said.

The five victims were all

ballet dancers with Premier Dance Arts in Los Alamitos, representatives for the ballet school wrote on their website and a Gofundme page set up to help cover the cost of their medical bills. More than \$44,000 had been raised to support them as of Tuesday afternoon.

Dance instructors described the people who were hurt as "strong resilient individuals who will overcome this tragedy."

"While the dancers have sustained a multitude of serious injuries, we are able to share good news that all five have survived and will journey on their road to recovery," members of Premier Dance Arts wrote

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Andrew Turner

JEREMY FRIMOND, assistant to the city manager, demonstrates types of balloons to the Laguna Beach City Council on Jan. 24. The council passed a balloon ordinance on Tuesday.

BALLOONS

Continued from page A1

violations within a year.

The council's action on balloons has followed other environmentally focused initiatives, including a single-use plastics ban for beaches, parks and trails.

"We shouldn't utilize artificial stuff like single-use plastic balloons," Hoiyin Ip, co-chair of the Sierra Club California zero waste com-

mittee, said. "This is horrible in terms of the impact to wildlife and biodiversity. I hope this will change the way people think."

Ip added that community members would have to step up as stewards to hold up the new policy on balloons. The new law drew support from some in Laguna Beach's hospitality industry as well.

"As a sailor, we pull out multiple balloons every time we are on the water," Kurt Bjorkman, chief op-

erating officer of the Ranch at Laguna Beach, wrote to the council before the ordinance's first reading on Jan. 24. "As the operator of the Ranch resort, we see balloons trapped on our hill-sides and in our many trees on property, unfortunately, quite often. We do not allow balloons of any kind on our property, [as] a matter of policy, and have not for four years now."

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BORDER

Continued from page A1

men had beached off the coast of Huntington Beach. By the time Customs and Border Protection officers and Air and Marine Operations agents responded to the scene, city police had detained six subjects from the vessel.

After witnesses stated they'd seen 11 people exit the boat, officers and agents searched the area and located an additional five individuals, Ruiz explained. All passengers were determined to have been unlawfully present in the United States and were taken into custody without

incident.

Carey said responders with the Huntington Beach Fire Department had checked the status of the passengers and found that no injuries were sustained during passage, Carey confirmed Tuesday. AMO agents seized the boat.

U.S. Homeland Security Investigations' Los Angeles Border Enforcement Security Taskforce is overseeing the investigation into Monday's incident. Ruiz said the Customs and Border Protection and Air and Marine Operations, working in partnership as part of a Regional Coordinating Mechanism, work to identify, intercept and disrupt criminal organizations operating in Orange, Los An-

geles, Ventura and San Diego counties.

Such smuggling events often use pleasure crafts and repurposed Mexican fishing vessels, known as "pangas," to smuggle narcotics and migrants into the area, Ruiz added.

Reports of beached vessels are not uncommon in Orange County — a panga boat carrying 14 passengers from Mexico was intercepted at Laguna Beach's Agate Street Beach last year on May 18. A similar sighting was reported in Newport Beach three days earlier, while a third incident was recorded May 2.

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Los Angeles Times
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BOYS' BASKETBALL

Sage Hill defeats Littlerock, advances to CIF final

BY MATT SZABO

LITTLEROCK — The Sage Hill School boys' basketball team has gone from "one and done" to "one more to go for a ring."

A year after losing in the first round of the CIF Southern Section Division 4A playoffs, the Lightning will play for the championship.

Sage Hill's remarkable season continues after the No. 4-seeded Lightning posted a 55-49 win at Littlerock on Friday night in a Division 4A semifinal game.

Junior wing player Carter Bryant had 28 points, 10 rebounds, five assists and six blocks for Sage Hill (15-11). Junior post Johnny Mayhew added 13 points and 11 rebounds.

The tandem helped lead the Lightning, guided by first-year coach D'Cean Bryant, into the CIF championship game against Long Beach Jordan. The No. 2-seeded Panthers topped Pacifica Christian Santa Monica, 84-64, in the other semifinal game.

Sage Hill will meet Jordan for the championship on Saturday, Feb. 25 at a venue to be determined. The Lightning have never won a CIF title; the only previous team to make the finals was in 2019.

"It's great going from a first-round exit team all the way to the finals," Mayhew said. "Our ups and downs have been pretty bad, especially our downs, but we're in the finals now."

Senior guard Shaan Patel added seven points for Sage Hill, and

senior guard Rocky Lee scored three on a make from downtown. The Lightning led by as many as 14 points and never trailed.

Carter Bryant also had a trio of dunks in the game, including one on the very first possession of the contest. Still, Littlerock (19-9) and junior guard William Young Jr. proved tough to put away.

The Lobos, who had rallied from a double-digit fourth quarter deficit to win at top-seeded Lawndale Leuzinger in the quarterfinals, threatened to do something similar to Sage Hill.

Young Jr., who matched Bryant with 28 points, scored 12 of those in the fourth quarter on Friday for the hosts. His step-through layup pulled Littlerock within 47-42 with 2:30 left to play.

But Carter Bryant immediately found Mayhew on a slashing drive that ended up as a three-point play.

"It's just dedication of our guys, especially Johnny," said Carter Bryant of the team's success. "He's been in the gym with the coaching staff. He's watching a lot of film. It's definitely paid off. You could see his progression as the season went on. He's shooting a lot better. He's shooting a really high percentage from the field, along with Shaan Patel. They're just doing a lot of really great things."

Littlerock got a couple of good looks at three-pointers in the closing moments, including a corner try by Omari Penn that



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

SAGE HILL'S Shaan Patel (21), shown shooting against Whittier in the first round, scored seven points Friday.

somehow spun out with 25 seconds left. That would have cut the Lightning lead to two, but on the other end, Carter Bryant sunk two free throws to push it back to seven.

Carter Bryant made seven of nine field goal attempts and was a perfect 14 of 14 from the free-throw line.

His dad, D'Cean Bryant, said he had talked to his team about Littlerock's run against Leuzinger. The Lightning made sure the same thing didn't happen to them.

"They saw that it was the same situation," D'Cean Bryant said. "Luckily, we were able to make our free throws down the stretch,

they missed some open looks and we got the rebounds. You know, it's hard. They got to the semifinals for a reason. They're a team that's resilient, and we were just a little bit better tonight."

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APP

Continued from page A1

up with and designed over the last 15 years."

Norris and longtime gym buddy Komron Tarkeshian created a Surf Ready Fitness app and equipment bundle. Norris calls it in the "soft launch" phase, with no real postings on social media about it, though the app already has about 200 subscribers.

The app, which features workouts for both veteran surfers and beginners,

costs \$9.99 per month. The fitness kit comes in a 22-liter dry bag backpack and includes tools like a stability ball and pump, resistance bands, a speed rope and a TRX suspension trainer. It costs \$249 plus tax and includes three free months on the app.

Newport Beach pro surfer Tyler Gunter, 23, has been working with Norris for years and surfs on the World Surf League Qualifying Series. Gunter was in the Surf Ready Fitness on a recent day for a training session and has contests in

Florida and the Caribbean in his sights.

His training bag is definitely coming with him.

"I'm about to leave for a month," Gunter said. "When you're on the road, you don't always have a way to work out, the equipment and things that you need. Having Paul's bag is amazing, just being able to set it up anywhere in a hotel room, an Airbnb. It's easy to use, there's not too many pieces, and along with the app you can do hundreds of workouts it seems like."

Because Norris knows the equipment that's in the dry bag, it's easy to construct exercises on the app to go along with that. Costa Mesa pro surfer Shelby Detmers, 28, doesn't currently use the equipment on the road, but that could change in the future.

Detmers' surf coach, Christian Saenz, recommended that she start coming to Surf Ready Fitness to take her surfing to the next level. At the time, she was mainly just doing yoga for fitness, but she's been coming to the gym

since December.

Detmers, a Newport Harbor High graduate who has dual citizenship with Mexico and surfs for that country's national team, has started seeing a difference.

"I feel stronger in every way," she said. "Your body's strong, your mind is strong. It's all very connected. I feel myself pulling off tricks that normally I would fall on, whereas now I have more stability and strength. That's what surfing is really all about, strength and staying on a surfboard.

With that also comes the mental aspect of it, the confidence which helps you get to the next level."

So Norris' kit and app offer confidence on the go.

He said the feedback from surfers he works with has been good. On one recent weekend, Norris took his dry bag snowboarding with him in Colorado.

"In hindsight, it was such a genius idea," he said. "There's nothing on the market like this."

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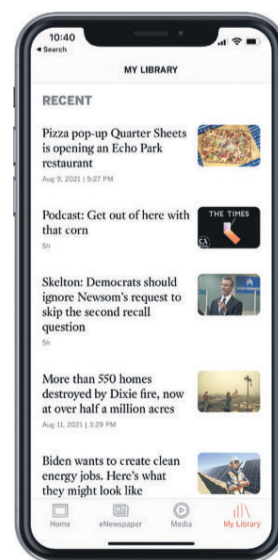
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