

Daily Pilot

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020 /// Now including Coastline Pilot and Huntington Beach Independent /// dailypilot.com



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

SANTA CLAUS at South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa Saturday visits with children from inside a display case. The move is a creative way to keep a time-honored tradition going during the COVID-19 pandemic, officials say. South Coast Plaza has installed two Santa sets custom made for holiday portraits.

Holidays behind glass

Orange County shopping centers find creative ways for kids to visit with Santa.

BY SARA CARDINE

Costa Mesa's South Coast Plaza opened at 11 a.m. Saturday, the start of the last weekend before Christmas, but by then a long line of distanced visitors had already queued up outside the Crate & Barrel store.

They weren't there for Tiffany & Co. or for Louis Vuitton but for a sweet, nostalgic taste of Christmas that almost seemed impossible given this year's pandemic — a visit with Santa Claus.

Hundreds of strangers standing elbow to elbow for a chance to share the same lap just doesn't pass muster with state and county coronavirus guidelines. So, to appease children looking for a little Ho, Ho, Ho when restrictions are screaming No, No,



SANTA CLAUS waves as workers arrange and sanitize seating in front of plexiglass for visitors to have their picture taken at South Coast Plaza.

No, shopping centers are getting creative this year.

South Coast Plaza officials

have installed two Santa sets custom made for holiday portraits. One is "Santa's Outdoor Wonder-

land," a large tent decorated in a woodland theme, where families enter one at a time for a reserved time slot, unmask and have a professional photo taken with live Santa positioned behind a clear plexiglass panel.

A second Kris Kringle is stationed inside an enormous window display fronting the center's Carousel Plaza, where he can take toy requests and pose for photos with kids from behind the glass, while moms and dads take free cellphone snaps out front.

Spokeswoman Debra Gunn Downing said Santa visits at South Coast Plaza have become a time-honored tradition for area families for more than 50 years. So, organizers wanted to find a

See *Santa*, page A8

More COVID-19 records fall in O.C.

The healthcare agency on Saturday reports 3,445 cases — nearly half of them among those under age 35.

BY SARA CARDINE

New coronavirus infections and COVID-19 hospitalizations in Orange County Saturday hit all-time high benchmarks yet again, as another 3,445 individuals tested positive for the virus, while area hospitals reported treating 1,601 individuals, with 361 in intensive care units.

A total of 119,822 infections have so far been logged by the Orange County Health Care Agency, which on Saturday reported another 26 deaths, pushing the fatality rate to 1,760.

Among the new cases, 46% — or 1,588 infections — occurred among people under age 35. With many schools and colleges out for winter break, health officials are urging residents not to gather with those outside their households during the holidays and have attributed the current spike to a post-Thanksgiving surge.

Still, state and county guidelines are allowing retailers to operate at 20% capacity and, on Saturday, while crowds at Costa

See *COVID-19*, page A8

Police seize 650 pot plants from home in F.V.

BY SARA CARDINE

Fountain Valley police have arrested eight individuals on suspicion of running an illegal marijuana growing operation in a residence that led to the seizure of 650 plants and 450 pounds of dried marijuana produce, officials reported.

Fountain Valley Police Department Sgt. Robert Cortes said officers followed up on complaints lodged by neighbors of the house, located on the 8500 block of Cape Cod Avenue.

"The complaints started a couple of months ago," Cortes said Friday, adding residents had concerns about the strong odor of marijuana and odd activities observed on the property. "We conducted an investigation that included undercover surveillance of the residence."

From their investigation, officers were able to obtain a search warrant for the property. On

See *Pot*, page A2

Jeff Grosso autopsy reveals fentanyl played a role in the legendary skateboarder's death

BY JACK HARRIS

Former professional skateboarder Jeff Grosso's death in March was caused by "acute polydrug intoxication" from the combined effects of fentanyl and phenobarbital, according to an autopsy report by the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department.

Grosso, who lived in Costa Mesa, was an Arcadia native who

rose to fame as a professional skateboarder in the late 1980s and later became a beloved ambassador for the sport through his YouTube show, his mentorship of younger pro skaters and his public reflections on battles with drug addiction. He died at the age of 51 at Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian in Newport Beach.

Severe cardiomegaly (enlarge-

See *Grosso*, page A8



COSTA MESA'S JEFF GROSSO, a legendary skateboarder, died in March at age 51 at Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian in Newport Beach.

YouTube | Vans

COLUMN | **GUSTAVO ARELLANO**

The year Orange County reminded us it's still Orange County

When it comes to Orange County and crazy, I always paraphrase Michael Corleone's memorable quote about his involvement with organized crime in "The Godfather Part III": Just when I thought we were out, we pull ourselves back in.

Over the last two decades, as Orange County's politics turned increasingly purple, and scripted and reality television shows broadcast my homeland to an international audience, the rest of the country began to see the county as almost ... normal.

Sure, the avarice and bunker mentality vis-a-vis the rest of Southern California remained. But largely gone were the politicians whose pronouncements from Capitol Hill or Sacramento were embarrassments to democracy.

Off to Arizona and Tennessee went most of the angry voters that birthed anti-immigrant, anti-gay and anti-tax ballot initiatives and laws that had an undue influence on American politics.

In their place rose a kinder, more diverse O.C. eager to join the rest of California.

But 2020 had other ideas. And the O.C. crazy — which county lifers like me know still

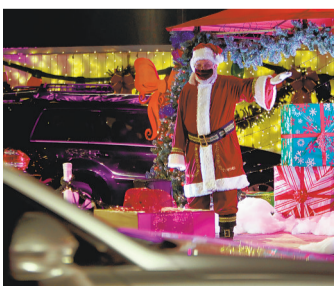
See *Orange*, page A7



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

PROTESTERS RALLY at the Huntington Beach Pier against COVID-related restrictions on May 1.

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

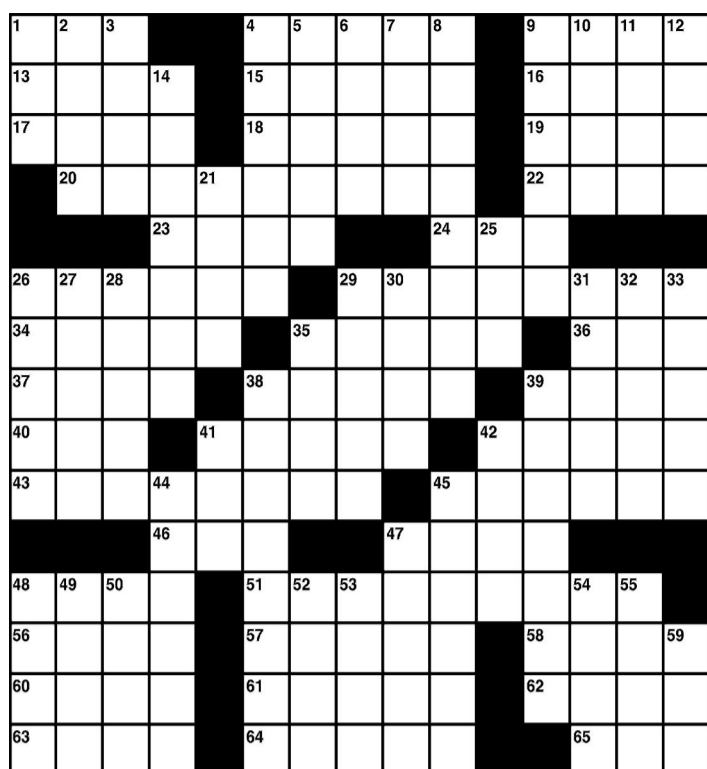
NIGHT OF LIGHTS OC BRIGHTENS SKIES, HOLIDAY OUTLOOK FOR ORANGE COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS CROWD PAGE A5

FESTIVAL OF ARTS RAISES MORE THAN \$300,000 AT FIRST VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER GALA PAGE A2

COMMENTARY: POSEIDON WOULD BRING JOBS AND WATER TO ORANGE COUNTY PAGE A4

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

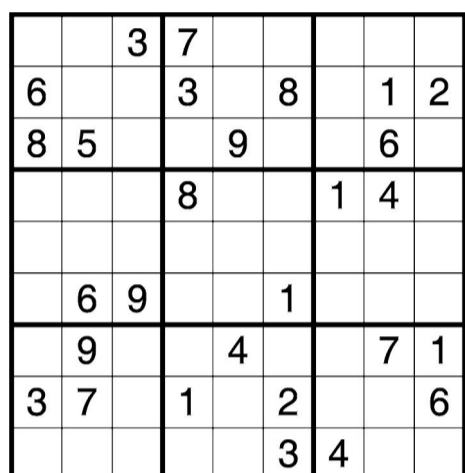


- ACROSS**
 1 J. Edgar Hoover's agcy.
 4 Bravery
 9 Lunch spot
 13 Quayle & others
 15 Popeye's love
 16 _ Bowl; annual game in Hawaii
 17 Sushi staple
 18 Restroom door word
 19 On _ own; independent
 20 Consequently
 22 Hang around
 23 Bagpiper's wear
 24 "Golly!"
 26 Speaks without preparation
 29 Bliss
 34 Golf clubs with flat heads
 35 Forest
 36 TV maker
 37 New York's _ Island
 38 Funeral song
 39 Twofold
 40 Day before a holiday
 41 Valentine's Day gift, perhaps
 42 Furniture wood
 43 Crazy
 45 Sews lightly
 46 Avail oneself of
 47 Piece of china
 48 Team's disappointment
 51 Aiding
 56 Polishes off
 57 Alex Haley novel
 58 On cloud _; delighted
 60 Bangkok native
 61 Fill with joy
 62 Elephant's color
 63 Positive reply
 64 Train station
 65 Have bills to pay
- DOWN**
 1 4-term U.S. president, for short
 2 Fishing worm
 3 _ along;
 5 In the air
 6 Long car
 7 _-the-top; outrageous
 8 Deserter; outlaw
 9 _ few; elite
 10 Family tree member
 11 Pet peeve?
 12 Not complicated
 14 Looking for
 21 BBQ favorites
 25 McMahon &

SUDOKU

By The Mepham 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 A7.

- advance slowly
 4 What "Psst!" lacks
 5 In the air
 6 Long car
 7 _-the-top; outrageous
 8 Deserter; outlaw
 9 _ few; elite
- group
 10 Family tree member
 11 Pet peeve?
 12 Not complicated
 14 Looking for
 21 BBQ favorites
 25 McMahon &

- Koch
 26 Felt miserable
 27 Did a chauffeur's job
 28 Solitude lover
 29 Pierced
 30 Fireplace fuel
 31 Burst forth
 32 USPS counter device
 33 Word with tax or pitch
 35 Shrewd
 38 Like the pages of a much-used book
 39 Flamboyant; debonair
 41 Hosp. employees
 42 Sail support
 44 One from Down Under
 45 Actress Jacqueline
 47 "Likewise!"
 48 Allows
 49 Diamond Head's island
 50 Night twinkler
 52 Part of the foot
 53 Bather's need
 54 Actor Robert De _
 55 Chew like a beaver
 59 Center of a storm
- Tribune Media Services

Festival of Arts raises more than \$300K at first virtual fundraiser gala

BY LILLY NGUYEN

The Festival of Arts of Laguna Beach recently announced its first virtual gala raised more than \$300,000 to be put toward the Festival of Arts and next year's Pageant of the Masters.

It raised \$300,952 of its \$300,000 goal.

The Fine Arts Show and Pageant of the Masters were canceled this year in response to the coronavirus with organizers saying that the cancellation was difficult, but necessary in light of the active stay-at-home orders in place. This year's celebration would have marked the 86th Pageant of the Masters and was themed "Made in America."

The last time the summer art show was canceled was during World War II. Organizers said in May that they were hopeful for the return of both in the summer of 2021.

Exhibits for this year's show were moved online, as was its fundraising this year with its virtual gala, which the organization called the Simply ARTra-geous: Live the Legacy Vir-



Courtesy of Festival of Arts

tual Gala. The fundraiser included musical performances, celebrity appearances and comedic skits.

Those interested can watch a replay of the gala at foapom.com/virtual-gala. Organizers said that they are still accepting donations and that all proceeds will be put toward supporting the Festival of Arts and the Pageant of the Masters.

About 500 people donated, according to the organization's website. The virtual gala was sponsored by Stephen R. Davy Violins, the Ritz-Carl-

ton of Laguna Niguel, Partners Bank of California and Yamaha.

"We are beyond humbled and grateful to everyone who made this event possible," Festival of Arts Board President David Perry said in a statement.

"We thank the donors for showing their support during these challenging times and for helping to position the organization for a stronger reopening in 2021."

lilly.nguyen@latimes.com
 Twitter: @lillibirds

POT

Continued from page A1

Dec. 3, members of the department's Crime Suppression Unit served the warrant and discovered eight individuals inside the residence.

Cortes said it appeared the interior of house had been retrofitted to serve as a growing operation with little to no residential space remaining inside the building.

The suspects — Fountain Valley residents Trang

Bui, 32, Minh Nguyen, 47, Cuong Hoang, 38, and Long Thai, 42, along with Ly Nguyen, 44, of Anaheim, San Francisco residents Tuoi Nguyen, 60, and Kim Nguyen Pham, 36, and Midway City resident Oanh Le, 47 — were arrested on suspicion of violating a California Health and Safety Code that prohibits people from cultivating, harvesting, processing or drying more than six living cannabis plants.

Violators may be punished with up to six

months in county jail, a fine of up to \$500 or both. Cortes confirmed Friday the individuals were arrested for misdemeanor offenses.

In addition to the plants and dried marijuana taken from the property, officers said they seized several pieces of marijuana cultivation equipment. Cortes said the department typically stores seized property while court cases are ongoing.

sara.cardine@latimes.com
 Twitter: @SaraCardine

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forum

MAILBAG

Living one's best life as an older person

I got a kick out of Lori Basheda's article, "Not a bit lonely: She's a century old and living on her own," (TimesOC, Dec. 6) relating to 100-year-old Jo Hamann from Yorba Linda. I'm a bit shy of 79, but feel like a toddler compared to Jo.

We have some things in common, such as a typical breakfast consisting of cold cereal with a banana and apparently a love for dark chocolate, which I crave and eat a bit too much at times. I usually have either one cup of coffee in the morning or none at all compared to Jo's four to six cups each morning.

She looks to be way more of a reader than I am by virtue of her word puzzles and reading fiction. "Jeopardy!" is one of her favorite TV programs, but I wonder if she will continue with that once they find someone to replace the late Alex Trebek. Jo lives alone at her senior citizen mobile home park while I occupy a small condo alone not far from the beach. She says she enjoys living alone doing what she wants anytime she wants and is not lonely thereby espousing senior independent living. As far as similar meds, we both take blood pressure medications, but I reign in that department with a plethora of other pills with my name on them.

One of the items that Jo says is responsible for her longevity is her attitude of getting along and accepting what life brings sans expecting more thereby excluding any disappointments that may arise with false hopes.

She says one must learn to adjust to life. And it appears that she doesn't live in the future but just enjoys living which is not unlike the adage of, "live for now." At age 100, I guess all we have is only now so I say to you, "Jo, go for it for as long as you can."

Bill Spitalnick
Newport Beach

Downsides to Poseidon project

While I admire Gov. Gavin



Photo by Robert Duron

JO HAMANN, left, sees "Happy 100th" birthday wishes from members of the SCAN team via Facetime. A reader writes that although he's only just shy of 79, he has some things in common with the centenarian.

Newsom, I am not always in lockstep agreement with his policies and actions. He is, after all, a politician with many special interest considerations that conflict with those who support him.

A perfect example is the proposed Poseidon desalination plant project, which has aroused the anger and opposition of environmentalists, coastal residents and good government advocates in my hometown and the other communities affected by this project.

There are many downsides to this boondoggle project which should give the governor pause in considering its approval. It is not needed as we have a multitude of better and more cost-effective options. It is environmentally destructive and ruinously expensive. It is simply a bad deal.

However, the primary point of opposition for me is that I believe Poseidon cannot be trusted. It is

the main reason that Newsom should just say no.

Tim Geddes
Huntington Beach

Questioning Dixon's vote for Muldoon

I've long suspected that Diane Dixon's "Women in Newport Networking" initiative was simply a marketing thing. Her vote Tuesday night to pass over Joy Brenner and install Kevin Muldoon as mayor pro tem of Newport Beach proved it to me once and for all.

There wasn't a single good reason for Dixon to vote for Muldoon. He already had his turn serving as mayor and mayor pro tem right after he was elected to the City Council and just a few years after moving to Newport.

Joy Brenner has been serving the city in various capacities for decades. Since being elected to

the council, she's never even been allowed to chair a major committee, much less serve as mayor pro tem.

Muldoon has a young family, a full-time job and will be campaigning seven days a week for a seat on the board of supervisors.

If he wins the special election in March, his departure from the council will cause further disruption in what will already be a challenging year for the city. If he loses, he'll spend the rest of the year campaigning for 2022.

Brenner is retired and made clear Tuesday that she would work full time for Newport Beach as mayor pro tem. Her colleagues, including Dixon, agreed that she would do an excellent job. Then they all fell in line behind Muldoon.

Cities around us are making history. In Irvine, Farrah Khan was elected mayor and the council unanimously selected a new

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colleague, Tammy Kim, as mayor pro tem. Tustin, Huntington Beach and Costa Mesa have women mayors. Garden Grove, Aliso Viejo, Buena Park and Laguna Beach all have a woman as mayor pro tem.

Meanwhile, we're stuck with the same politicians forming the same self-serving alliances to further their careers.

No wonder so few people run for council in Newport Beach. They know that if they're not part of the insider network, they won't have a voice and they don't stand a chance of moving up.

Jennifer McDonald
Newport Beach

Face masks make Surf City safer

Huntington Beach Mayor Pro Tem Tito Ortiz's can honor his pledge to "make Huntington Beach safer" by ditching his bulletproof vest and instead wear a protective face mask.

His misguided "plandemic" theories and bare face not only endanger his fellow council members but his whole Huntington Beach community.

He says, "I didn't realize what I was getting into" when he decided to run for City Council, so now's the time for him to step up and acknowledge Huntington Beach and Orange County's COVID stats: Orange County ICU capacity is at 9% (as reported Dec. 9). Please Tito, safety and leadership first, celebrity second!

Lorraine Crawford
Huntington Beach

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COMMENTARY | GLORIA ALVARADO



Courtesy of Poseidon

THE CLAUDE "Bud" Lewis Carlsbad Desalination Plant was built by Poseidon Water. A similar proposed desalination in Huntington Beach would help resolve the water shortage in California, writes the executive director of the Orange County Labor Federation.

Poseidon would bring jobs and water to Orange County

We've seen this story before: What do you do when someone doesn't have science on their side?

You make up a conspiracy story. And better yet, you try to piggyback on a politically charged conspiracy theory with no ties to reality.

And that's exactly what Gary Brown attempts to do in his opinion piece regarding the Poseidon project, "Governor's talk on environment falls short when it comes to the Poseidon project," Dec. 3.

He claims that desalination is somehow tied to a bigger conspiracy involving Gov. Gavin Newsom and shady backroom politics. Well, hang on to your tinfoil hat. There's no government conspiracy here — it's actual science.

There's no question California is about to face a severe water crisis. The snowpack we've relied on for

generations is no longer a reliable means of water storage for our state. We've got more than 40 million people who rely on clean water to drink, and we will soon be unable to provide it. That's fact, not fiction, and backed by reputable science.

And this fact isn't new. That's why Gov. Jerry Brown, who was rightfully concerned with the depletion of California's natural water storage and its effect on the continued provision of water for the state, signed AB 685 into law back in 2012. AB 685 declared water to be a human right in California and called on all state agencies to revise, adopt or establish policies and regulations that "further the provision of clean, affordable and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes."

Since 2012 we haven't moved the state's water policy too far forward.

We now have a desalination plant successfully online in San Diego County, constructed by Poseidon Water of Boston, and have instituted water-saving methods throughout the state.

However, we are still facing a crisis with the ever-evaporating snowpack, a continuously warming climate and the reframing of the Delta tunnel project. And this might make for a good long political debate, but the reality of the situation is that most Californians do not have the luxury of time for a political debate — they have real-world needs, including the need to be able to provide water for their children to drink.

And while we are talking about facts versus luxuries, let's talk about what's happening today in Cali-

See *Poseidon*, page A7

MAILBAG

An open letter to an O.C. restaurant

Regarding your restaurant's email declaring its plans to reopen outside dining, citing "freedom of choice": Is it OK if I smoke amid the people there?

Or, maybe yell "fire!" just for the fun of it?

Freedom of choice and all that.

Your current application of freedom of choice against COVID-19 restrictions alarms me. It is specifically contrary to the efforts of the state of California to keep us alive and not in the hospital. I believe restaurants are the highest locations of contagion, right up there with places of worship.

I was alarmed enough when your outside dining seemed full on Thanksgiving as my expectation was that it would be at reduced capacity — relative to the guidelines in place at the time. Seems to me that the compliance you offer shouldn't mean with just *some* of the guidelines.

The reason previous restrictions didn't have the desired effect is because of the scofflaws — or rather, those who believe that freedom of choice means they can put others at risk.

I love your restaurant and all its servers, managers and owners. I hate that the restrictions are costing everyone so dearly.

Still, if we could *just do this* for three weeks, maybe we could get the shrinking hospital capacity under control. And maybe we could have less severe restrictions until 100 million of us are vaccinated.

I am frustrated, like you. I lean in the direction of what's good for the country, and it's *beyond understanding* when I see maskless people gathering, from home-size events to hundreds at the White House.

You are more inclined to look at what's good for your cohort. I understand us both.

Wishing you the best of all possible outcomes,

Liz Swiertz Newman
Corona del Mar

Concerns about coronavirus

This is serious, folks. The disease is real. Coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths are at an all-time high nationally and in California. If you have been lucky enough not to have caught the coronavirus up until now, this is the time to buckle down and redouble and triple your efforts to follow the health guidelines set down by the state and county health departments.

Stay home unless you need to be out because you are an essential worker, need supplies or are exercising. Scrupulously wear a mask at all times in public and physically distance as much as you can.

Wash your hands regularly. Only socialize with members of your own household and limit the size of your gatherings with other people. If you are exposed to someone with the coronavirus or you have symptoms, get tested so you can avoid spreading it to others. If you are sick, isolate in your home. When you are eligible to receive the vaccine, get one.

And no, no one can force you to do these things. Do it to protect yourself and your family, friends, colleagues, coworkers, neighbors and those essential workers who

See *Mailbag*, page A6

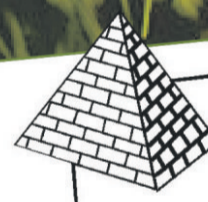


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Night of Lights OC brightens skies



Photos by Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

VEHICLES CIRCLE around a 50-foot Christmas tree during the Night of Lights OC event at the Orange County fairgrounds in Costa Mesa on Dec. 10. The installation is open through Jan. 10.

The night sky above the Orange County fairgrounds recently became illuminated by the glow of more than 1 million holiday lights as Night of Lights OC — a 1-mile drive-through holiday light display — made its debut Dec. 10 in Costa Mesa.

From the creators of the city's popular Winter Fest OC, the immersive experience allows visitors young and old to partake in some holiday fun in the comfort and safety of their vehicles during a 30-minute route that features the world's largest ornament and a 50-foot Christmas tree.

Despite the enormity of the 1-million light spectacle, portions of which were

enhanced by 3-D glasses, signs of pandemic precautions dotted the landscape during the show's debut.

Observing social distancing rules, a cast of characters wore facial coverings — even Santa Claus himself masked up for the occasion.

At the end of the route, staff members waited with cameras to take custom-made portraits of vehicles and their passengers as a keepsake of what is sure to be an unforgettable holiday season.

The installation will be open to visitors through Jan. 10. Monday through Wednesday, prices per vehicle begin at \$49.99 "for selected time slots." Thurs-



SANTA WAVES at cars during the Night of Lights OC event.

day viewings start at \$59.99 and Friday through Sunday start at \$69.99.

For more information, visit nightoflightsoc.com. — Sara Cardine



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MAILBAG

Continued from page A4

are leaving their homes every day to keep our economy going by providing essential goods and services. We all can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Let's not break down before

we can all bask in that light.

Steven Rosansky
Former mayor,
Newport Beach

We've heard all their names before and many of us are weary of their questionably feigned resistance to statewide stay-at-home orders, this time to contain

the coronavirus from overloading the emergency rooms throughout the state.

Even though the coronavirus cases in Orange County just topped 100,000 and ICU rooms are reaching capacity, the "resistance group" consisting of familiar names we have all heard before in similar contexts, are out there protesting the latest orders, this time in Newport Beach rather than Huntington Beach.

Where is this group's concern for the thousands of victims who have died in Orange County, California, and finally, the United States? I don't recall any of them ever referring to the overwhelming loss of lives.

I do have an idea though, of what would be a better expense of their time, at least for the supervisors involved.

Perhaps they could focus their energy on helping small businesses better adapt to COVID-19 protocols, or as the Voice of OC pointed out recently, "publicly release the spending details about the vast majority of federal coronavirus relief aid they received in April." It seems that Supervisor Lisa Bartlett is the only one yet to do so.

As for the two Newport Beach council members involved in Sunday's protest, I would give the same type of advice.

Your resistance might be worth some political capital now, you might be momentarily admired by some misguided souls, but in the end, history will not look



Courtesy of Caraa

FACE MASKS made by luxury sport bag and accessories brand Caraa. A reader asks why her favorite restaurant has decided to remain open despite state mandates closing outdoor dining as the coronavirus pandemic continues.

back upon you kindly.

Lynn Lorenz
Newport Beach

Newport Beach Councilmen Kevin Muldoon and Noah Blom participated in a protest against COVID-19 restrictions as cases explode and overwhelm hospitals.

I attended a virtual meeting this week discussing the planned protocols for allocating scarce medical resources, the most horrifying conversation of my medical career.

If cases continue to climb, California will declare a state of medical emergency and hospitals will begin to triage who receives care. The more people blindly follow the likes of Muldoon and Blom, the more likely we will be to ration care. Choose wisely.

Susan Skinner, MD
Newport Beach

"This order recognizes that we must not forget the humanity of incarcerated people and they should not be put in mortal danger."

Both Judge Wilson and the ACLU should consider that although prisoners do not have full constitutional rights, they are protected by the 8th Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment and that testing "positive" should not lead to "panic" with a 98% survival rate.

Perhaps, both Wilson and Ramirez need to ask the question, "Is having flu-like symptoms more severe than the crime committed?"

As Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes commented, "This order puts our community at substantial risk and does not take into account the impact on the victims of these crimes."

ACLU President Susan Herman stated that the organization's founders believe that everyone should have a right to liberty and justice.

This should include the parents of the Saldana family who were innocently killed while leaving their three children orphaned in a Newport Beach accident on Dec. 9.

Suspect Grace Coleman's first offense in August in Laguna Beach for a DUI was still pending investigation by the Orange County district attorney's office at the time of her alleged second offense.

Will Coleman be released New Year's Eve, along with 1,799 potentially dangerous criminals, because we must protect those rights who have taken the rights of another person?

Or shall the rights of convicted murderers, rapists and felons be restricted if they are outweighed by the interests of society?

We should collectively support our sheriff, police and first responders but most of all support the call for common sense.

Peggy V. Palmer
Newport Beach

Praising H.B.'s choice on power

I am writing to offer a brief message of thanks to the Huntington Beach City Council for their vote supporting Community Choice Energy and becoming one of the Orange County Joint Powers Authority's founding members.

Since first being considered by our City Council back in 2017, Community Choice Energy has been reviewed and debated before three different councils and 10 different council members. Each time a matter related to Community Choice Energy has been put up for a vote at a council meeting, it had been approved.

Last week's Huntington Beach City Council's vote in favor of moving forward with Community Choice Energy is not some random action taken on a whim but rather the culmination of a lengthy review and consideration process.

And to the naysayers, of which there are many, I ask only that you have an open mind.

With 23 different operational CCE agencies across the state providing electricity for some 11 million Californians in 180 different California cities, towns and counties, the least we should do is give Community Choice Energy a chance.

Steve Shepherd
Huntington Beach

Daily Pilot

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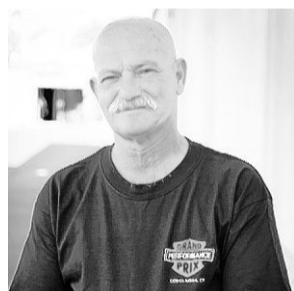
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Joan Penberthy LaMontagne

May 5, 1923 - November 18, 2020

Joan Penberthy LaMontagne passed peacefully of natural causes at age 97 in Corona Del Mar, California with her family at her side. She was born in Glendale, California where she grew up and spent her summers on Balboa Island. She graduated from Stanford University in 1945 (biology and pre-Med) Phi Beta Kappa & Alpha Phi. Although she was accepted into Stanford Medical School, she chose to marry Lt. Cmdr. John deGottrau LaMontagne February 17, 1946 and they went on to have four children, John, Stephen, Anne & David. Many years later, Joan returned to graduate school and earned her PhD in Psychotherapy becoming a much loved Psychotherapist. In addition to her therapy, her passion was understanding the path to Enlightenment and imparting this to others through giving classes and writing articles. She grew up sailing in the Balboa Island Yacht Club (BIYC) and eventually sailed with her husband and family to Hawaii as well as through the Panama Canal and throughout the Caribbean Sea on their own S/V Queen Anne. She loved music, played the piano throughout her long life, and has passed this passion on to her children and grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband John and son Stephen. She is survived by her three children John, Anne and David, seven grandchildren Tony, Michael, Daniel and Mimi, Lauren, Grace and Luc and four great grandchildren Austin, Gavin, Ashley and Dagny. We will miss our loving mother and wish her eternal peace on her spiritual journey.



Berj Palanjan

October 12, 1954 - December 3, 2020

Berj Palanjan, devoted family man and larger-than-life figure in the Orange County community, passed away on Thursday December 3, 2020.

Born to his Armenian parents Leon and Rose Palanjan in Aleppo, Syria, Berj came to the United States with his parents and younger sister, Sossi, in 1966. After a brief stint in Boston, they moved to San Diego to be near family. Berj attended high school in San Diego before moving to Costa Mesa to live with his beloved uncle, Jerry Palanjan.

Berj admired his Uncle Jerry and went to work for him at Grand Prix Performance in Costa Mesa, hardly ever missing a day in over 40 years. While helping Jerry run the business, Berj grew into somewhat of a local celebrity with his personality, trustworthiness and automotive expertise.

Grand Prix customers remember that Berj was always quick with a joke (maybe not always appropriate) or a compliment to make them smile. While on the surface Berj was a fun-loving tough guy, he also had a huge heart and was extremely helpful to those in need. His charisma combined with his generosity contributed to his status as a local legend, known and appreciated by so many in this community that meant the world to him.

During his marriage to Carolyn, they were blessed with three sons, Chase, Jake and Dane. Berj was a dedicated father who cherished his time with his boys. He was extremely proud of all of their accomplishments and wasn't shy to brag about them to anyone who would listen...from his eldest son Chase's Military Service to Jake graduating from Cal State University, Long Beach and Dane graduating from the University of Southern California.

Berj loved the outdoors and enjoyed camping, fishing and dirt biking with his boys and dogs. He earned a pilot's license and enjoyed flying in his sparse free time. Berj was also an avid cook and gardener (staghorn ferns were his specialty).

Berj passed away after suffering through a six-year illness from complications of a stroke. Those who knew Berj know he did not go without a fight...he was swearing, smiling, laughing and loving until the very end. He will be missed by everyone who knew him and will always be remembered as a wonderful father, son, brother, nephew, uncle, cousin, colleague and friend.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that anyone wishing to commemorate Berj please make a donation to either the Armenian Ararat Home of Los Angeles (https://ararathome.org/donations/giving-opportunities) or The Boys and Girls Club of Central Orange Coast (https://boysandgirlsclub.com/donate/) and please continue to support small businesses in our community.

The family would like to thank the Flagship Healthcare staff as well as the many doctors, healthcare workers, family members and friends who helped Berj in recent years.

Unfortunately, there will not be a funeral service at this time. Naturally, Kettle One Vodka and ice are devastated by the loss of Berj and they've requested a celebration of his amazing life whenever is appropriate.

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POSEIDON

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formia. We are walking further and further into a pandemic-induced recession. There isn't a working family today who isn't struggling with unemployment, with childcare, with illness, with anxiety — take your pick.

Our state is not going to have the resources to solve the water crisis, the housing crisis, the health crisis or the unemployment crisis without private investment. We need to be open to private investment in our state and in our communities because that will be a big part of what rights the ship of state.

As with everything, every big idea, there are people who will always look for the problems, and right now in California, we have a lot of problems.

Desalination is an answer to one of those problems. Mr. Brown might want to look for the problems, with desalination, with leadership, with the Poseidon project, but I choose to look through the other end of the telescope.

I see desalination as part of the answer to a real-life crisis that working Californians are facing.

I see Poseidon as representing a project that wants to invest a whole lot into our community. And, I see the governor as a leader who is desperately trying to keep Californians safe during an unprecedented hard time.

Remember, we are all in this together.

GLORIA ALVARADO, a resident of Santa Ana, is executive director of the Orange County Labor Federation representing 250,000 Californians who live and work across Orange County.

ORANGE

Continued from page A1

courses through our civic veins — easily burst forth.

Our gift to America this unfathomable year? A Murderers' Row of COVID-19 nitwits.

In the early days of the pandemic, cities and residents sought to keep coronavirus patients away from their paradises.

In April, Supervisor Michelle Steel sent out a news release with a straight face that Orange County was "flattening the curve" on coronavirus cases and had kept hospitalization rates stable.

A month later, both figures skyrocketed; right now, we're even worse.

Next month, Steel will be sworn in as a member of Congress.

The Orange County Board of Education sued California for closing school campuses and endorsed guidelines that suggested students return to class with next-to-no coronavirus protocol — never mind that the move went against the guidelines from the state Department of Education.

O.C. Sheriff Don Barnes yaps every couple of months about how his department won't enforce any coronavirus shutdowns because he thinks they might be unconstitutional — never mind that he runs a department accused of violating the constitutional rights of inmates for dec-



NEWPORT BEACH police officers enforce a beach closure at the Wedge, a famed surfing and bodysurfing spot.

*Irfan Khan
Los Angeles Times*

ades by extracting illegal jailhouse confessions.

Huntington Beach has become a ground zero for protests against the state's coronavirus shutdown, the type of place where a restaurant bars people from wearing a mask inside.

Surf City earned widespread ridicule for a viral video in which two comedians offered face coverings near the city's iconic pier to anyone who wanted them (no one wanted them).

But there's coronavirus ignorance, and then there's hundreds of people who burned their masks at a San Clemente beachside bonfire.

The stupidity of 2020 didn't just limit itself to the rich or the white or the

coast in Orange County, either. In Santa Ana and Anaheim, two Latino-majority cities that account for about 35% of all of O.C.'s coronavirus cases, weekend parties remain the mariachi-scored rule rather than the exception.

Pandejos all around in Orange County, I'm telling you. We have become a reminder of how other parts of the country are behaving and — rightfully so — both a warning and a freak show for the rest of Southern California to point at and snicker.

Gotta love this place — and I wholeheartedly do. I've lived in O.C. my entire life, and plan to stay here because I'm no California quitter. But as Sinclair Lewis knew, you can't truly

love where you're from unless you eviscerate its sins at all times.

So that's why I feel a certain *schadenfreude* any time we earn nationwide shade for our coronavirus sins. Because that's what Orange County needs. It's that shame of being from here, from a bad O.C., that has motivated a generation to fight for change. These good people recognize coronavirus is a threat and, disgusted by the deniers, are using their time sheltering in place to plan a new

O.C. in the aftermath of COVID-19.

And that's why as 2020 comes to a close I remain optimistic for the future of Orange County in the face of this damned disease. The worst days may still get better, because they always do. Even here.

They have to. Because we'll have to face our crazy anew.

GUSTAVO ARELLANO is a columnist with the Los Angeles Times.

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

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SANTA

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way to keep the holiday cheer alive.

"We wanted to offer a measure of reassurance and hope that some favorite traditions remain constant despite the profound changes all of us have experienced this year," she said in an email interview.

"We know we did the right thing, because the response from our guests has been overwhelmingly positive."

Lake Elsinore resident Sheri Wheeler, who grew up in the area, came with 11-year-old daughter Tabitha to continue a family tradition that spans three generations. Each year, women in the family meet for a group photo with the South Coast Plaza Santa and then grab lunch nearby.

But with COVID-19 front and center, Wheeler wasn't sure they'd be able to pull it off.

"Before we heard about this, we were wondering if we could go see Santa," Wheeler explained. "We didn't want a Santa with a mask, and we didn't want to wear masks for the photo — the kids want to be able to talk with him."

The plexiglass Santa proved to be the perfect option. The cluster of women and girls perched atop tree trunks and logs as a masked photographer led them through a series of fun and serious poses.

As they left, Wheeler's 3-year-old niece, Scarlett, pointed at the Santa behind the glass.

"He's stuck in there," she said. "We gotta get him out."

"I know, poor Santa," said mom Jennifer Stroffe, guiding the tot

from the tent. "Maybe after he's done seeing the other people."

Safely outside, Tabitha described her sincere desire to communicate with Santa her wish for a Barbie Princess Adventure Ken doll (the one with the crown) despite her natural shyness.

"For some reason, I'm always shy with Santa," Tabitha said from under a flannel unicorn mask she made herself. "But I think I'm getting my confidence up now, because I know Santa's Santa — he's the person who makes Christmas and holidays come to life."

Some shopping meccas in Orange County have decided to forego visits with St. Nick this year, while others are taking a virtual turn, offering visitors the chance to play with augmented reality versions of Santa, reindeer, elves and penguins that can be accessed by scanning a QR code on a cellphone and superimposed onto real scenes and people.

Newport Beach's Fashion Island has arranged a series of photo opportunity booths and kiosks that instruct guests how to pull up reindeers and other holiday-themed special effects from their phones as they shop.

And, from Dec. 21 through 24 only, families can go online and sign up for a virtual Santa visit held over a video conferencing platform.

Representatives from the Irvine Company, which operates Fashion Island, confirmed the center has partnered with Evara Virtual Reality to create new experiences for shoppers.

But aside from seeking out traditional mall Santas, some Orange County residents are going online to communicate kids'

wishes.

One area mom went on Facebook to share her experience with *PortableNorthPole.com*, a site that lets families can provide basic details and a photo and sends out a Santa video personalized to each child.

"I'm so grateful to have this technology," she wrote. "Check it out if you're feeling bad about making the decision to not see the big guy this year like me. This might be helpful for your family too."

Virtual Santas may be good alternatives to potentially braving crowds, but for those at South Coast Plaza, like Irvine resident Cherrie Bravo, the safely distanced, in-person visit was the best of both worlds.

Bravo's family dressed in matching Mickey Mouse pajamas for the annual family holiday photo, a custom that began when her 15-year-old son was just 1 but was looking like it might be canceled this year.

"I almost gave up," Bravo said. "We usually go to Newport Beach, but they were doing virtual visits, so I thought this year we'd be missing it. Then I found out about this."

Gunn Downing said the center has made a great effort to give visitors the feel of the holidays without compromising their health and safety.

"We hope to lift them up and give them a momentary respite from reality through happy music and beautiful holiday décor," she said. "We're doing the best we can."

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Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

HOLIDAY SHOPPERS pass by a giant Christmas tree in the Jewel Court at South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa on Saturday.

COVID-19

Continued from page A1

Mesa's South Coast Plaza on the last weekend before Christmas were a fraction of the typical holiday season, masked shoppers continued to make purchases and line up outside storefronts.

Orange County's hospitalization rate reflects a 12.9% rise in the three-day average. Area ICUs continue to report having no available beds specifically for COVID-19 patients. Meanwhile, the county's seven-day average of new cases stands at 42.7 per 100,000 residents, while the average health equity quartile positivity rate is at 18.8%.

Another 21,203 tests were issued countywide Saturday, bringing the cumulative number of tests issued to 1,831,645 and accounting for a seven-day average testing positivity rate of

13.2%. Here are the latest cumulative coronavirus case counts and COVID-19 deaths for select cities in Orange County:

- Santa Ana: 23,656 cases; 354 deaths
- Anaheim: 20,289 cases; 378 deaths
- Huntington Beach: 4,843 cases; 94 deaths
- Costa Mesa: 3,905 cases; 50 deaths
- Irvine: 4,377 cases; 20 deaths
- Newport Beach: 1,851 cases; 28 deaths
- Fountain Valley: 1,499 cases; 25 deaths
- Laguna Beach: 419 cases; fewer than five deaths

Updated figures are posted daily at ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc. For information on getting tested, visit ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing.

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GROSSO

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ment of the heart) with dilation, a clinical history of hypertension and anxiety, and obesity were listed as other conditions in the autopsy report obtained by The Times through a public records request. The manner of his death was ruled an accident.

Grosso's mother, Rae Williams, declined to comment on the findings.

Phenobarbital is a barbiturate often used to treat seizures and anxiety. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic

opioid similar to morphine but 50 to 100 times more potent. Fentanyl is more likely even than prescription opioids to suppress breathing and cause death when taken in uncontrolled concentrations by unsuspecting users or by users whose opioid tolerance has not been heightened by long-term use. Fentanyl, which is often present in counterfeit pills, is becoming an increasingly common factor in Los Angeles-area drug-caused deaths, according to Drug Enforcement Administration statistics. About 33% of such deaths in L.A. County in 2019 featured fentanyl —

a more than tenfold increase from six years prior. Of the more than 1,200 drug-caused deaths confirmed in the county this year, 47.4% have involved fentanyl.

A toxicological examination performed by the Orange County Crime Lab showed that Grosso had 0.0459 milligrams per liter of fentanyl in his system, an amount well beyond the typical minimum fatal concentration.

The skateboarding world was sent into shock this spring at the news on March 31 of Grosso's death, the cause of which was un-

known at the time. A lifelong skateboarder who was drawn to the expressive freedoms and rebellious spirit of the sport, he became a top amateur as a teenager before turning pro in 1986.

Of the same generation as legendary skaters Tony Hawk and Christian Hosoi, Grosso became one of skateboarding's most popular figures at the height of the "big air" vertical skating era defined by halfpipes and aerial tricks. His competitive career was short-lived, ending when street skating, where skateboarders perform tricks off urban obsta-

cles such as staircases and handrails, began to dominate the sport in the early '90s.

Grosso's legend and stature within skateboarding culture, however, only grew with time. He spoke openly about his years-long struggles with drug addiction and battle to get clean, which he said he achieved in 2005. He became a mentor to many young skaters over the last decade. And he earned a sparkling reputation as a father to his 8-year-old son.

Grosso was sponsored by Vans throughout his career and in 2011 began hosting

the popular "Loveletters to Skateboarding" show on its YouTube feed, in which he discussed the sport's history and culture through interviews with some of its biggest stars.

"His presence and his devotion to skating's integrity is really what carried through all these years and why a whole new generation knows who Jeff is," Hawk said in an interview this summer. "He was the gatekeeper to why skateboarding was cool."

JACK HARRIS is a staff writer with the Los Angeles Times.

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