



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

JESSICA TRAN is a car detailer and digital media creator based out of her Studio 94 space in Huntington Beach.

## TikTok fuels business and fame for H.B. auto detailer

BY MATT SZABO

Jessica Tran did not necessarily think she would last this long in the auto-detailing world.

Starting out as a 16-year-old at Marina High School, the Huntington Beach native worked in mobile detailing on the weekends with her girls' basketball coach.

At the time, the allure of a \$20 bill was big. But after graduating and getting her associate degree at Golden West College, a funny thing happened.

Tran kept going, establishing JT Mobile Detailing.

"I ended up working with him part time once I graduated high school, and then over the years kept sticking at mobile detailing," she said. "Ended up doing it by myself, it evolved into a full-time job, and the last two years we've been here."

Half a lifetime later, "here" is Studio 94, her Huntington Beach detailing garage that she opened in 2022. It's a play on Studio 54 that instead features the year she was born and even has a disco ball in the middle of the work area.



See *Detailer*, page A2 JESSICA TRAN and staff member Daulton Lantow, from left, inspect the details of a Subaru.

## Standing strong a year after bluff's collapse

Casa Romantica in San Clemente celebrates its progress after a landslide in April 2023 damaged the historic property.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Casa Romantica, a cherished historical landmark in San Clemente, still bears the scars of a landslide that tumbled the bluff it sits atop a year ago.

A back patio that suffered significant damage remains off-limits to visitors — as does the breathtaking ocean views it offers. The whitewashed mansion's main salon, an important site for weddings and cultural events, is still yellow-tagged until further notice.

Construction crews working on stabilizing the crumbled cliff also had to plow over much of an outside amphitheater to make way for heavy machinery.

But Casa Romantica is back on the mend and recently marked a year since the devastating landslide with a spring soiree on April 27 commemorating its "resilience and progress."

"We didn't focus on what we've lost," said Kylie Travis, co-executive director of Casa Romantica's nonprofit. "We put together the event so that no matter where people went on site, they would have more information about what we have accomplished."

Since the landslide, the cultural center has carried on with six garden renovations, 150 pieces of visual art exhibited and over 70 cultural events.

Argentinian mixed-media artist Carlos Grasso's tapestry exhibit "South American Colors" is currently on display through June 9.

Ballet classes, film screenings, theater and concerts round out the rest of the events heading into summer.

But the cultural center's comeback wasn't always so assured.

Casa Romantica shuttered for about a month after the landslide. It partially reopened on Memorial

See *Strong*, page A4

### ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



James Carbone

NEWPORT BEACH ARTIST TO HOST 'HEALING HOUSE' PAGE A9

FUNDS POUR INTO ANAHEIM COUNCILWOMAN NATALIE RUBALCAVA RECALL ELECTION PAGE A2

## Tea for Mom: A fine collection of Mother's Day tea services in O.C.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

The practice of enjoying a cup of tea in the afternoon is as much about the comfort of the ritual as it is about the tea. It is a chance to relax as you patiently wait for tea to steep and an opportunity to catch up with friends. Plus, there is almost always cake. The leisurely nature of the modern tea service has made it a popular addition to some of Orange County's favorite restaurants.

This Mother's Day, treat Mom to a tea experience for two (or more) with afternoon tea services that range from the fancy and formal



Courtesy of Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel

AFTERNOON TEA service at the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel includes a menu of tea sandwiches and sweets.

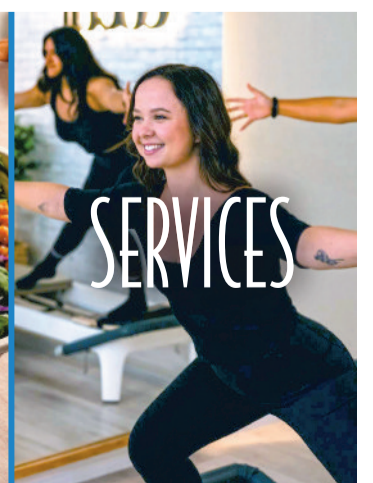
See *Tea*, page A2

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# Backers, opponents vie over councilwoman's recall



Screenshot by Gabriel San Román

**COUNCILWOMAN NATALIE RUBALCAVA** speaks during a Feb. 27, 2024, meeting of the Anaheim City Council.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

With a recall election against Anaheim City Councilwoman Natalie Rubalcava about a month away, fundraising efforts are ramping up.

Voters in Rubalcava's downtown Anaheim district will decide on June 4 whether she keeps her seat or not.

Ahead of the special election, an assortment of political action committees are aiming to persuade potential voters to support or oppose the recall.

On Jan. 30, Unite Here Local 11, a union that represents hotel workers in Anaheim, chipped in \$30,000 through its own PAC in seeking Rubalcava's ouster but hasn't reported any new contributions since council members scheduled the recall election during a Feb-

ruary council meeting.

The union sponsored a petition against Rubalcava before getting the recall qualified on the ballot.

Campaign finance records show Unite Here Local 11 spent \$315,000 through 2023 in support of such efforts.

"Our members are fighting to clean up Anaheim's politics," Kurt Petersen, co-president of Unite Here Local 11 told TimesOC in February. "Council member Rubalcava is connected to a corrupt cabal and has been criticized by the city's corruption investigators. The recall process exists to remedy this exact kind of situation."

Rubalcava won election in November 2022 by a wide margin.

In her first year on council, she pushed for panic button protections for hotel

workers in Anaheim — a key provision of a ballot measure championed by Unite Here Local 11 that principally sought to raise the minimum wage for hotel and event center workers to \$25 an hour.

Known as Measure A, the initiative was rejected by voters during an October special election.

Since then, pro-recall proponents have tried to tie Rubalcava to the ongoing political corruption scandal in Anaheim that publicly surfaced with an FBI investigation in May 2022 that halted the sale of Angel Stadium and led to former Mayor Harry Sidhu's resignation.

It's a claim that Rubalcava backers have said is unfair.

"No one is buying that,

See *Recall*, page A4

## O.C. Clerk-Recorder taps veteran Latino journalist to reach Spanish speakers

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

For years, Martin Plascencia helped bring the stories of local Latinos to broader audiences through his broadcast journalism.

He last oversaw Tele-mundo 52's Orange County news bureau when he was suddenly laid off in 2020 during pandemic-era cut-backs by the company nationwide.

Months later, the county of Orange hired the veteran journalist in 2021 to help with Spanish-language communication and outreach efforts, especially as COVID-19 vaccination campaigns ramped up.

After serving in that capacity for the past three years, Plascencia is taking on a new but familiar role in helping the Orange County Clerk-Recorder better connect with local Spanish-speaking communities.

"My name and face may be familiar to some members of the Spanish-speaking community who have seen me on television news for three decades," Plascencia said in a press release. "Now I have been offered the opportunity to continue serving the Hispanic community by promoting the many programs and services offered by the Office of Hugh Nguyen Orange County Clerk-Recorder to all of Orange County's 3.2 million residents, including 34% of them Latinos."

O.C. Clerk-Recorder Hugh Nguyen publicly announced Plascencia's hiring on Monday as a community outreach manager.

"I wanted somebody who could feel comfortable with the Hispanic community to go out there and let them know about all the services that we provide at the Orange County Clerk-Recorder department," Nguyen



Courtesy O.C. Clerk-Recorder

**MARTIN PLASCENCIA** is now a community outreach manager for the Orange County Clerk-Recorder.

told TimesOC. "Plascencia has more than 30 years of experience in media with the community. He's a familiar face."

Nearly half of all O.C. residents over 5 speak a language other than English at home, according to the 2023-24 Orange County Community Indicators Report.

Plascencia's role will entail networking with the Mexican Consulate, Latino organizations and colleges in helping to get the word out in Spanish about key services offered by the Clerk-Recorder's office like vital records, wedding ceremonies, passport photos, fictitious business name filings and even an apostille pop-up in Santa Ana on May 29.

In this work, Plascencia joins another community outreach manager who focuses on the Vietnamese community.

"It's going to be a big help," Nguyen said, "because 3.2 million is a lot of people to try to outreach to."

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## DETAILER

Continued from page A1

Tran, who turns 30 this year, is definitely a personality, and she's used that to her advantage on social media. She started documenting her business on TikTok about three years ago with fun videos.

She now has 1.7 million followers at @jtmobiledetailing.

"It sounds super-corny and lame to say, but TikTok did change the trajectory of my career entirely," Tran said. "I don't think I would have kept up with this, if it weren't to this scale. I think at some point, I really would have done what my mom would have wanted, buckled down and got a white-collar job. But luckily, this thing took off."

The brick-and-mortar business has benefited her in myriad ways. She no longer has to coordinate trips to clients with her workers, and she's no longer in the sun all day.

She hired four other detailers as part of her

team, including Daulton Lantow of Westminster.

"I started as a fan and still am to this day," Lantow said. "I still wait for her videos. I still learn from her every day, from the content that she puts out. She's a great detailer and content creator, for sure. She knows what she's doing."

Her videos have also helped pay dividends financially. Tran said. She's been able to support both herself and her girlfriend, who is in graduate school. "TikTok took my mobile business and blew it up 200%," she said. "But with having this shop, I was able to blow it up another 200% in sales, just because we could expand and do tinting and films."

TikTok says that 28,000 jobs were supported by a small and medium-sized businesses' use of the app as an ad platform in California. But a measure to outlaw the popular app has earned approval by Congress and was signed by President Biden last week.

The measure gives Beijing-based parent company



**JESSICA TRAN** opened her Studio 94 space in Huntington Beach in 2022.

Don Leach  
Staff Photographer

ByteDance up to a year to sell the company, or TikTok will be banned in the United States.

Tran hopes that doesn't happen. Her garage allows the crew to work on several cars at once.

On one recent weekday, Tran grinned as she showed off a Japanese Kei truck in one corner and a 1992 Honda NSX supercar in another corner.

"I love Japanese cars," Tran said, though she admits about 20% of her clientele brings her Teslas. "I talk about them a lot."

On this particular day, a customer from as far away as San Diego sits in the

waiting room. Tran said that wouldn't have been possible without her TikTok fame.

Her mother, Jocelyn, hasn't even asked her to go back to college for a few years now.

"Coming from a traditional Asian family ... my brother has a doctorate, and I dropped out of college and work with my hands all day," Jessica Tran said, again smiling. "It was not something she was hyped on. Now that I've got a brick and mortar, she sees it as more legit."

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Courtesy of Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel

**A SPECIAL** "Spring Par-Tea" afternoon tea is being offered at the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel for Mother's Day.

## TEA

Continued from page A1

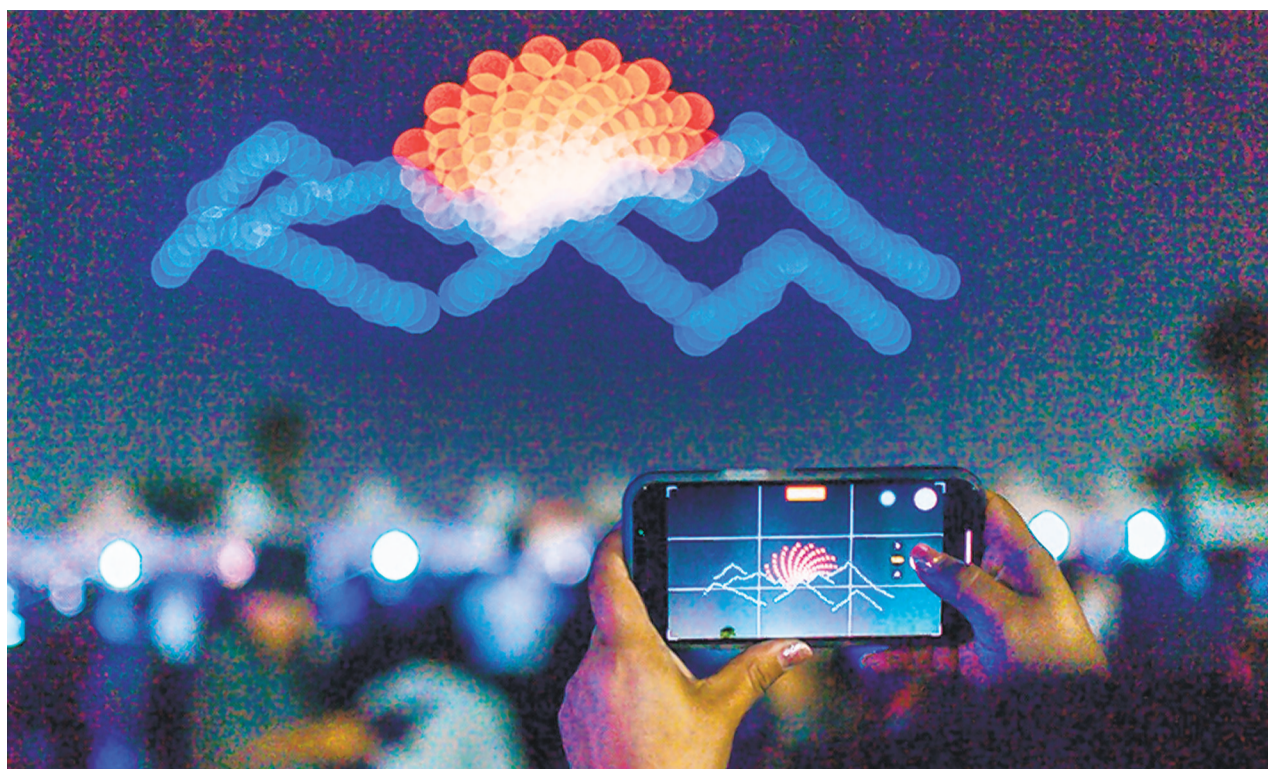
to the cute and adorable. It will give her a chance to indulge in a little luxury that is just her cup of tea.

**RAYA AT THE RITZ-CARLTON, LAGUNA NIGUEL**  
1 Ritz Carlton Drive,  
Dana Point

The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel is bringing

back its Spring ParTea afternoon tea experience this month to celebrate Mother's Day. Hosted at the resort's RAYA restaurant now through May 16, afternoon tea is \$115 for adults and \$90 for kids with reservation available from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and presented in partnership with Parisian tea brand Palais des Thés.

See *Tea*, page A3



Courtesy of the city of Los Angeles

**DRONE "FIREWORKS"** sparkle over the beach at La Jolla Shores courtesy of a Fourth of July drone show. The Laguna Beach City Council has decided to host a drone show instead of a fireworks display on Independence Day.

# Laguna Beach opts for drone show on the Fourth of July

BY ANDREW TURNER

Laguna Beach will trade in its pyrotechnics for a high-tech option on Independence Day, as the City Council has decided to have a drone light show for the city's Fourth of July celebration.

The coastal community has hosted a fireworks display since the early 1980s, but council members unanimously backed the drone show for a one-year trial, citing environmental responsibility.

"My problem is with the smoke and the pollution of the ocean and the noise for the ocean animals, as well," Councilman George Weiss said at the April 23 meeting. "We shouldn't be doing that. We don't see [the fireworks] very well because it typically is no wind on Fourth of July, and that screen of smoke comes in front of the fireworks."

Options presented to the council included a fireworks show from Monument Point that would have come at a cost of \$42,000. The drone light show is expected to cost \$75,000.

Laguna Beach plans to have 300 drones included in a 15-minute show which would be launched from Heisler Park. Assistant City Manager Jeremy Frimond said the drone show would occur over the water.

Drone shows typically utilize between 100 and 500 drones. The city's environmental sustainability committee recommended the 300-drone show, said Frimond, who added the number represented a middle ground between image resolution and cost effectiveness.

"It's always super smoky, and then what we live with is that smoke traveling through the canyon and sitting there for quite some time," Judie Mancuso, who is serving as the acting chair of the committee, said of the traditional fireworks display during the public hearing.

Beyond the issue of air pollution, Mancuso spoke to the impact of fireworks on animals, saying, "For wildlife, it's terrible, for nesting birds. It is the number one day of the year for dogs getting hit by cars and for going into shelters because of the noise. They get spooked."

While visibility of a drone show may be dependent on the weather, including high wind speeds and low visibility, Councilman Mark Orgill appealed to the community's creativity in saying he felt it appropriate for Laguna Beach to explore new territory.

"I like change, so I'd be all for the drones," Orgill said. "I'd be OK with rolling the dice in the event that there's bad weather. These things happen sometimes."

Councilman Bob Whalen lamented the Fourth of July celebration plans not coming to the forefront sooner, expressing a hope that residents could be involved in customizing the show going forward.

"We could have had a fun process involving community members in terms of designing what some of these drone elements might look like," Whalen said. "I think we should do that next year."

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Dr. Maheswari Senthil is a nationally recognized surgical oncologist who specializes in the management of advanced abdominal cancers.

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## TEA

Continued from page A2

Loose leaf tea is presented in glass jars for guests' inspection, while servers trained by Palais des Thés tea sommeliers go over the finer points of the tasting notes for each. Once your tea of choice is selected, you'll receive your own teapot, set atop a small burner to keep it warm throughout the afternoon. If Mom would like to toast with something other than tea, she can add a tea-infused cocktail to her experience. Afternoon tea service includes a variety of tea sandwiches like a curried chicken salad tartlet and rib-eye steak sandwich with brie and balsamic caramelized onions. An assortment of delicate sweets includes a chocolate tulip, blueberry tartlet and guava cookie. One of the best treats at this tea party though, is the panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean.

### KNIFE PLEAT

3333 S Bristol St, Costa

Mesa; (714) 266-3388

Knife Pleat, South Coast Plaza's one-Michelin-starred French restaurant from Chef Tony Esnault and restaurateur Yassmin Sarmadi, offers an elegant afternoon tea each Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. In honor of Mother's Day, Knife Pleat will be open an extra day to offer afternoon tea on Sunday, May 12. Tea service is \$135 per guest and includes a selection of loose leaf teas from La Maison du Thé that go beyond black tea. A Japan Sencha special tea, for instance, is a green tea grown in Shizuoka and high in antioxidants, while the nutty Gen Mai Cha is a blend of sencha, roasted brown rice and corn. Savory tea sandwiches are elevated with luxury ingredients like black truffle and Maine lobster, while pastries are baked with finesse. Guests can enhance Mom's experience even further by adding champagne or caviar to the tea service for an additional charge. If Mom prefers a



Jakob N. Layman

**AFTERNOON TEA** service at Hello Kitty Cafe in Irvine.

cocktail party to a tea party, Knife Pleat has recently launched a bar menu with bites like deviled egg toast, a mix of mustard, chive, celery served on brioche to go with their craft cocktails. (The bar menu is served daily at the bar only.)

### HELLO KITTY GRAND CAFE

860 Spectrum Center Drive;  
(949) 536-5357

The Hello Kitty Grand Cafe in Irvine serves sea-

sonal goodies and beverages themed after Sanrio's most famous cat, but there are even more experiences hidden in the Bow Room. Just beyond the cafe's main room, pink booths surround a marble-topped bar in the small 30-seat lounge, where a cocktail service is offered after 5 p.m. for guests over 21, and a special tea service Mom will love is available in the afternoons. Available from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Wednesday through Friday

and from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, afternoon tea service is priced at \$60 per person and is family friendly. Enjoy a prix fixe menu of sweet and savory treats and a pot of tea of your choice, with blends like Lychee Peach and Earl Grey. Crustless cucumber sandwiches are cut in the shape of Hello Kitty, and egg salad is served in a fun mini ice cream cone. Everything is served on adorable Hello Kitty china, and small details like a tiny red bow adorning the macarons and a sparkling pink Hello Kitty sugar cube on your saucer evoke Sanrio's motto: small gift, big smile.

### THE TEA HOUSE ON LOS RIOS

31731 Los Rios St.,  
San Juan Capistrano;  
(949) 443-3914

The Tea House on Los Rios in San Juan Capistrano is what cottage core dreams are made of. Delicate floral print tea cups and white lace doilies top the tables in a garden party setting where after-

noons are known to slip away unnoticed. To honor moms, the Tea House is hosting a special tea experience, available daily through the entire month of May. The two-hour experience is priced at \$85 per person and includes organic loose leaf tea service and choice of champagne, mimosa or sparkling cider. The menu covers all the traditional bases with classic tea sandwiches like cucumber and herbed cream cheese and house cured pink peppercorn salmon with beet creme fraiche and caviar, but guests will also get a choice of heirloom tomato bisque or a baby spinach and strawberry salad. Mom can also indulge in a trio of Mother's Day petit fours and plenty of the Tea House's famous currant scones, baked fresh and served with lemon curd, raspberry preserves and early California cream.

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# STRONG

Continued from page A1

Day weekend when, just days later, another landslide rumbled below the 2.5-acre estate.

By then, a wave of cancellations cost the cultural center much needed wedding and event ticket revenue.

Travis and Jacqui Groseth took over as co-executive directors last summer amid such challenges.

"Our main goal at the time was to promote stability, both within the organization and to the community," Travis said. "We wanted to let our team know that we're in this together, we have a plan and that we're going to make it through this."

Over the past year, she estimates that Casa Romantica has lost about \$500,000 in private event and ticket revenue. But with winter rainstorms finally subsiding and sunny summer weather on the



Gary Coronado | Los Angeles Times

**A LANDSLIDE DAMAGED** the historic Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens in San Clemente in 2023.

way, Travis is spending more time excitedly planning for future events to come.

All the while, construction crews continue to make progress on stabilizing the battered bluff since San Clemente City Council approved \$8.5 million in repairs last summer.

"We are approximately two-thirds complete," said Shawn Ryan, a senior civil engineer for San Clemente. "We are making good

progress with the current weather."

Three rows of tiebacks, which are drilled horizontally and secured with grade beams, are visible from the exposed hillside.

Dirt is being shoveled around to clear the way for a fourth and final tieback row, which, once completed, will allow crews to regrade the slope.

That should clear the

See **Strong**, page A10

# RECALL

Continued from page A2

and the timing doesn't even line up," said Derek Humphrey, Rubalcava's political consultant. "Natalie was elected to City Council six months after former mayor Sidhu resigned in disgrace."

A previous council contracted an independent investigation in the aftermath.

In a report publicly released in July, Rubalcava stood accused of using contact information from a binder for Anaheim First, a nonprofit founded, in part, by the Anaheim Chamber of Commerce, to make an unsolicited campaign call to a voter in her district.

Rubalcava denied any wrongdoing and criticized the report's accusations against her as "inaccurate."

According to recent campaign finance docu-

ments, a cross-section of hoteliers, trade unions and public employee unions are backing Rubalcava.

"I'm proud of the diverse coalition of groups who have endorsed against the recall," said Rubalcava in a prepared statement. "I appreciate their help in getting the message out to voters about what I've been able to accomplish over the past year and a half. I care deeply about Anaheim, and I hope to continue serving on our City Council."

One PAC alone has amassed a war chest of just over \$100,000.

The Anaheim Police Assn. is the single biggest contributor to Anaheim Neighbors Opposed to the Misleading Recall of Natalie Rubalcava with \$29,500.

Another PAC from the Anaheim/Orange County Hotel and Lodging Assn. is flush with cash from Anaheim Resort-area hoteliers.

Wincome Hospitality, which counts the Westin Anaheim Resort and the Anaheim Hotel among its properties, is the top donor to the PAC with \$38,000 in contributions alone.

According to Anaheim's annual lobbying report, the Anaheim/Orange County Hotel and Lodging Assn. met with several council members, including Rubalcava, regarding the standalone panic button hotel worker law last year.

But the biggest single donor is the Los Angeles County Building and Construction Trades Council PAC, which contributed \$50,000 to Working Families Against the Recall of Natalie Rubalcava.

The June 4 recall election is expected to cost Anaheim \$700,000.

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# THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

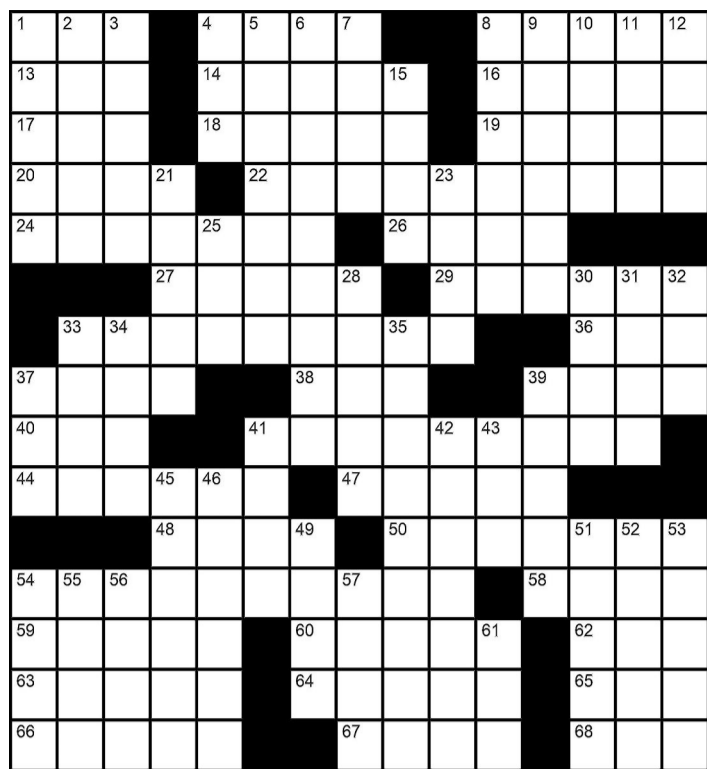
By Jacqueline E. Mathews

## ACROSS

- 1 Car fuel
- 4 Difficult
- 8 "I'm on it!": 2 wds.
- 13 Halloween month: Abbr.
- 14 Atlanta university
- 16 "That wasn't true": 2 wds.
- 17 Skater Midori
- 18 Polyphonic Bach composition
- 19 In perfect pitch
- 20 Behavioral standard
- 22 '80s fad garments: 2 wds.
- 24 More significant
- 26 Whirled
- 27 Extra-shabby
- 29 Bible book of religious hymns
- 33 Cheater's answer key: 2 wds.
- 36 Driver's org.
- 37 "Stop, horse!"
- 38 Ctrl-Delete
- 39 Tie tightly
- 40 Assistance
- 41 Not in a hurry: 2 wds.
- 44 Gave lip to
- 47 Texter's "Are you kidding?"
- 48 Vaccine type
- 50 Electric shaver brand
- 54 Within a single school
- 58 Housetop
- 59 Boxing matches
- 60 Soup and
- 62 Slice
- 63 Lauder of cosmetics
- 64 Leans to one side
- 65 Tailless primate
- 66 Dull impacts
- 67 Russian "no"
- 68 Dawson of football

## DOWN

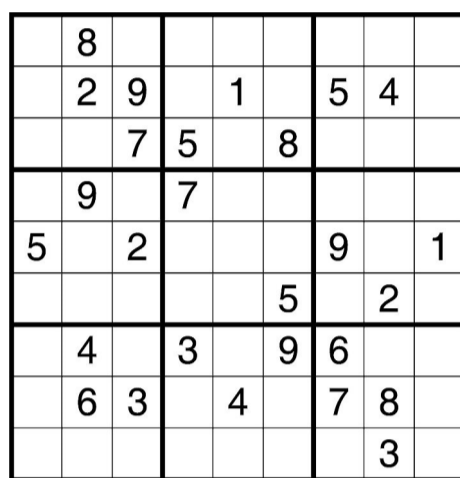
- 1 "Am I crazy?"
- 2 Stage performer
- 3 Emporium
- 4 Playboy mogul, for short
- 5 Necklace charms
- 6 "I hear ya": 2 wds.
- 7 Medication
- 8 Lemon or lime
- 9 Barnard grad, e.g.
- 10 Highest single digit
- 11 Stags and does
- 12 and ends
- 15 Decorative evergreens
- 21 Soprano Callas
- 23 Calendar entry: Abbr.
- 25 Key near Q
- 28 Shouts
- 30 Hidey-hole
- 31 Lion's locks
- 32 Down in the dumps
- 33 pet (sprouting figurine)
- 34 Batons
- 35 Without end
- 37 Used to be
- 39 Purchaser
- 41 Eve's mate
- 42 Cut off from others
- 43 Camera type: Abbr.
- 45 Categorized
- 46 Cleans the chalkboard
- 49 Passionate feeling
- 51 In the area
- 52 Two-door car
- 53 Frequently
- 54 "Yeah right": 2 wds.
- 55 Snack
- 56 Ballerina's skirt
- 57 Showers from the sky
- 61 Summer clock abbr.



# 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](http://sudoku.org.uk).



For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A9.

- 23 Calendar entry: Abbr.
  - 25 Key near Q
  - 28 Shouts
  - 30 Hidey-hole
  - 31 Lion's locks
  - 32 Down in the dumps
  - 33 pet (sprouting figurine)
  - 34 Batons
  - 35 Without end
  - 37 Used to be
  - 39 Purchaser
  - 41 Eve's mate
  - 42 Cut off from others
  - 43 Camera type: Abbr.
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  - 54 "Yeah right": 2 wds.
  - 55 Snack
  - 56 Ballerina's skirt
  - 57 Showers from the sky
  - 61 Summer clock abbr.
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Jaime Martín, music director

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# The foodiest place on Earth?

BY EDWIN GOEI

The food scene at the Disneyland Resort today is not the one of 30 years ago. Gone are the days when eating inside the park was an after-thought of hot dogs, burgers and fries. In fact, it has been widely reported (my previous articles on the subject included) that the food at the resort is now just as much a reason to come as the rides.

And in this writer's opinion, there's no better place to see this in practice than Disney California Adventure. From the wildly popular quesabirria taco to a spicy hot link corn dog, the offerings found inside the younger park are a dizzying kaleidoscope of cuisine that spans continents, honors cultures and challenges customs.

Proof of Disney California Adventure's foodie focus happens every year at its annual Food & Wine Festival, when the lines at stalls featuring steak with chimichurri and cheeseburger baos rival the one for Radiator Springs Racers. And with the introduction of San Fransokyo Square, arguably the first food-centered themed land at a Disney park if you don't count EPCOT's World Showcase, you can spend all day eating and never taste the same thing twice.

Here are 10 of the best bites to enjoy this summer at Disney California Adventure — the Foodiest Place at the Happiest Place on Earth.



**THE CHILI CONE** Queso at Cozy Cone Motel Snacks.

**CHILI CONE QUESO - COZY CONE MOTEL SNACKS**

Like all things in Cars Land, Cozy Cone Motel looks exactly like the movie. But that's not what makes it special. Its five traffic-cone-shaped structures hide five distinct food stalls, each featuring a unique item that's served inside, wait for it, cones. The best cone of all is the Chili Cone Queso for \$9.99, which can be procured at the middle cone. And it's a dish that's as fun-filled as it is pun-filled.

A thick beef chili is poured into a sturdy, leak-proof, hand-holdable cone engineered out of bread with a texture somewhere between a pretzel and a bread stick. The top is showered with grated cheese and Fritos.

At first, you eat it like a stew with a spoon; then you eat the rest like an ice cream cone, wasting nothing. It could be said it's the next evolutionary step after those ubiquitous clam chowder bread bowls. But it's better than that. Besides, have you tried standing in line for Radiator Springs Racers eating a clam chowder bread bowl?



**THE BEEF BULGOGI** Burrito from Lucky Fortune Eatery.

**BEEF BULGOGI BURRITO - LUCKY FORTUNE EATERY**

In 2008, a then-unknown chef named Roy Choi put Korean BBQ meat inside a tortilla and sold it out of a food truck he called "Kogi." He didn't know it at the time, but it would go on to make history and his fortune. The Korean Mexican hybrid dish he invented was kismet. Korean BBQ meat, as it turns out, never met a better partner than a tortilla.

Since then, Choi has inspired countless chefs to fuse Mexican and Korean flavors together, including those at Lucky Fortune Cookery. They've created a bulgogi burrito that tastes as though it could have conceivably come from the Kogi food truck itself.

The flour tortilla has a nice elasticity. The seasoned rice is fluffy. The beef is sweet and sesame-scented. But the most inspired add-on is an Asian slaw that is so spicy, it's disorienting. At \$13.99, which includes a side of garlic chips, it's a filling meal that feels like you just ate at a taqueria and KBBQ in one sitting.



**COSMIC CREAM** Orb from Terran Treats.

**COSMIC CREAM ORB - TERRAN TREATS**

You can have churros anywhere on Earth, but when you're underneath the shadow of the Collector's fortress, trying the so-called Cosmic Cream Orb at Terran Treats seems more appropriate. It looks like a craggy rock formed by volcanic eruption. Or maybe one of those alien eggs ready to hatch a face-hugger.

Bite into it, and you discover an alarming purple substance inside that suspiciously tastes like tangy raspberry cheesecake. Is this weird cream puff a decadent splurge for \$6.75 a specimen? Perhaps, but how much would you expect to pay for a space souvenir you can eat?

**GYOZA SAUSAGE BUN - PORT OF SAN FRANSSOKYO CERVECERIA**

At Tokyo DisneySea, fans reportedly wait in line for hours to sink their teeth into the gyoza sausage bun, an oblong bao steamed to fluffiness and stuffed with a pork and veggie filling you'd normally find in gyoza dumplings. And now



Photos by Edwin Goei

**AT \$13.99**, the Chicken Shawarma Wrap from Shawarma Palace is designed to be eaten while waiting in line for a ride.



**THE GYOZA SAUSAGE** Bun from Port of San Fransokyo Cerveceria.

you can have it at the Port of San Fransokyo Cerveceria here at Disney California Adventure.

Best of all, there's no waiting. So far, the gyoza sausage bun enjoys some anonymity as it remains undiscovered. And though it is the size of a hot dog, at \$8.99 a pop, it's intended as a snack. It's warm and comforting and gets increasingly addicting the more you dunk it into the side of chili-soy dipping sauce that electrifies every subsequent bite. Before you know it, you're ordering another. Thank goodness you don't have to wait hours in line when you do.



**HOT LINK** Corn Dog from Corn Dog Castle.

**HOT LINK CORN DOG - CORN DOG CASTLE**

No trip to the Disneyland Resort is complete without consuming at least one corn dog. Deep fried to a dark mahogany brown, it's as greasy as they come. A napkin wrapped around its base will turn clear on contact, but you won't want it any other way.

And if you're going to have a corn dog, there's no better place to get it than Disney California Adventure's Corn Dog Castle, which has been one-upping Disneyland's Little Red Wagon as the Resort's corn dog Mecca since it opened in 2001.

At both venues, thanks to the pull of gravity, almost all of the corn dogs produced are lopsided. The more asymmetric the porous cornbread shell gets, the better the experience. Best of all is when the batter tears halfway through cooking, creating gnarled knobs of goodness reminiscent of crackly hush puppies.

But why settle for the regular one when you can have the hot link corn dog? It's just as juicy but packed

with more flavor and heat. And for a mere \$10.79, which is just 20 cents more than the original corn dog, it's all that and a bag of chips, literally.

**NEW YORK'S TASTIEST (CHICKEN SHAWARMA WRAP) - SHAWARMA PALACE**

You know the scene. After a bruising battle over New York, an exhausted Tony Stark points to his fellow Avengers in their seminal film and says, "Have you ever tried shawarma? There's a shawarma joint about two blocks from here. I don't know what it is, but I wanna try it."

It's arguably the movie's most memorable line and sets up one of the best post-credit segments in history. It also reportedly caused a big boost on the sale of shawarma throughout the country. So it was inevitable that Avengers Campus was going to get a shawarma vendor.

Shawarma Palace — the place where the Avengers assembled to eat it — has two carts here, placed strategically near the entrance at the Web Slingsers: A Spider-Man Adventure and Guardians of the Galaxy - Mission: Breakout!, the land's two most popular rides.

And that's no accident. At \$13.99, the shawarma is designed to be eaten in queue. They're pre-prepared, prewrapped and ready to go so that you can enjoy the fluffy pita stuffed with aggressively seasoned chicken slathered in garlic sauce standing up and as you recall that memorable scene after the credits.



**THE "NOT SO** Little Chicken Sandwich" from Pym Test Kitchen.

**NOT SO LITTLE CHICKEN SANDWICH - PYM TEST KITCHEN**

Pym Test Kitchen isn't just a place to eat; the restaurant itself is an attraction. Outside, the Wasp's giant-sized cellphone is repurposed as a menu board. You can stand there all day reading the funny text notifications that pop up from just about every Avenger.

Inside the restaurant, normal-sized pretzels dangling on a conveyor enter a glass chamber, get zapped and then exit as a snack-sized mini or a Bavarian-style behemoth. Everything you see here tells a story.

And then there's the "Not so Little Chicken Sandwich," a breaded chicken breast cutlet blown up as big as your face, topped with a comically shrunken brioche bun. Obviously made for Instagram, this meal isn't just a gimmick; it's also great value at \$15.49. You need a knife and fork to eat this very legit Japanese-style katsu, which is embellished with slaw, teriyaki sauce and chili mayo. On the side, a not-insignificant helping of crispy tater tots is included with the price — it's definitely what Giant-Man would order.



**QUESABIRRIA TACOS** from Cocina Cucamonga.

**QUESABIRRIA TACOS - COCINA CUCAMONGA**

It would be hard to find a more coveted food item at Disney California Adventure than Cocina Cucamonga's quesabirria tacos. When it debuted a few years ago, it was such a hit that Disney imposed a rule limiting guests to two orders at a time. Today, at \$12.49, it is still the star attraction at San Fransokyo Square. Walk around the vast eating district, and you see nearly every table with an order.

The taco — with its tortilla shell stained red from being fried in the spicy grease skimmed off the top of the birria stew — is decadently crispy, beefy and cheesy. Dunked into the intense soup called consommé in which the meat was cooked, Cocina Cucamonga's quesabirria taco could go head-to-head against the best quesabirrias in O.C., perhaps even rivaling those made in Jalisco, Mexico.

**SALMON PLY - LAMPLIGHT LOUNGE**

Lamplight Lounge remains the hardest restaurant reservation to snag at Disney California Adventure. The obvious reason is the view, which is spectacular. But if you're lucky enough to get a table, its Salmon PLY sandwich may be even better still.

This riff on the BLT transcends the definition of the word "sandwich." The filet of salmon is so precisely grilled, it belongs on a plate surrounded with gourmet sauces and artful garnishes. And everything that joins it is as "gourmet" as the salmon, including the bun, which is an airy toasted focaccia. The roasted tomato is seasoned with balsamic and thyme. The house-made aioli is fla-



**SALMON PLY** from Lamplight Lounge.

vored with a hint of bacon, lemon and dill. And, of course, there's the pancetta, the thing that makes up the "P" in "PLY," which is patiently rendered to be shatteringly crispy.

If all of that doesn't already justify its \$26 price tag, an order of this sandwich also entitles you to possibly the best French fries at the Disneyland Resort — fries that you can only get here, at Lamplight Lounge. That is, if you can get a table.



**SHRIMP KATSU** Sandwich from Aunt Cass Cafe.

**SHRIMP KATSU SANDWICH - AUNT CASS CAFE**

There may not be a more controversial food item on this list as the shrimp katsu sandwich. Online Disney food reviewers either love it or hate it. There's very little middle ground. And what camp you'll fall into will depend on your familiarity with the fried shrimp lolipops served at dim sum restaurants.

For all intents and purposes, the breaded shrimp patty featured at Aunt Cass Cafe is made from the same material. Shrimp is coarsely ground, mixed with a starchy binder, then molded into the desired shape. And the result is a bouncy, resilient texture prized in Asian cuisine.

Paired with a crunchy slaw, slathered with a surprisingly spicy mayo and drizzled with a katsu sauce, it's a blend of Eastern and Western cultures that will fill you up for its \$14.99 sticker price. It also includes garlic chips, which is so ubiquitous at San Fransokyo, it must be what people eat in the fictional city of "Big Hero 6" instead of Lay's.

Edwin Goei is a contributor to TimesOC.

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COLUMN | **PATRICE APODACA**



File Photo

**STUDENTS GATHER** outside of the school gates before classes start at Costa Mesa Middle and High School. Chronic absenteeism throughout the nation is chronically high.

# The nation's grade schools face one problem above all others

**W**hen it comes to public schools there's never a shortage of controversy. In the past few years alone they've been attacked for all kinds of reasons — some imagined or at least overblown — that a vocal minority of people get very worked up about. CRT, vaccine requirements, transgenderism and, of course, books are a few



targets that spring to mind. Unfortunately, all that noise tends to drown out awareness of the real problems facing schools. Problems like chronic absenteeism. Since schools ended pandemic restrictions and fully reopened, chronic absenteeism has remained stubbornly high. Nationwide, the rate of chronic absenteeism stood at about

30% in the 2021-22 school year, edging down only slightly, to about 28% , in the following school year. Similar numbers hold for California. By contrast, in the year prior to the pandemic, chronic absenteeism measured at 15% nationwide and 12% in California. At the time, the U.S. Department of Education considered this a crisis.

See **Apodaca**, page A10

A WORD, PLEASE | **JUNE CASAGRANDE**

## Advanced punctuation tips for those in the know

**I**f you're reading this, you probably know a thing or two about punctuation. But nobody — including punctuation book authors (ahem) — knows it all. So here are some advanced punctuation tips for good punctuators who want to get even better. **A single quote mark followed by a double quote mark comes after a period or comma.** Let's say you're quoting someone who's talking about a specific word, so you put the quotation in regular quote marks and the word



itself in singles, like this: "Stop saying 'whatever.'" The rule that says periods and commas go inside quotation marks applies to single quotation marks, too. The order is period, single quote mark, double quote mark. **An apostrophe comes before a period or comma.** Apostrophes look a lot like single quotation marks. Depending on the font, they can be indistinguishable. But they're different. An apostrophe can represent an omitted letter: thinkin', talkin', sleepin', etc. And unlike a

single quote mark that would come after each of those commas, an apostrophe is part of the word. That's why the apostrophe goes before a period or comma, even when it's within a quotation: "He's sleepin'." **An em dash can have a space on either side, or not.** Different publishing guides have different rules for whether you put spaces around a dash — like this, or not—like this. Either way is fine. **If you can rearrange the order of adjectives, they require commas**

See **Word**, page A10

**MAILBAG**

## Larger issues face Surf City than kids' books a few people dislike

Our officials are wasting time and money on unimportant things. Monitoring books on the shelves is not their job, but repairing sidewalks that bulge up because certain trees should never been planted is. We have houses whose homeowners do not take care of their frontyards, running the whole neighborhood down. At an unattended property in Huntington Beach, the eucalyptus trees stand high above the house, just waiting to break off and cause damage or worse. They belong in a park, where there is room, not reaching over the sidewalk. A storm a couple years ago broke branches that lined the street well over half a block, and I



File Photo

**HUNTINGTON BEACH** Central Library is a "hallmark of modernist architecture," a Daily Pilot reader writes.

could not drive out of my garage. The house is a hotel for four-legged creatures. The grass is not cut, the leaves are not

raked, so everything ends up in the storm drains. The city is well aware of

See **Mailbag**, page A8

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# Chef shares vision at Downtown Disney

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Chef Carlos Gaytán welcomed guests to the opening of his three Mexican dining concepts with the Patina Restaurant Group at Downtown Disney in Anaheim on Wednesday morning with Mickey and Minnie Mouse at his side.

"It is my sincere pleasure to officially announce the grand opening of Paseo, Centrico and Tiendita at Downtown Disney District," said Gaytán, as cannons of streamers exploded, and traditional Mexican folkloric dancers spun to the live mariachi music.

Patina has had a longstanding relationship with Downtown Disney District since the restaurant group opened Napolini Pizzeria, which is still popular today. The three new restaurants will be the latest Patina addition to the shopping and dining destination.

"We are thrilled to share Chef Gaytán's culinary vision with guests and introduce his world-renowned Mexican cuisine as we continue to grow our presence at Downtown Disney District," said John Kolaski, president of Patina Restaurant Group. "Each of these unique venues, Paseo, Céntrico and Tiendita, offer a bespoke dining experience with their own look and feel, while maintaining their roots in authentic Mexican cuisine and culture."

Paseo is a contemporary Mexican restaurant meant to spotlight lesser-known



Christian Thompson | Disneyland Resort

**CHEF CARLOS GAYTÁN**, center, is flanked by Mickey and Minnie Mouse and joined by a host of Disneyland Resort and restaurant officials at Downtown Disney.

Mexican dishes by Gaytán, who is widely known as ambassador of Mexican gastronomy. He appeared on Bravo's "Top Chef" in 2013 and is the chef-owner of Tzucu in Chicago, which was a semifinalist in the Best New Restaurant category by the James Beard Foundation Awards in 2020. He is also the first Mexican-born chef to earn a Miche-

lin star, for his now shuttered Chicago restaurant Mexique. He is committed to educating himself about his country's food and traditions and sharing that knowledge with diners through his cooking.

"For me, it's very important to share my heritage, my true Mexican cuisine, my unknown México that people are not used to,"

said Gaytán, "For me this is an opportunity to showcase what real México is."

For Gaytán that means dishes like Mama's chichinita pibil, a guerrero-style pork shank that truly is his mother's recipe.

"Everyone has to try that one," Gaytán said. "There is a lot of heart in that recipe."

At Céntrico, the outdoor bar formerly occupied by

Uva Bar, guests can enjoy an extensive cocktail menu in the space reimaged as a Mexican hacienda. Tiendita is the quick-service dining option of the trio, with counter service or self-service kiosks where parkgoers can order Mexican street-food staples.

The opening of the three restaurants in Anaheim comes just a week after

Walt Disney World's Victoria & Albert's restaurant in Florida earned a Michelin Star, the only U.S. theme-park-owned restaurant to receive such a distinction.

The Mexican dining concepts from Gaytán and Patina are among several other new restaurants set to open at Downtown Disney, including Din Tai Fung and Porto's Bakery. It will be interesting to see if the addition of such robust dining options draw as many crowds as the parks. If so, the Anaheim resort could be poised to become a culinary destination.

The opening was something of a full circle moment for Gaytán who recalled coming to the United States for the first time 34 years ago and paying a visit to the Disneyland Resort where a cousin worked at the time.

"I never knew that 34 years later I would come back in a different way," said Gaytán.

While Gaytán could not have predicted his own path, he said he has found being bold can lead to success.

"We as Hispanics, as Latinos we need to dream big. We have to stop being scared of doing things. That is one thing I have learned," said Gaytán. "You can make a lot mistakes, but when you fix those mistakes, it can motivate you to continue to do better."

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# Pitfire Pizza, Sonoratown partner for Cinco de Mayo

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Tacos might seem like the obvious choice for our Cinco de Mayo celebration, but Pitfire Pizza and Sonoratown are teaming up to create a fun alternative to the taco bar this year. The Southern California pizza concept and the Los Angeles-based fast-casual spot known for Northern Mexican-style tacos have teamed together to create a chivichanga pizza. The festive offering will be available today for dine-in, takeout and delivery at all Pitfire Pizza locations, including in Costa Mesa and Orange.

The pizza is inspired by Sonoratown's popular chivichanga, a guisado of slow-cooked shredded chicken, cheddar and jack cheese, blistered tomatoes and roasted Anaheim chiles inside a Tortilla Tournament-winning flour tortilla. Chivichangas are similar to burritos but specific to the Sonora

region and an example of the many variations of the rolled taco found throughout Mexico and, in recent years, Southern California. In Orange County, you can find Zacatecas-style burritos at Burritos La Palma in Santa Ana and the Mexican state of Chihuahua's version at Los de Juarez Burritos in Anaheim.

This Cinco de Mayo collaboration, however, isn't a burrito at all but a dish that reinvents the Mexican pizza. Pitfire Pizza's signature sour-dough crust will be topped with Sonoratown's shredded chicken, Monterey jack and mild cheddar cheese and finished with radish, onion and lime. Sonoratown's spicy Chiltepin salsa and avocado crema will be served on the side for extra heat.

Teodoro Diaz-Rodriguez Jr. and Jennifer Feltham founded Sonoratown in 2016 to serve tacos in the style of San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, while Pitfire Pizza, part of the American

Gonzo Food Corp., opened in 1997 in the North Hollywood Arts District and has since grown with locations in L.A., Orange County and San Diego. Pitfire's city of Orange location opened last summer and is the second addition to the group's Orange County restaurants.

This is the third year Pitfire Pizza and Sonoratown have partnered for Cinco de Mayo to serve chivichanga pizza, and as with previous years, part of the proceeds will benefit No Us Without You, a charity dedicated to providing food relief for the undocumented community in the restaurant industry. The organization was created in response to the COVID-19 shutdown in Los Angeles in 2020 and today serves over 700 families quarterly.

"When we first partnered with Sonoratown for Cinco de Mayo two years ago, Jen and Teo chose No Us Without You, as it's a community that's close to



Courtesy of Pitfire Pizza

**CHIVICHANGA PIZZA** from Pitfire Pizza, featuring Sonoratown's slow-cooked guisado for Cinco de Mayo. It's available today for takeout, delivery or dine-in.

their hearts," American Gonzo Food Corp. chief executive officer Jeff Goodman said. "The organization's efforts supporting restaurant workers aligns

with all our values, and since then they've been the obvious choice for this annual event."

Five dollars from each chivichanga pizza sold will

be donated to No Us Without You.

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## MAILBAG

Continued from page A7

this, but so far nothing has been done. I guess that takes backbone and determination to resolve, whereas books in the library are easier to regulate.

**Maria Bauer**  
Huntington Beach

Huntington Beach is paying a steep price for voter apathy in the 2022 local election. According to the Orange County Registrar of Voters, the four conservatives elected to the City Council all received less than 14% of the vote. The current council majority parlayed its MAGA trappings and grievance-fueled political blitzkrieg into what many now see as a hostile takeover of local government. The majority's entire time in office has been spent tearing down community norms and institutions while catering to its extremist base. Opposition from remaining council members and the community has been marginalized, and the threat of action from state and county authorities remains high over policies and positions taken by this rogue group of ideologues. Voters cannot afford to make the same mistake in this November's election. The three majority-

anointed candidates running for City Council are just as objectionable to a majority of the citizenry as those in 2022 should have been. Hopefully the grievance factor will start going against the majority instead of for it. Surf City may not survive another extremist tsunami, which will wash away our community values and sink our civic reputation further into the mire of MAGA mediocrity.

**Tim Geddes**  
Huntington Beach

As a longtime resident and business owner in the community, I am deeply concerned about the request for proposal to outsource our Huntington Beach libraries. In 1909 an organization was formed to create a library here. That same year our city was officially incorporated with a first city council (then called board of trustees) established, and the library was officially turned over to our city.

That branch grew over time to the five branches we enjoy today. The Main Street Library is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Huntington Beach Central Library is a hallmark of modernist architecture with over 100,000 square feet of books, community meeting spaces, a theater and beau-

tiful grounds. The Oak View Branch Library serves the vital Oak View community with a large Spanish-language collection. The Banning Branch Library is a popular study center for local students. And the Helen Murphy Branch Library was named in memory of a branch manager who worked in the library system for more than 20 years.

Our local library has seen additions, improvements, changes, challenges like the 1933 earthquake, and a host of librarians and dedicated public servants who have maintained this vital community pillar.

Public libraries are the bedrock of an informed citizenry. Our libraries have withstood challenges, but never before, to my knowledge, the assault of a few council members who believe they know more and better than 115 years of steadfast leadership.

I find members of this council to be arrogant, capricious and politically petty enough to wield this venerable institution, this symbol of democracy, community, literacy and learning as a weapon against community members who disagree with their agenda.

For 115 years, our city and its leaders have gotten it right. Please don't let the political fervor of this mo-

ment in time and the ambitions and political motivation of people, very temporary people, dismantle an institution our city and its members built.

**Dr. Chris Duquette**  
Huntington Beach

I spent my youth biking down Newland Street to the city beach, participating in the junior lifeguards, playing Frisbee golf in Central Park and golf at the old Driftwood and Meadowlark courses, and attending the annual Fourth of July parade. But some of my favorite memories are evenings spent at the Huntington Beach Library where I would meet friends to "study." The library became the epicenter of our schoolwork and social life and provided an enriching environment that stimulated and furthered my academic efforts.

I have now been living on the East Coast for over 30 years, and my wife and I are starting to think about how we will enjoy the remainder of our lives free from the stresses of work, raising children, and snowstorms, while being closer to my mom (she still lives in the house and my father bought in 1965). Huntington Beach seemed the perfect place for us for all the obvious reasons, and we routinely scan the real estate sites for our

next home. Until now. The politics in Huntington Beach have always spanned the spectrum and usually tilted somewhat conservative, which I never had a problem with being a registered Republican until relatively recently. But as I follow the current efforts of certain City Council members to turn Huntington Beach into an intolerant dictatorship with a handful of individuals imposing their supposed "morality" on others — I just can't see myself proudly saying that I live there or contributing to the city tax base. The last straw was the pandering of these individuals to the lowest common denominator of historical intolerance — banning books — and worse yet, handing one of the city's greatest community assets to a private company to run, and run at the behest of these few intolerant people who are using a public institution as a weapon against those that disagree with their beliefs. Frankly, it is reprehensible. Shame on you. No one is forcing you, your children, or your grandchildren to read anything they do not want to read, so please stop forcing your purported morality onto others.

**Joel Lehrer**  
Boston

## Turf could threaten health

Newport Beach just completed a \$2.7-million installation of synthetic turf at Arroyo Park touting its water savings and increased usage. What was not recognized was the increased heat production from artificial surfaces (climate change) and the tremendous shedding of microplastics from the increased heat and agitation of the fields. In a 2024 study in the New England Journal of Medicine, 47% of patients had microplastics in their major vessels, potentially increasing the risk of a cardiovascular event fourfold. Plastics are also a known endocrine disruptor. Our children should not have to inhale more microplastics because they played on synthetic grass.

We need to be reminded that plastic is a forever chemical — it never goes away and just disintegrates into smaller pieces. We ingest both by breathing and eating, a credit card size piece of plastic every week, and projects such as these increase that number. Newport Beach is a great city but needs to be more forward thinking and environmentally conscious in their future planning.

**Barbara De La Pena**  
Newport Beach



# Artist to host her second 'Healing House'

BY LILLY NGUYEN

Newport Beach artist Britt Michaelian thinks a lot about what her purpose in life is.

Michaelian, a practitioner of holistic healing practices like reiki, quantum healing and stone medicine, said it took her a long time before she finally came around to that purpose. A painter by trade, she initially went the traditional path of art exhibition after graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1996 with work shown in places all over the country including Los Angeles and New York.

She later completed her master's in marriage and family therapy from Notre Dame de Namur University in 2002 and went on to do her practicum at San Francisco's California Pacific Medical Center.

Michaelian's world stopped when her mother was diagnosed with cancer in 2010.

"We kind of gathered the family and ... we moved to Southern California to support my mother. I decided I was going to take a break and focus on my mom and her healing. I was doing businesses on the side [while taking care of her] and doing things like life coaching and social influencer work, and I just got to the point where I was like, 'This wasn't why I was put on this Earth,'" Michaelian said in a recent interview. "I know I'm supposed to be an artist, and my mom was one of my biggest advocates in becoming an artist. She was an interior designer up in Silicon Valley.

"My mom and I were really close, and when she passed [in 2012], it made me reevaluate everything," she said. "Then, my sister, a few years later, also got diagnosed with cancer. At the time, I finished the first two levels of reiki training and was looking into taking



James Carbone

**ARTIST BRITT MICHAELIAN** poses in front of a pair of her paintings at her home in Newport Beach on Wednesday. Her work combines practices like reiki, quantum healing, sound baths and sacred rituals.

a master course and diving into other types of healing because I wanted to potentially help my sister. It became clear that she was very sick and, after a four-year journey with cancer and all types of healing work, she left very peacefully."

By then, Michaelian said she had basically stopped creating and painting in favor of taking care of her family. But when her sister got her a paint-by-numbers set to do while she was being cared for, Michaelian finally picked up the brush again.

But she wanted to do something different.

While meditating during a quantum healing retreat, she decided to change the way she approached art — shifting the focus of creating from purely processing feelings to projecting

positive intentions and feelings.

Michaelian said her artwork is intertwined with alternative healing practices and, as part of that she is hosting "Healing House" — an event at the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills on May 19. It's the second time she has hosted this event, with the first last year in Laguna Beach. The free event focuses on art and wellness.

About 20 of her pieces will be exhibited there, each named after a mantra or with a mantra written on its canvas. They vary in sizes, from 2 feet by 2 feet to five feet wide, and include a copper coil in the back. She uses non-toxic, plant-based acrylics and powdered crystals in her work.

"Healing House" includes healing frequency sounds, sound baths, meditation and other forms of group

healing. It is co-sponsored by app WellSet.

Michaelian said she knows there are plenty of skeptics out there, but she welcomes them to enter and enjoy the space.

"Right now, we're at such a transition in so many ways. Quantum physics, in particular, is getting a lot more attention because they are able to prove that there are certain phenome-

na that can and do happen. But the bottom line is that we all know we're made of energy. Healing, in particular — it is about the intention behind it and the thought process behind it," Michaelian said.

"We know certain thoughts that are maybe negative or not healthy in some way can cause a lack of ease and disease in the body. The opposite is true as well. Simply based on that, if we're talking about positive thoughts that can impact your body positively, then viewing art that has good intentions is going to translate to having a good effect on your body physically and emotionally," she said. "Even if this is just planting the seed for naysayers, maybe it will become, 'This is something interesting that I should pay attention to.'"

"Sometimes, that seed may not blossom until some years later, but my current goal is to have a place where, even if they don't believe, they are coming into a room and have the ability to feel present and feel unconditional love. Being surrounded by people with that same intention, that can be really powerful."

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## CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

G	A	S		H	A	R	D		C	A	N	D	O				
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7	4	8	3	5	9	6	1	2
9	6	3	1	4	2	7	8	5
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**THE BUNGALOW**



Gabriel San Román

**CASA ROMANTICA'S** main salon remains closed as a portrait of the landslide is perched outside its doors. A final determination on reopening the ocean terrace has not been made.

## STRONG

Continued from page A4

way for Casa Romantica's main salon to reopen, a day that Travis is waiting for as it would allow more weddings and events to be booked at the venue.

Ryan said that could happen as early as this fall,

though inclement weather could still play a factor.

Meanwhile, San Clemente continues to work with the California Coastal Commission on approving plans for reopening the ocean terrace. A final determination hasn't yet been made.

Until then, Travis is grateful for a board, staff and volunteers who have

helped Casa Romantica come this far.

"It's a long haul," she said. "We have made a comeback, we've made a lot of progress, but we still do need support from the community."

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## WORD

Continued from page A7

**between them.** Why are there commas in "a red, purple, yellow and green shirt" but none in "a bright red Hawaiian shirt"? It's because the adjectives in the first example all have the same relationship with the noun. You can swap the order and it doesn't affect the meaning: a yellow, purple, green and red shirt. But in our second example, some adjectives are more closely related to the noun than others, so you can't move them around. "A Hawaiian, red, bright shirt" just doesn't mean the same thing.

**If you can insert "and" between adjectives, they require commas between them.** Here's another trick you can use: Try "a red and purple and yellow and green shirt," then try "a bright and red and Hawaiian shirt." The first one works fine, but the second doesn't because "bright" describes not the shirt but the color red and

because the word "Hawaiian" is more integral to the noun than the other adjectives. That's why experts say you put commas between "coordinate adjectives" that come before a noun — the commas are standing in for the coordinating conjunction "and."

**Semicolons can make sentences less readable.** Semicolons can be used to show that two independent clauses are closely related; for example, like this. But that makes the sentence longer and more cumbersome. Semicolons can also be used to separate complicated sentence elements that commas just can't handle. For example, if you were to write, "We visited Denver, Colorado, Augusta, Georgia, and Toledo, Ohio," it looks like "Denver" and "Colorado" are two different places. A semicolon after each state shows the proper relationships of these nouns. But state-city combos are the rare example when semicolons help more than hurt. Usually, if you need semi-

colons to make sense of complicated lists, it's better to break up the sentence.

**Adverbs ending in -ly shouldn't be hyphenated.** Rules say you should often hyphenate words that work together to modify a noun: a test-taking strategy, a family-friendly movie, a state-of-the-art technology. But when one of the words is an -ly adverb, you don't use a hyphen: a happily married couple, a recently renovated home.

**A complete sentence before an ellipsis ends with a period.** If you're using an ellipsis to ... indicate a delay or omitted words, you put a space before and after the three dots. But sometimes the stuff before the ellipsis is a complete sentence. ... In those cases, end that sentence with a period, then insert a space, then insert the three-dot ellipsis.

**JUNE CASAGRANDE** is the author of "The Best Punctuation Book, Period." She can be reached at [JuneTCN@aol.com](mailto:JuneTCN@aol.com).

## APODACA

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So as some people spend valuable time and resources worrying about pronouns, schools are grappling with a crisis that has doubled in just a few years, but which has received considerably less attention among the general public.

Chronic absenteeism is a term often used interchangeably with truancy. But the latter is a more narrow term for unexcused absences, whereas chronic absenteeism includes truanancies as well as excused absences and suspensions. A student is considered chronically absent when they have missed at least 10% of school days for any reason.

It's not hard to imagine how damaging it can be when a student misses out on that much school time.

If the pandemic taught us one thing about education, it's that in-person learning is crucial to student development.

Not surprisingly, students who are chronically absent fall behind in schoolwork, and it can be extremely hard to recover from the lost learning. Younger students struggle to read and fail to reach grade-level standards. Many eventually drop out.

What's more, these students lose opportunities to build friendships, become part of a community and explore possible career interests. Those low standardized test scores that we keep hearing about? Chronic absenteeism could be a key culprit behind them.

This isn't just worrisome from an educational perspective. Chronically absent students also have a higher risk of bad outcomes later in their lives,

including poor health, diminished job prospects and involvement in the criminal justice system. Students who do attend school regularly can also suffer because of classroom disruptions caused by kids coming and going.

The damage can extend to the nation as a whole by negatively impacting economic productivity and social stability. High rates of missed school tend to be worse in disadvantaged areas; they both result from and exacerbate inequality.

The problem is so severe that several months ago the White House issued an "all hands on deck" call to mount a vigorous effort to get kids back in school. The federal effort has included additional grant funds, technical assistance, mental health programs and more help with tutoring, mentoring and other support services. States also have some remaining pan-

demical-era relief funds, some of which can be used to address the absenteeism problem. California has invested billions of dollars in programs to encourage student engagement.

Even with the extra resources, it won't be easy. Chronic absenteeism is a thorny issue, complicated by the fact that it is often brought on by many other hard-to-solve factors, such as housing instability, financial hardship, lack of transportation, bullying and physical and mental health concerns. The pandemic might be over, but many families are still experiencing residual trauma that, at least in theory, continues to weigh down school attendance.

But getting at the precise reasons why so many kids are missing too much school will be critical to devising solutions.

"We take an individualistic approach," said

Sarah Coley, Newport-Mesa Unified School District's administrative director of student services.

"We take a look at what's going on with that student and their family and try to find a way to help the student. We look at barriers that are preventing them from going to school, working in partnership with those families."

The district has directed resources, including counseling staff, to school sites to address the various campus' particular set of issues impacting attendance. It has sent out emails and postcards emphasizing the positive aspects of attending class. Connections are facilitated with community organizations that can offer assistance to students and their families.

"That's where we've really shifted," said Coley. "We're less reactive and more proactive."

The effort is gradually

paying off. Newport-Mesa's chronic absenteeism rate edged down from 23.9% in the 2021-22 school year to 21.2% in 2022-23.

But such incremental progress still leaves much work to be done.

Schools face a constant barrage of criticism and complaints. Some of it is valid, other times not so much. But it must be more widely recognized that if schools are to fulfill their most basic purpose — teaching students what they need to know to succeed in life — it would be wise to focus less on the distractions of manufactured controversies and more on the most fundamental goal: getting kids to show up.

**PATRICE APODACA** is a former L.A. Times staff writer and is coauthor of "A Boy Named Courage: A Surgeon's Memoir of Apartheid." She lives in Newport Beach.

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