

Composer hits another high note



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

VIET CUONG, composer-in-residence at the Pacific Symphony, stands in the Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa on Wednesday. Cuong, a Laguna Hills resident, saw a fifth piece of his performed by the symphony this weekend.

In his third year as composer-in-residence with the Pacific Symphony, Viet Cuong debuts 'Marine Layer,' his fifth piece performed by the orchestra.

BY ANDREW TURNER

Before Viet Cuong took a seat on the floor to listen to the Pacific Symphony rehearsal on Wednesday night, more than one reporter asked him to recall his time working with the orchestra.

While his music has taken him many places, a constant in his love for music has been the relationships, Cuong said. That was true when he was a clarinet player and a percussionist attending high school in Georgia.

Cuong, a Lake Forest resident, is now in his third year as the composer-in-residence for the Pacific Symphony, which calls the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa its home.

The time spent working with the orchestra has been "special," said Cuong, who added that he feels like he is "writing for people." That feeling of connectivity and trust extends to his relationship with Carl St.Clair, the longtime conductor of the Pacific Symphony.

"I feel like I'm in a safe space," Cuong said of collaborating with St.Clair. "I know that the music will be taken care of well."

St.Clair, a Laguna Beach resident, is in his final season as music director, a role

See **Composer**, page A10

Elevating digestive health in Orange County

UCI Health

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N.B. jeweler restores pieces that survived Palisades fire

BY ERIC LICAS

The Knap family were visiting relatives in Norway, half a world away when the first alerts and evacuation warnings related to the Palisades fire buzzed their phones on Tuesday, Jan. 7. Hours later, even after friends sent them videos of charred piles of ashes and debris that had once been a neighborhood known as the Alphabet Streets, they could hardly believe that the place they had called home for the past 11 years had disappeared overnight.

Julie Knap called the sequence of events "surreal." Her husband Ulrik Knap said he was "just numb." They lived three blocks away from a fire station.

"We have been evacuated before," Julie Knap said. "So we went to bed thinking, even though we're getting a lot of text messages, 'They're not going to



Courtesy of Julie and Ulrik Knap

ULRIK KNAP holds an heirloom bracelet heavily damaged by the Palisades fire, in which the family lost nearly everything else. Newport Beach-based Jeweler George Bandar is restoring the found jewelry.

let the town burn. They'll stop this."

The couple wound up staying with Julie Knap's parents in

Newport Beach after landing in California the weekend after the

See **Jeweler**, page A9

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Textli Gallegos

THE MCCHARMLYS CHARM LOCAL FANS — AND EACH OTHER
PAGE A10

SANTA ANA TAKES ANOTHER LOOK AT SANCTUARY CITY ADVISORY GROUP PAGE A2

COM TOGETHER: 3 LITTLE SAIGON RESTAURANTS THAT OFFER FAMILY MEALS FOR COMMUNAL FEASTING PAGE A8

New O.C. Equity Report reveals challenges, path forward



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

UC IRVINE professors Walter Nicholls and Carolina Valdivia join a panel discussion moderated by Taryn Palumbo, left, during the 2025 Orange County Equity Report special presentation at the Cove at UCI on Thursday.

BY MATT SZABO

Equity has been a popular buzz word in recent weeks, either as a standalone word or the middle letter in DEI.

The Orange County Grantmakers, a nonprofit community of philanthropists, had long planned to release the 2025 Orange County Equity Profile this week.

The fact that it feels more relevant than ever doesn't bother O.C. Grantmakers executive director Taryn Palumbo at all.

"Things are changing rapidly, sometimes by the hour," Palumbo told attendees of a special release event at the Cove, on the campus of UC Irvine, on Thursday. "Did we plan on releasing an equity report this week when we decided to pick this date a year ago? No, we did not. But this report and its



DR. MANUEL PASTOR, director of the USC Equity Research Institute, speaks at Thursday's event.

timing, however you perceive it, whatever your political affiliations are and whatever your understanding is of equity, is an opportunity for us all to remember that equity is not about the process. Equity is about the outcomes

we're trying to achieve for the community."

The event was titled "The Path Ahead: OC's Roadmap to Equity," Professor Manuel Pastor, the di-

See **Report**, page A8

Santa Ana revisits sanctuary city advisory group

Council members debate group's merits in face of president's talk of mass deportation.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

When Donald Trump first won election as president, Santa Ana responded in 2016 by declaring itself a "sanctuary city" for undocumented immigrants.

With Trump back in office and vowing to carry out the "largest deportation operation in American history," Santa Ana remains Orange County's only such city.

On Tuesday, Santa Ana City Council debated what to do next with a sanctuary city law from 2017 already on the books, rumors spreading about Immigration and Customs Enforcement actions and protests swelling the streets.

Councilwoman Jessie Lopez asked for a discussion to consider directing City Manager Alvaro Nuñez to reconvene a Sanctuary Policy Advisory Group within a month.

"The question before us is simple," she said. "Will this council uphold and implement the law that is already in place?"

In her item report, Lopez noted that the group hadn't met since 2020.

"I believe that technical expertise can be added to the group," she said. "This is one small way that we can directly have a positive impact on our community."

Mayor Valerie Amezcua took the opportunity to affirm her support of Santa Ana as a sanctuary city, par-



DEMONSTRATORS BLOCK parts of Santa Ana Boulevard during a Feb. 3 protest of Trump's immigration policies.

ticularly because an Orange County news site suggested without evidence that she may be collaborating with ICE in violation of the city's sanctuary law.

"Do I support ICE coming in here and conducting raids in our community? No, I do not," Amezcua said. "Am I working with them? No, I am not, and I never have."

Regarding reconvening

the advisory group, she asked Nuñez and City Atty. Sonia Carvalho if it ever existed in an official capacity in the first place.

"I could not find an advisory group that had been created," Amezcua said. "Can somebody please enlighten us? Was there an advisory group?"

Nuñez noted that his office was still researching the question but didn't have

any policy reports to indicate a formal advisory group existed. Carvalho also couldn't provide an affirmative answer.

Lopez turned to conversations she had with attorneys who were a part of the process.

"Part of the reason why staff can't find anything is because of all of the turnover in the city manager's office," Lopez claimed.

Amezcua argued that the immigrant backgrounds of key city staff rendered an advisory group no longer necessary.

Santa Ana Police Chief Robert Rodriguez was formerly undocumented. Nuñez is the son of a bracero worker. Newly appointed Assistant City Manager Minh Thai is a Vietnamese refugee.

"This administration

does not just advocate for immigrant protections, we embody them," Amezcua said.

Carvalho cautioned that if council members created a formal advisory group that meets regularly to bolster the city's sanctuary law, the state's open meeting laws would be applicable, which could dissuade undocumented immigrants from working with it out of fear.

Councilman Johnathan Hernandez backed forming the advisory group and having it meet every 30 days.

"I want to ensure that we are working across the table and that we're bringing every single service provider who is vested in protecting immigrant families, whether that be Resilience OC, whether that be [the] ACLU, Orange County Rapid Response Network, VietRise, the Harbor Institute [for Immigrant and Economic Justice], the Public Law Center," he said. "We need all hands on deck right now."

But Councilwoman Thai Viet Phan aired questions about outside groups coming in.

"We also don't know what their policies are for ensuring data collection confidentiality," she said. "They might not have attorney-client privilege with our city attorney's office."

The hourlong deliberation ended with Nuñez affirming to return to council with an approach that ensures the sanctuary law is fully complied with.

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San Clemente declines to join nonsanctuary fight

Council passes on teaming up with Huntington Beach against California's 'sanctuary state' law.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Citing key differences between the two cities, San Clemente City Council refused to back Mayor Steve Knoblock's push to join Huntington Beach's lawsuit over California's "sanctuary state" law.

With President Donald Trump vowing mass deportations, Huntington Beach moved forward last month with a lawsuit challenging the California Values Act, which limits cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration officials.

Huntington Beach already lost a legal fight over the law in 2020 when the 4th District Court of Appeal overturned a lower court's ruling in favor of the city. The California Supreme Court later declined to hear the case.

A majority of San Clemente council members did not seem eager to back up its fellow Orange County beach town.

"We don't want to be Huntington Beach," said Councilman Mark Enmeier to applause. "We ... don't want to get involved in national politics."

San Clemente, unlike Huntington Beach, is not a charter city. It also does not have its own police force and is, instead, patrolled by the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

O.C. Sheriff Don Barnes released a statement on Jan. 27 clarifying his department's role.

"The Orange County Sheriff's Department does not enforce federal immi-



Robert Gauthier | Los Angeles Times

SAN CLEMENTE City Council members shelved a proposal to join Huntington Beach's legal fight against SB 54.

gration law," he said. "It is not part of our primary mission, and we remain focused on violations of state and local laws."

In backing the push, Knoblock falsely claimed that 15 to 20 million immigrants entered the United States without authorization during the Biden Administration.

An estimated 11.7 million immigrants resided in the U.S. without documentation as of July 2023, according to the Center for Migration Studies.

Knoblock, who previously tried to declare San

Clemente an abortion-free "sanctuary for life" city, argued that local politics has a role to play in federal immigration.

"Public safety is the number one issue in this community," he said. "We've had panga [boats] showing up in Cypress Shores in organized events. This effort would simply strengthen the president's effort to make this country safer."

But Knoblock did not find support for the move, even among fellow conservative council members. "This is a federal issue,"

Councilman Victor Cabral said. "Part of what the administration has decided was to target violent criminal aliens. I think that's appropriate, but it's not a job for our city to get involved with."

Cabral also clarified that he backed putting the issue on the agenda during the Jan. 14 council meeting solely for discussion and to have a staff report on it.

The debate ended on a contentious note when Knoblock railed against "a mindset in Sacramento that says we need to be a sanctuary city" and claimed that

same mindset wanted to protect children who wanted to become "transvestites."

With an audience in an uproar over the comments, council members voted 4-1 to table the lawsuit discussion without scheduling a rehearing.

Knoblock was the sole vote against it.

San Clemente City Council also weighed another immigration effort championed by the mayor during the meeting.

According to a staff report, panga boats boarded by undocumented immi-

grants are landing on San Clemente's shorelines more frequently.

Knoblock wanted to explore a role for residents in monitoring the coast for such vessels.

"I'm not suggesting that the city become ICE or take on a federal government's job," he said. "What I'd like to see is ... cameras that the public has access to that they can watch and look and if there's a problem, they have the right number to call."

U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested nine Mexican nationals, including an unaccompanied minor, after a boat docked at Dana Point Harbor last month.

The mayor supported infrared cameras being mounted at San Clemente Pier and at coastal neighborhood association buildings in support of the move.

But involving residents in an immigration monitoring effort, particularly at nighttime, made other council members uneasy.

"I'm very much against the idea of having our own citizens who aren't trained ... seeing something on the monitor saying, 'Oh, no, is that a whale or a panga boat?'" Enmeier said. "We need to have trained professionals doing this."

The council unanimously supported putting the number of Customs and Border Protection on the city's website for residents to call if they come across an abandoned panga on the beach or see one approaching.

San Clemente will also contact CBP with an initial inquiry about adding new cameras but without any direction on residents monitoring them.

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Dana Point airs concerns on potential fishing limits

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

A potential change to recreational fishing regulations for the barred sand bass has drawn the Dana Point City Council's attention.

On Tuesday, council members unanimously authorized City Manager Mike Killebrew to send a letter on its behalf to the California Fish and Game Commission outlining its concerns.

"Barred sand bass is a sought-after species for many anglers and fishing charter operators, who rely on this fish as a primary target during peak fishing seasons," the letter signed by Mayor Matthew Pagano read. "A reduction in bag limits and potential restrictions could impact the livelihoods of local businesses and may discourage recreational fishing participation in our waters."

The letter invited the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to maintain open lines of communication with the city's stakeholders, including anglers fishing from "piers, breakwaters, kayaks, small boats, and commercial passenger boats."

It also called for enhanced scientific data to better understand barred sand bass population dynamics.

Regulations on barred sand bass are intended to protect fish populations while allowing for year-round fishing access.

Current Department of Fish and Wildlife regulations for Southern California allow anglers a "bag limit" of up to five bass of any combination of species caught per day, with a minimum size limit of 14 inches.

Those regulations have been in place since 2013



Gina Ferazzi | Los Angeles Times

PEOPLE DROP their fishing lines into the water from a small pier outside the Ocean Institute in Dana Point.

when the department cut the bag limit in half from 10 per day. The agency also increased the size limit by 2 inches.

The changes were made out of concern for kelp bass and barred sand bass stocks.

More recently, the department had been supportive of cutting the bass bag limit down by one fish per day with a three-year sunset.

But a Jan. 7 notice from Fish and Game Commission Executive Director Melissa Miller-Henson noted that estimates in Southern California show a "severely depressed" barred sand bass population.

After consulting with various stakeholders and receiving guidance from the commission's Marine Resources Committee, the department is now asking that a broader set of options be considered.

The commission is set to discuss making bag limit changes specific to the barred sand bass, instead of having it lumped in with a combination of other bass species.

In addition, commissioners may assign different bag limits between

zero and five per day between June 1 and Aug. 23, which is spawning season, and between one and five per day for the rest of the year.

The proposed changes, which will be discussed during hearings later this month and in April, are intended to reduce the number of barred sand bass fished, especially during spawning months when they are most vulnerable, according to the notice.

Donna Kalez, owner of Dana Wharf Sportfishing and Whale Watching, called on Dana Point city officials to send a letter to the commission in light of the proposed changes.

"Sand bass is 100% recreational fishing for our seniors, our children," Kalez told council members. "This will impact us. If it's a closure, it's really going to impact us."

Dana Point City Council gave Killebrew the go-ahead to send the letter with little deliberation, save for Councilman Mike Frost calling the move a "no brainer."

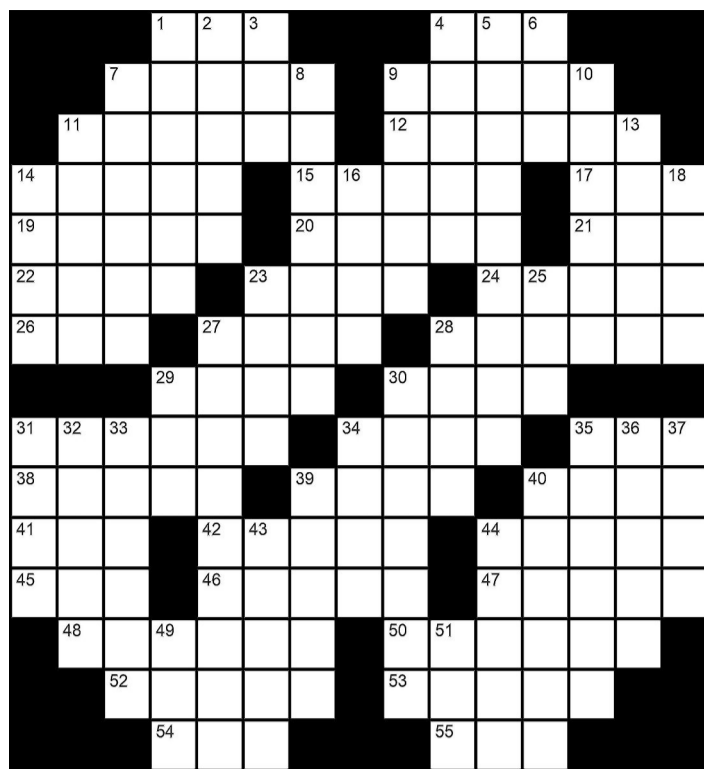
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THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

ACROSS

- 1 _-by-four
- 4 Charitable ad: Abbr.
- 7 Beijing's country
- 9 Mustache parts
- 11 Jupiter or Mars
- 12 "Certainly!"
- 14 Incorrect
- 15 _ of a kind
- 17 Cut off, as a tree branch
- 19 Puts at stake
- 20 Instagram video feature
- 21 She-sheep
- 22 Star pitchers
- 23 Apple computers
- 24 "Be silent" instruction in music
- 26 _ XING (road sign)
- 27 Foot covering
- 28 End a dispute
- 29 Injured
- 30 _ for the picking
- 31 Break out of jail
- 34 Glasses part
- 35 Day parts: Abbr.
- 38 Brief break
- 39 Easter meats
- 40 Cook in hot water
- 41 Hospital hookups: Abbr.
- 42 Horned zoo animal
- 44 Jolt of power
- 45 Trig function: Abbr.
- 46 Cake maker
- 47 Archer's projectile
- 48 TV controller
- 50 Fourth-year student
- 52 Planted, as seed
- 53 Go in
- 54 Ancient
- 55 June honoree



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.

	4	9						1
				9				3
			4	7				
4		1			6	2	8	
2								9
	8	3	2			7		6
			1	9				
6				8			2	
	2					9	7	

For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A10.

DOWN

- 1 Expression of gratitude
- 2 Chicken order
- 3 "That's _ I haven't heard"
- 4 Instrument display
- 5 Dodges
- 6 "_ you happy now?"
- 7 Shut
- 8 Entice
- 9 Brings on staff
- 10 Make a choice
- 11 Retail cost

- 13 Wooden rod
- 14 Prepare Christmas gifts
- 16 "What the _?"
- 18 Maravich of basketball
- 23 Seconds
- 25 Snacked on
- 27 NFL championship: 2 wds.
- 28 Moral misdeeds
- 29 Owns
- 30 Guilty feeling
- 31 Huge in scope
- 32 Enjoy the taste of
- 33 Uses swear words
- 34 Country road
- 35 Scary genre
- 36 Strictness
- 37 Killed, as a dragon
- 39 Walked in the woods
- 40 Interred
- 43 Couldn't stand
- 44 _ Barbara, California
- 49 Cow's call
- 51 Finale

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forum

A WORD, PLEASE | JUNE CASAGRANDE

A bot's answer to a grammar question might literally be the worst

"It makes me mad when people say 'literally' when they mean 'figuratively' as it does sound stupid and confusing," a poster on Quora wrote recently. "Is this normal?"



normal to feel frustrated when people misuse words, especially a word like 'literally,' which has a specific meaning. Language evolves over time, and the way people use words can change, leading to confusion or irritation for those who value precise language. Many people share your sentiment about the

misuse of 'literally,' as it can dilute its meaning and create ambiguity. Your feelings are valid, and it's common for individuals to have strong reactions to language use, particularly in a world where communication is so important.

There's something deeply unnerving about a bot validating a person's feelings in the same tone

a human therapist would use to talk to a trauma survivor. Adding insult to injury: Assistant got its facts wrong. Even the original poster is a little off, not just for casting this as an "am I normal" issue but by saying people use "literally" to mean "figuratively."

In case you're not familiar with the poster's complaint, consider a sentence like: "I was so hungry I

literally inhaled that pizza." If, as the poster believes, "literally" means only "in the exact sense of the words," the speaker would be dead from cheese and crust clogging their lungs. Not the worst way to go, I suppose.

In its answer, the bot says "literally" has a specific meaning

See *Word*, page A10

MAILBAG

Fairview Park's future at stake

The long-awaited update to the Fairview Park Master Plan came before the Costa Mesa City Council on Jan. 28.

Fairview Park is a rare jewel "that's unique [in] all the state," said Travis Brooks, a restoration ecologist, at the meeting. Also known as the Fairview Indian Site by the National Register of Historic Places, it's the sacred home of tribes whose habitation goes back to 1500 B.C.

The mesa is the watershed for vernal pools where federally protected Riverside and fairy shrimp live. They're supposed to be "specially managed and maintained," said Robb Hamilton, a biologist who's been studying them since the 1980s, but he called the area a "free for all," referring to the Harbor Soaring Society, ebikes and radio controlled cars.

Yet there's no park ranger for the 208 acres, which is larger than all of the other city parks combined.

The federal and state departments of Fish and

Wildlife as recently as last month told Costa Mesa to stop HSS, as have biologists the city hired, the Fairview Park Steering Committee, the park administrator and over 800 members of the Fairview Park Alliance. Residents voted 70.9% in favor of Measure AA to protect Fairview Park, and California Administrative Code states that "No person shall remove, injure, deface or destroy any object of paleontological, archaeological, or historical interest or value."

In November, at an FPMP update community meeting, which no council members attended, Brooks showed 100 years of aerial photographs documenting the degradation of the watershed by HSS since the 1960s. They've cleared protected tarweed and bulldozed the watershed, changing the rain's flow into the pools, as well as trampling the pools while retrieving their gliders and tow lines. Then, a leader of HSS — who doesn't live in Costa Mesa — rose to his feet and threatened to oust

from office any member of our council who votes to oust them from the park.

The council yet again allowed HSS access until May 2025 — when the vernal pools are full and birds are nesting and migrating — and when the council will vote on whether HSS will be in the FPMP. One voice, Councilman Arlis Reynolds, a liaison to the Fairview Park Steering Committee, feels there's a great opportunity for ecotourism, and agrees the park is a unique jewel, which adds a Native American ancestral home and nature's art to the performing and fine art venues within Costa Mesa. If we're to see this vision realized, however, people must speak loudly and often at every City Council meeting.

Priscilla Rocco
Costa Mesa

H.B. council ignores residents

Ballot initiatives, also commonly known as ballot measures or referendums,



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

A WOMAN WALKS her dog on a path in the southern side of Fairview Park in Costa Mesa. A reader expresses her concerns as the city continues to weigh plans for the 200-acre site, after several years of study and analysis of the ecological resources there.

are questions placed before voters on local ballots. Citizen-initiated ballot measures give voters the opportunity to repeal an existing city ordinance or propose a change in the city governing document. In Huntington Beach that is our City Charter. The process gives people the ability

and the power to collect signatures to place those proposals directly before voters.

Through ballot initiatives, a majority of voters tell the local government what the public wants to get done. Voters in red, blue and purple states have used initiatives to get issues

on the ballot that help their communities. The process is direct democracy, an example of democracy in action.

Direct democracy is the will of the people. No matter who we are or where we're from, we all want the

See *Mailbag*, page A12



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Caroline Shaw Artistic Director
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Mark DeChiazza staging/design

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Communal feasts on the menu in Little Saigon

BY EDWIN GOEI

You've experienced the culinary bounty of Little Saigon and already know where to get the biggest bowl of pho, the crispiest banh mi, and the smokiest bun cha Hanoi. You might even know that if you see the words "dac biet" at the end of those dishes, it's going to taste "extra special." But have you heard of the term "com phan gia dinh"? It translates to "family meal," a style of cooking that echoes what Vietnamese actually eat at home.

It typically consists of a soup, a protein and a vegetable dish — nutritious, balanced and comforting spreads served with a big pot of rice. If you're lucky enough to be invited by a Vietnamese family to their house for dinner, this is likely what you'll be fed. Think of it as the mac-n-cheese, meatloaf and green bean casserole of a typical Vietnamese household.

Though you could conceivably cobble together a family-style meal at any number of restaurants in Little Saigon, there are relatively few eateries that cook the specific home-style dishes of "com phan gia dinh." As a general rule of thumb, you'll know



CANH CHUA CÁ is the most popular soup at Thanh My Restaurant in Westminster, part of a two-person set meal.

you're in one when the menu offers ca kho to (catfish steaks braised in a caramelized glaze of soy, fish sauce and dried chilies). Another tell: The list of soups includes canh chua cá (fish in a tamarind-

soured broth with taro stems and pineapples).

Yet the best feature of these "family meal" restaurants is the special set prices designed for parties of two or more, which, for the most part, will be a

better deal than ordering à la carte.

What follows are my recent experiences at three of the most popular "com phan gia dinh" restaurants in Little Saigon. Bring your family, friends, co-workers and acquaintances, because the more people you've got, the bigger the variety of dishes, the grander the feast.

THE OLD GUARD

Thanh My Restaurant
9553 Bolsa Ave., Westminster; (714) 531-9540

When TV travel host Samantha Brown visited Little Saigon for her Orange County episode of "Places to Love," she ate at Thanh My. Joining her to chat about the restaurant was politician Janet Nguyen, who, like the family that opened the venerable eatery in 1979, was a refugee.

And for the refugee community that would eventually grow around it, Thanh My is nothing less than a pioneer. It isn't just one of the first Vietnamese restaurants to open on Bolsa Street before it became Little Saigon, it is also possibly the oldest Vietnamese restaurant in Orange County.

Like tree rings in a Sequoia, the menu is evi-

dence of its 46 years in business. With over a hundred dishes, it rivals Cheesecake Factory on choices.

Most customers flip immediately to the Traditional Family Meal page where a three-course meal for two starts at \$37.95. A party of eight gets seven courses for \$145.95. The choice of dishes for each course is clearly listed with the more premium options marked with an upcharge fee. Whatever family meal package you order, there's an additional charge of \$1.50 per person for the rice. It comes in a big covered bowl that's theoretically refillable if there wasn't already more than double the amount that any group could conceivably consume in one sitting.

The most popular soup is the canh chua cá, with its sweet-and-sour broth made tangy by pineapple. On my visit, it was less a soup than an immovable wad of bean sprouts and half a pound of bone-in catfish steaks displacing the broth. Absent were the sliced taro stems that are usually a traditional component. Instead there was celery cut on the bias.

Cá kho to — the main dish that usually follows

canh chua cá at a Vietnamese dinner table — featured more catfish braised in roiling caramel. Though the sauce was glop, it was salty and sweet enough to mask the muddy flavor of the fish.

For the vegetable course, I learned that one should always opt for the bo xà lách if it's offered. This beef salad was more about the beef and less about the salad. Consisting of tender, marinated slices of seared tenderloin, it rested atop torn lettuce and sliced tomato — the highlight of my meal at Thanh My and, quite possibly, Samantha Brown's, too.

THE HIDDEN GEM

Mirada Restaurant
9102 Edinger Ave., Fountain Valley; (714) 842-7892

I'm not sure why this restaurant is called "Mirada," a Spanish word that means "look." Is it an appeal for passersby on Edinger Avenue to do just that? Tucked inside an anonymous strip mall that's recessed from the street, it is easily missed.

In fact, I have driven hundreds if not a thousand times past the place and was unaware until a friend told me about its existence.

See *Feasts*, page A9

REPORT

Continued from page A1

rector of the USC Equity Research Institute, gave a presentation on the equity profile, which is available on the O.C. Grantmakers website.

Palumbo then moderated a discussion on housing, income inequality and other key issues with UC Irvine professors Walter Nicholls, Carolina Valdivia and Dara Sorkin.

Finally, representatives from several community collaboratives, like the Orange County Economic Jus-

tice Initiative and the Orange County Black Solidarity Network, were given time to address the crowd.

Palumbo said most if not all of the collaboratives were not around five years ago, indicating how much has changed since O.C. Grantmakers conducted the first O.C. Equity Profile in 2019, in partnership with USC and with the support of the St. Joseph Fund.

"I just feel like we can be so demoralized right now with some of the challenges that seem like they're facing us," Palumbo said in an interview following the event. "We need to be reminded

that we're already doing the work and we can keep it going, and that's not going to be impacted by how you label equity. What's important is what is happening on the ground. We're working to address food insecurity, hate crimes, health disparities. It's happening, and so as long as we continue to do the work, we'll be fine."

Pastor highlighted three words that he feels are three characteristics of equity — opportunity, ownership and oneness.

"When we are short-changing kids, particularly kids of color, at our schools, we are shipwrecking our

economic future," Pastor told attendees. "When we over-incarcerate, we are tossing away talent that could be used to generate economic growth. Too often, equity gets cast just as a fairness issue rather than a prosperity issue.

"The way that our fates are intertwined has been seared in our consciousness in Los Angeles in recent weeks with the fires."

The report shows that Orange County, home to about 3.2 million people, has a diverse population, ranking 20th among the 150 largest regions in the United States in that category. Between 1980 and 2022, the county shifted from 78% white residents to 38% white, with Latinos now representing 34% of the population and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders at 22%.

Currently in Orange County, native-born Latinos outnumber immigrant Latinos by two to one.

"It's no longer really immigration that's driving the change," Pastor said. "It's the sons and daughters of those immigrants that arrived in an earlier period. More people are settling in and making their lives here."

About one in eight Orange County residents is either undocumented or living with an undocumented family member. Huntington Beach recently made news by naming itself a



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

GUESTS CHAT during a break in the 2025 Orange County Equity Report special presentation at the Cove at UC Irvine.

nonsanctuary city and suing the state over its sanctuary law. On the other side, Santa Ana declared itself a sanctuary city in 2017, and current Mayor Valerie Amezcue has affirmed her support of that.

Speaking on wealth, Pastor highlighted that Black and Latino residents in the county have lower median incomes than other racial groups. As a whole, he said about 25% of the income in the United States goes to 1% of the population, the highest that percentage has ever been.

"Incomes for those at the top have gone steadily up, and gone up higher in O.C.," Pastor said. "Incomes at the bottom have gone down, and they've gone down more in O.C. There's inequality in the nation,

and you all are experiencing it on steroids."

Housing is another key component of the report. Palumbo asked the panelists for their thoughts on the numbers, including that a majority of renters (56%) are considered rent-burdened. This means that they're spending more than 30% of their income on rent.

Nicholls, the chair of the UCI department of urban planning and public policy, said the percentage of renters in the county has increased from 38% in 2000 to about 44% today.

He noted that the state Legislature has passed 18 major pieces of legislation in recent years in order to streamline production of homes, but only one was passed benefiting renters in that time.

"In another 10 years, we expect to be a majority renter county, which is quite important," Nicholls said. "When we're thinking about housing policy ... it's important to think about how we're going to make home ownership affordable for more people, more equitable. But also, as we do move into becoming more of a renter society, how are we going to provide greater protections for those folks?"

Per the equity profile, if rent burden were eliminated, disposable income for impacted households would increase on average by \$11,000. That would equal \$3.4 billion more in disposable income county-wide.

Pastor ended his presentation by stressing that community, government and the private sector need to all work together to create a better Orange County.

"That's what can defend us from fires and a bad future," he said. "That's what can help us rebuild. The fact that we cannot see how those are threaded together, the fact that equity has become a hot buzzword rather than a common goal, that speaks poorly on us and our inability to thread that needle for a common destiny."

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Bernard Downing ("Buz") Lowe, Jr.

Long-time Balboa Island resident Buz Lowe passed away at Regents Point in Irvine on January 29. He was 92.

Buz Lowe was born in Pasadena, and grew up in San Marino, attending South Pasadena High School. He served in the Army, and earned a B.S. in engineering from Stanford University in 1958. He married Pat ("Patty") Siler, also a Stanford graduate, shortly after graduation.

He began his career at Westlectric Castings, a foundry 50% owned by the Lowe family. He started as a foundryman, and over the next 20 years, worked his way up to Vice President of Operations. In 1978, he and Pat opened a Kwik-Kopy franchise in Arcadia, which they ran until 1983. Buz and Pat raised their children in San Gabriel, where Buz was a member of the Tennis Club, SG Striders, city planning commission, Church of Our Saviour, and many other organizations.

Buz spent much of his youth enjoying the Newport Beach area; and in 1998, he and Pat retired to the house on Balboa Island which his parents purchased in 1959. Among his favorite activities was taking a morning walk with Pat around the island, meeting and chatting with Island friends.

An avid sailor since boyhood, he and Pat enjoyed sailing their Cal 2-29 to Avalon; and later, motoring their Grand Banks to Two Harbors. They were very active members of the Balboa Yacht Club. They were known for their driving adventures in the American West. They were also world travelers, visiting six of the seven continents (including Antarctica).

Buz is survived by his wife, Pat Siler Lowe; his children: Mark Lowe, Kathy Lowe Knowles, and Tom Lowe; and his grandchildren: Megan and Ryan Lowe, and Eva and Audrey Knowles.

A private family memorial will be held.

FEASTS

Continued from page A8

Mirada, as it turns out, has been open since 1995 and throughout its tenure, has specialized in family-style meals. That means you won't find pho here. Instead, there's a whirlwind of stir-fries with beef, pork, squid or shrimp. There are vibrant salads utilizing ong choy, lotus stems or papayas. There are, of course, Vietnamese mainstay soups like canh chua cá. But the restaurant also makes room for a few Thai dishes as well.

Mirada's menus — which were placed underneath the glass that covered its tables — boast nearly a hundred items in all. A sign placed near the register warns: "We are not a fast food restaurant. Your food is made fresh every order. Please be patient." And inside a dining room flanked by mirrors on either side, I saw families slurping soup, plucking food from shared plates with chopsticks and tucking into bowls of rice.

If you can resist ordering a la carte, Mirada's Combo Special offers a \$28.95 set meal of three dishes for two people that always has the following: a seafood tom yum soup, fried fish with a sweet and sour



Photos by Edwin Goei

THE TWO-PERSON meal at Mirada Restaurant in Fountain Valley, priced at \$28.95, comes with a set list of tom yum soup, fried fish, and a vegetable of the day.

dipping sauce, and a stir-fry of whatever vegetable might be in season. On my visit, it was crisp-tender green beans tossed in a flurry of garlic.

The tom yum soup — teeming with squid, shrimp and imitation crab — was so full of tang, sweetness and heat from diced Thai chili peppers that I consumed an entire bowl of rice to blot out the burn. I ate the fish, which was crisp, salty and delectable down to its skinny bones, with yet another bowl of rice.

It should be noted that Mirada does not allow for

substitutions when opting for the Combo Special, even for the four- or six-people set meals. While they do charge the nominal \$1.50 per person for rice, bowls of warm chè dessert are served at the end of the meal for everyone in your party to enjoy — which is worth more than \$1.50 if you ask me.

THE UPSTART

Hien Thanh Restaurant
9741 Bolsa Ave. Suite 108,
Westminster; (714) 421-4512

In business since 2013, Hien Thanh is technically the newest restaurant on this list, but it's just as



A TWO-PERSON MEAL at Hien Thanh Restaurant in Westminster. The white bowl on the upper right contains pork-stuffed bitter melon, a taste worth acquiring.

popular as the others. On weekends, there's routinely a wait for the chance to sit in its small rhombus-shaped room with koi fish paintings on the wall and a TV no one watches.

Hien Thanh isn't expressly a "com phan gia dinh" restaurant, however.

Pho is available, as is bun (vermicelli noodle-based dishes) and hu tieu (noodle soups with toppings). There's also a page on the menu devoted to the chef's specialties that include Vietnamese fish udon noodle with crab.

But here's the rub: While

all of these single-serving dishes come with English translations, the Family Dinner section is written only in Vietnamese. And because you must choose your own soup, protein and vegetable when you opt for the Family Dinner deal, it's here where you need those translations the most. Instead you are faced with lists of about a dozen choices for each course with only three or four pictures to help guide you.

It should also be noted that Hien Thanh is the only restaurant on this list where it's more expensive to choose the set meal option than to order the dishes a la carte for \$11.50 each. The soup with pork-stuffed bitter melon was bracing and refreshing — an acquired taste you must acquire. The caramelized catfish was nearly perfect, which, with the crunchy stir-fried water spinach, became a pairing meant for gobs of rice.

The \$37.50 price for three courses does seem to have the cost of the rice baked into it, however. But don't be surprised when the bill comes and an additional 15% is conveniently tacked on to the total for gratuity — you were going to tip 20% anyway ... right?

Edwin Goei is a contributor to TimesOC.

JEWELER

Continued from page A1

L.A.-area fires started. Ulrik Knap couldn't sleep the night before he visited what remained of their neighborhood for the first time.

The reality of the devastation wrought by the fire finally set in on him as he passed rows of empty lots where multimillion-dollar homes once sat. When he got to where his house used to be, he used a shovel and chicken wire to sift through ashes one scoop at a time. A few ceramic sculptures their teenage children had made in kindergarten had survived;

their vibrantly painted surfaces were now faded or completely bleached white after prolonged exposure to extreme heat.

A tall safe that housed some of their family's most precious heirlooms was literally the only thing left standing on their property. Flames had defeated its lock and heat-resistant plating, forcing it open and allowing ammunition stored within to discharge. Inside, amid a pile consisting of disintegrated paperwork, an exploded Rolex and ruined revolvers, Ulrik found one ring handed down to them by his grandmother, another his wife's mother had given to them on Julie's 30th birth-

day and an antique bracelet they had been planning to give to their daughter when she turned 18.

"I gasped," Julie said. "I was so excited. I just didn't think we were going to find anything in there, and I had set my mind to accept that. So it was such a moment of joy to see those. Just a little luck came our way."

The jewelry that survived the fire will go on to become reminders of their family's resilience as it gets passed down to future generations. But first, the pieces are being restored to their original luster by George Bandar, owner and sole craftsman of Master Jewelers Newport.

"I have worked on the most difficult pieces during my career, and this is one of them," Bandar said. "... if you don't have experience, forget about it. You'll ruin it."

Body oil that had collected on the jewelry after years of being worn were baked into the gold, and the delicate soldering points connecting the gems to the metal were weakened. Bandar had to surgically remove each stone and use highly corrosive chemicals to cut through the discoloration caused by flames.

So far, he has finished working on one of the two

See *Jeweler*, page A12



Courtesy of Julie and Ulrik Knap

A SCORCHED SAFE was the only thing left standing after the Palisades fire destroyed the home of Julie and Ulrik Knap.



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Band members charm fans – and each other

Santa Ana band the McCharmlys kicks off its latest tour at the Observatory on Valentine's weekend.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

The McCharmlys, a local band with a retro sound, is made up of four musicians who are all pretty big fans of each other.

"Every single person in this band has been a part of other bands that I love and admire," said lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist Angie Monroy, who started the band in 2018.

Monroy was a fan of bassist Yari Bolanos, who was playing with a band called the Mellows in Texas. Dummer Cole Maxwell was a fan of the McCharmlys before he joined the band.

"I was a fan of this band for a long time, and then I saw Angie at a show," said Maxwell. "I was, like, what could be the harm in introducing myself and saying how much I love the music?"

Guitarist Eddie Gutierrez was last to join the band in 2021.

"Angie says that when I joined the band at that time, it felt like the band really solidified," Gutierrez said.

The Santa Ana-based group borrows their name from an obscure Beatles interview in which John Lennon introduces the band as "George Parasol, Ringo Stone and Paul McCharmly."



Textli Gallegos

THE MCCHARMLYS will launch their tour with a show in Santa Ana on Feb. 16

"I guess technically, John Lennon named us," said Monroy.

They have been making a name for themselves in the local Orange County and Los Angeles music scene with a sound that blends elements of surf rock, '60s girl groups and old-fashioned rock 'n' roll. Their latest record, "You'll Be Fine," dropped on Jan. 14, released on Nu-Tone Records, a sister label to Hi-Tide Recordings.

The band celebrated with a listening party at Bar 616 in Santa Ana where their own fans got to hear the song for the first time

and watch a screening of the pulp noir-style music video.

"From the beginning there wasn't an aim to be retro-sounding," said Monroy. "The sound really developed when everybody came together. We all have our own influences and ones we all have in common."

Collectively the group references the Ramones, Roy Orbison and the Beach Boys as key influencers of their sound, but members' Mexican American heritage finds its way into the music as well.

"The stuff that I like, that

I grew up with, is really just a lot of music that my folks listened to, like rock 'n' roll from the past," said Gutierrez. "Watching 'La Bamba' as kid made a huge impact on me."

Monroy agrees.

"I was raised on banda fresca, banda limon, all these different genres and a lot of really strong women, like Lola Beltran and Ana Gabriel, women with really raspy, rock 'n' roll voices," said Monroy. "Mariachi can still be rock 'n' roll, in a way."

The McCharmlys single "Tu Seras Mi Baby," a Spanish-language take on the

Ronettes' 1963 hit "Be My Baby," currently has 355,810 listens on Spotify.

"We are Latinos, our parents are immigrants and they are the ones who showed us pretty much everything, and doing this song, specifically 'Tu Seras Mi Baby,' was inspired by Les Surfs," said Monroy.

A lesser known group than the Ronettes, Les Surfs was a pop group from Madagascar that recorded from 1964 until 1971.

"They sing in lots of different languages but they do 'Tu Seras Mi Baby' in Spanish, and us being nerds about vinyl and enjoying old music on YouTube, when we saw it we were, like, man, that is a cool one. And of course I have huge love and admiration for Ronnie Spector."

The band has recorded original music in Spanish too, which Monroy calls "challenging and beautiful" work that connects her to her community.

"Especially when you see a lot of la raza coming through in different places around the world," Monroy said. "It's special; you are never alone. Sometimes you feel alone and then you look around, and you're like 'My people are here.'"

No matter what language you speak, the McCharmlys feel they have something audiences can connect with.

"Rock 'n' roll is such an inherently American thing, and I think that we all can vibe to that," said Gutierrez.

The vibes are good and the band is enjoying a bit of buzz around their new single.

Recently the McCharmlys were featured at a 95.5 KLOS "Breakfast with the Beatles" live event at Hollywood's Hard Rock Cafe. The "Breakfast with the Beatles" segment on the popular classic rock radio station introduced Gutierrez to the band's music as a teenager.

"I would tune in to that pretty often, and to be able to play for Chris Carter and just the mere fact that we were on the radio was an honor and privilege," said Gutierrez.

This week band members pack their bags for Spain, where they will play the European music festival "Rockin' Race Jam-boree" ahead of headlining their own tour across the western United States.

The McCharmlys will kick off their tour with a show at the Observatory in Santa Ana on Feb. 16 with Ramona and Los Tranquillos before playing dates in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

They are excited about the upcoming travel plans but even more excited about getting to connect with fans.

"Music brings people together, and we have created a community around that," said Gutierrez. "It is a wonderful thing."

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COMPOSER

Continued from page A1

he has held for 35 years. He will stay connected to the symphony as music director laureate. (Alexander Shelley was named as St. Clair's successor in November.)

That relationship began when Cuong heard that his music was going to be played at USC during the coronavirus pandemic. That's when he met St. Clair, who was guest conducting a concert with the USC Thornton School of Music's wind ensemble.

"Everything was being canceled all the time, and I hadn't heard a piece of mine played in months," Cuong said. "I reached out to USC, and I was like, 'Would you allow me to come on campus, so I could hear this piece played?' ... [St. Clair] was so excited that I was there, and I got to talk to him a little bit. I think I was one of three people in the audience for that concert because it was a livestream concert."

Pacific Symphony picked

up a fifth piece from Cuong, "Marine Layer," for a world premiere during its performances this weekend.

"I think it's really hard to do anything that's truly one of a kind or never been done before," Cuong said. "There's so many composers who have tried so many things, so many chords, so many melodies, so many different orchestrations. For me, things stay exciting when I feel like I've figured something out for myself that I probably wouldn't have thought of a year ago, or even yesterday."

"Whenever I'm writing a piece, whenever I get that feeling, the piece feels like it starts to write itself when I have that excitement."

Cuong, 34, got his start in music when his mother put him in piano lessons as a young boy.

"I always joke that I took it too seriously, like I got too interested in it," said Cuong, who noted that he was encouraged to pursue fields with more stability as the son of Vietnamese immigrants.

By his senior year of high

school, classmates were playing pieces he wrote, and he was beginning to win support at home, albeit with a healthy bit of skepticism.

"I think that their apprehension made me work even harder because I always thought to myself, 'Well, they took a big leap of faith, and I want them to see that it was worth it,'" Cuong said.

Cuong attended the Peabody Conservatory, before enrolling in graduate studies at Princeton University and the Curtis Institute of Music.

"I feel grateful for all my teachers I've had," said Cuong. "There's a composer here based in Southern California named Frank Ticheli, who was the composer-in-residence for the Pacific Symphony [from 1991 to 1998]. ... I played a lot of his music when I was in high school, and he still is writing really amazing music and still has a really wonderful career as a composer."

"He has always been really kind to me, and he even guest conducted a group in Korea, a piece of



Doug Gifford

THE PACIFIC SYMPHONY, with Carl St. Clair conducting, performs Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 9 at the Renee and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa in 2023.

mine, this past summer. I think if you had told me when I was 14 that one day Frank Ticheli would be a fan of mine and conducting my music, I would have freaked out."

Cuong now splits his time between Orange County and Las Vegas,

where he is an assistant professor of music composition at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

"Students today have the same insecurities and dreams and ambitions as when I was a student," he said. "I think my role as a teacher is to use all the

knowledge that I've gained over the years, and all the lessons I've learned, and have those lessons be in service of someone other than myself. It's really rewarding in that way."

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WORD

Continued from page A6

— a meaningless statement if ever I've heard one. All words have specific meanings. That's how words work.

The bot describes the problem as "misuse" of "literally." It's not. One of the definitions of "literally" is "in effect, virtually — used in an exaggerated way to emphasize a statement or description that is not literally true or possible."

The way Merriam-Webster uses the word "literally" in this definition undermines their point, but virtually every other dictionary agrees, so the point stands. It's not wrong to say, "I literally inhaled that pizza." You can dislike it. I do.

You can lament that "literally" can't have a narrower definition that adds clarity to the sentence. I do. But you can't call it a misuse.

Bots can't reason. This one goes on about how "language evolves over time" but then talks about how this can "dilute meaning." The first part means that word meanings change, the second part suggests that they don't and that any change in meaning is a dilution.

A changed meaning isn't a wrong meaning. The word "girl" used to mean a child of either sex. When we use it today to mean a child of the female sex, we're not diluting its true nongendered meaning. We're using its new one.

And, yes, at certain points in time the evolution of the word "girl" probably caused some confusion. But if it had been too confusing, people would have stopped using it in favor of some other word or phrase that others understood.

The secondary meaning of "literally" is well established. Here's Merriam-Webster again: "The 'in effect; virtually' meaning of 'literally' is not new. It has been in regular use since the 18th century and may be found in the writings of some of the most highly regarded writers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, including Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Charlotte Bronte, and James Joyce."

One final point about the

poster's original question. When you say, "I literally inhaled that pizza," you're not using that word as a substitute for "figuratively," which means "metaphorically." Instead, you're using it to mean "in effect," "virtually" or "practically," which isn't quite the same thing.

So if you're experiencing emotions, wondering if you're normal or just have a question about language, don't accept help from a bot.

JUNE CASAGRANDE is the author of "The Joy of Syntax: A Simple Guide to All the Grammar You Know You Should Know." She can be reached at JuneTCN@aol.com.

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Treat your sweetheart to Valentine's Day dining

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

This year, Valentine's Day falls on a Friday, which means getting a dinner reservation might be extra tough. If you don't want to get your heart broken, reserve a table early at one of these Orange County restaurants offering prix fixe menus and other intimate dining experiences. You can also opt to celebrate on Saturday or Sunday with a romantic brunch or Izakaya feast.

LOREA

21080 Pacific Coast Highway, Huntington Beach; (714) 698-6130

Why limit Valentine's Day to Feb. 14? At Lorea, diners can celebrate romance the whole month with a prix fixe dinner menu and "Love Potion" cocktails available from Feb. 14 to Feb. 23. Located within the renovated Paséa Hotel & Spa, Lorea offers its regular land-to-sea-driven menu as well as a special four-course dinner menu that starts with a Kusshi oyster served with Calabrian chili mignonette and a glass of Gambino Prosecco. A salad of Pinot Noir-poached figs and arugula follows, with Dover sole in



Courtesy of Rare Society

RARE SOCIETY is known for premium meat boards that feature a selection of cuts presented on a wood lazy Susan.

lemon butter with artichokes, asparagus and Kaluga caviar for the fourth course and a chocolate heart filled with red velvet truffles and long-stemmed strawberries for dessert. The prix fixe menu is priced at \$130 for two, with each additional guest priced at \$65 and an optional wine pairing for \$22. Cocktails on the beverage menu include a large drink designed for two called "Cupid's Potion," made with Absolut Elyx vodka, creme de cassis, hibiscus, lime and ginger beer for fizz. Reservations can be made at loreaoh.com.

OSPI

234 East 17th St., Suite 100, Costa Mesa; (949) 200-9232

This Italian concept from "Top Chef" alumnus Jackson Kalb recently launched brunch service on weekends at its location at Paseo 17 in Costa Mesa. On Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. enjoy lemon ricotta pancakes and shakshuka pizza, a creative take on the Arabic breakfast dish of poached eggs in a spiced tomato sauce. There are Ospi favorites too, like spicy rigatoni alla vodka, spaghetti pomodoro with basil and parmigiano and salads and sandwiches. Also on the menu: spritzes, making Ospi the perfect place to toast to your love. Make reservations at ospi.com.



HAND-CRAFTED cocktails pair with special dishes at Verde in Costa Mesa.

Courtesy of Verde

RARE SOCIETY

226 Avenida Del Mar San Clemente, (949) 669-7273

The signature offering at this modern take on the classic steakhouse is perfect for intimate Valentine's Day dining. Chef Brad Wise selects the premium cuts that go onto the shareable steak boards. The 30- to 40-day dry-aged steaks are paired with house-made sauces, like bearnaise, horseradish and Wise's signature Santa Maria-style salsa, and served on a custom-made lazy Susan. Take your date for a spin of fresh grilled meat or a tour of the ocean with seafood towers made up of snow crab, cocktail shrimp and Rare Society Gold Oysters, a bespoke variety grown in Coos Bay, Ore., for the restaurant. The wine cellar features nearly 800 bottles, so there is sure to be a perfect pairing for each guest. Book a table at raresociety.com.

SUSHI ROKU

327 Newport Center Drive, Newport Beach; (949) 706-3622

Sushi Roku at Fashion Island specializes in what founding partner Lee Maen refers to as "new-school sushi." For Valentine's weekend the restaurant is offering a special Izakaya feast alongside the regular menu. The feast, priced at \$125 per person, starts with Brussels sprouts chips in truffle oil, followed by bites like fluke kumquat in yuzu vinaigrette, hamachi serrano in garlic and yuzu ponzu, toro carpaccio, Hanabi, Sushi Roku's signature crispy rice with spice tuna and A-5 Japanese wagyu ishiyaki. The sushi course includes nigiri of Chu-toro, sea bream, salmon and wagyu, white lotus roll and baked crab hand roll. Carnival cake is served for dessert. Other special dishes include uni blue crab with ossetra caviar and wasabi truffle soy and a surf-and-turf special of prime filet mignon and cold water lobster tail served with garlic butter, potatoes and togorashi-tossed vegetables. Reserve your table by visiting iloveidg.com or by calling the restaurant at (949) 706-3622.

TOP OF THE V

1601 S. Anaheim Blvd., Anaheim; (657) 439-3289

Take Valentine's Day to new heights at this rooftop restaurant at the Viv Hotel in Anaheim. The 12th-floor view makes this Basque-

inspired restaurant a prime place to watch Orange County sunsets and Disneyland fireworks while enjoying Spanish tapas. For Feb. 14, diners can indulge in a five-course prix fixe menu of French brie with guava and raspberry, burrata on crostini followed by a roasted baby beet salad and a choice of lobster thermidor or filet mignon wellington. The dinner ends on a sweet note of chocolate truffle with strawberry. The menu will be offered for one night only, priced at \$130 per person. As an extra treat, Top of the V is partnering with Moët + Chandon to offer Valentine's sweets from a local chocolatier to any sweethearts who order a bottle of Imperial Brut. Reserve a table at topoftheviv.com.

VERDE

2675 Irvine Ave., Suite D2, Costa Mesa; (949) 867-8011

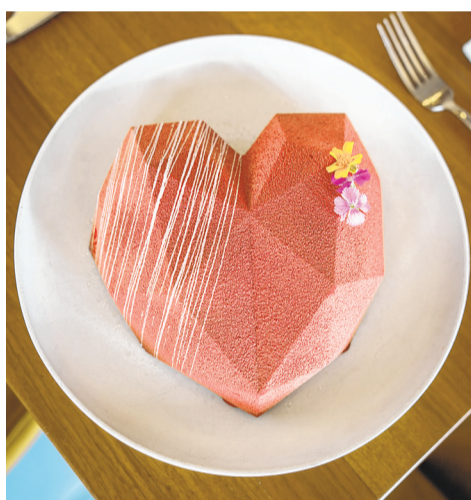
Executive chef Paula Balderrama and bar director Anthony Laborin have created a few special drinks and dishes in honor of Valentine's Day at this newly opened upper-level restaurant, where guests can enjoy shareable starters like Burrata with pickled strawberries and crispy Kafta meatballs served with hummus and green chutney and dessert like tiramisu, available from Feb. 13 to Feb. 16. At Bar Verde, the lower-level lounge, lovers can cozy up over a cheese and charcuterie plate for two, paired with a glass of wine from the curated wine list or handcrafted cocktails like the Overnight Celebrity made with strawberry-infused Campari. Make your reservations at verde.restaurantcm.com, but note Bar Verde is closed on Sundays.

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ENJOY A sunset view at Top of the V in Anaheim this Valentine's Day.



Courtesy of the Viv Hotel.



A CHOCOLATE heart at Lorea comes filled with red velvet truffles and long stemmed strawberries.

Courtesy of Lorea

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'Omnivision' art exhibit at Old O.C. Courthouse has SoCal views

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

There isn't one way to view all the beautiful scenery Southern California has to offer, but multiple points of view are gathered in one place for "Omnivision: Art Across Boundaries."

The art exhibit on display at the Old Orange County Courthouse in Santa Ana now through March 13 is hosted by OC Parks and the Southern California Plein Air Painters Assn., with more than 180 original paintings featured. Scenes of nature, cityscapes and florals in the Golden State all painted by local Orange County artists make up the diverse show.

"Orange County is home to so many talented individuals," Orange County Board of Supervisor, Vicente Sarmiento said in a statement.

Sarmiento attended a ribbon-cutting for the show on Jan. 30, ahead of its opening reception on Feb. 1. He has worked with OC Parks to bring art exhibits to the Old Orange County Courthouse in the past, like a Chicano art exhibit from the private collection of Cheech Marin last summer.

Sarmiento was accompanied by Steve Sandborg and Dawn Buckingham, presi-

dent and vice president respectively of the Southern California Plein Air Painters Assn.

Plein air, the French term for "in the open air," is the practice of painting outside, which allows an artist to capture its subject in natural light. The practice was popularized in the 1870s with the invention of tube paint. As painting materials became more portable, a proper studio became less of a requirement for painting. The work in "Omnivision" continues the tradition of plein air painting, while offering individual perspectives of quintessential scenes of California life, like Orange County beaches.

Founded in 2001 by Margaret "Maggie" Jamison as a small gathering of artists from a painting class at Irvine Valley College taught by Jeff Horn, the Southern California Plein Air Painters Assn. has since grown into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to bringing artists of all skill levels together.

"Attention aspiring artists! Are you hesitant to join our plein air painting club because you lack experience?" a statement on the Southern California Plein Air Painters Assn.'s website reads. "Fear not! Our group is all about learning and growing together."



Photos courtesy of OC Parks

"OMNIVISION: ART Across Boundaries" is on display at the Old Orange County Courthouse in Santa Ana.



THE EXHIBITION features the work of local artists inspired by life in Southern California.

Members can enjoy weekly in-person paint-outs and inspiring Zoom meetings along with other community engagement. Besides building camaraderie among local plein air artists, the association is dedicated to supporting local conservation efforts to protect O.C.'s natural landscape. Members' paintings can be found on view year round at OC Parks' Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve in the Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center.

Additionally, the association works to promote arts education, and "Omnivision" includes artwork by students from the Orange County School of Arts in

Santa Ana.

"It is wonderful to have a place in the heart of the county, at the historic Old Orange County Courthouse, to display the work of local artists where others can be inspired and introduced to a new art medium," Sarmiento said.

The artwork in the gallery is for sale, with all proceeds going directly to the artist. The exhibit is free and open to view at the Old Orange County Courthouse gallery Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. through March 13.

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JEWELER

Continued from page A9

rings the Knaps have entrusted him with, and that took about 11 hours. He said he's only charging them the cost of materials and considers the task a personal labor of love.

"I work on it like it's my own," Bandar said. "My weak point is when I hear it has sentimental value. When I hear that, I take it like it comes from my grandma to me."

The master jeweler with over 50 years of experience said the opportunity to help people in need was his "real profit." He's willing to offer his skills and a deal similar to his arrangement

with the Knaps to others with damaged valuables that survived the Palisades and Eaton fires.

"Even if other shops have turned them away and said 'no way,' come to me and I'll see what I can do," he said. "I'd say at least 98% of the time I can bring them back to life."

Bandar had been selling jewelry directly to wholesalers for about 20 years before opening his shop in Newport Beach during the pandemic. It was a risk, but the chance to get to know the people who wear his pieces on a personal level instead of only dealing with middlemen was worth it. He typically works at a bench next to a window in his shop, where curious

residents often stop by to watch and chat.

He's been commissioned to make or restore at least 3,000 pieces in the four years since starting his business in Newport Beach. He takes each one personally regardless of the monetary value of the jewelry, focused instead on the meaning it holds for his clients.

"After hearing what they had been through with the fire and everything, of course I had to do something," Bandar said.

Gestures of kindness from friends, acquaintances like Bandar and sometimes complete strangers have helped sustain the Knaps as they navigate a host of uncertain-

ties moving forward. They and many of their neighbors hope to return and rebuild the community they had grown to love.

Insurance should help the Knaps work toward that goal. But many who were either renting or dropped from their policies due to the seemingly inevitable risk of wildfire in Southern California weren't as fortunate.

"The key is, you've got to let the people who lived there decide what to do with it," Ulrik said. "It's not the bureaucrats' job to, frankly, take this tragedy to serve their political agenda."

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Courtesy of George Bandar

AN HEIRLOOM RING heavily damaged by the Palisades fire was restored by Newport Beach-based jeweler George Bandar.

MAILBAG

Continued from page A6

freedom to make decisions on important issues that impact our lives. It's an essential tool for passing people-centered policies at the local level and a critical part of building an inclusive, participatory, and thriving community. It is a process that is truly by the people and for the people.

Are the members of the Huntington Beach City Council afraid of democ-

racy? Let the voters decide how they want their public libraries managed and what books and materials should be purchased.

Cathy Ryder
Huntington Beach

As a trained volunteer who spent six months collecting petition signatures from concerned residents who want to protect the library from government overreach, I am incensed that the city of Huntington Beach, under the direction of its 7-0 MAGA City Council, distributed a survey to residents casting doubt on the legality of the petition process.

Of all the culture wars they have enacted, accusing library supporters

of being liars is one of their lowest attempts. Suggesting that their Ordinance No. 4318, which creates a parent/guardian review board, does not involve banning books, is in fact, one of their biggest lies. Their 21-member board of political appointees who have final and non-appealable authority to determine which books are purchased and kept in our library is book banning. If their hand-picked activists, with no library science background, don't like an award-winning Young Adult book because it has a sexual or LGBTQ+ reference, they have the power to remove and permanently keep that book off the shelves. That's book banning!

Our library, with its vast collection and range of programs, is the envy of non-Huntington Beach residents who don't have their own city libraries. We can't take this city institution for granted. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Central Library this year, we need to protect it from politicians and their culture war agenda. When the library initiatives are placed on the ballot for a special or general election, Huntington Beach residents must vote yes to preserve our city's crown jewel for current and future generations.

Carol Daus
Huntington Beach

The release of Jan. 6 insurrectionists is and

alarming insult to police, our U.S. Capitol, and democracy. Failing to hold violent offenders accountable emboldens others to attack law enforcement.

The mayor of Huntington Beach is a former police officer and should be ashamed to support or display a statue honoring someone who disregards the safety of your former profession. This isn't just poor judgment — it's a toxic endorsement of weakness and possible violence.

It's time to end the MAGA culture wars and stop wasting taxpayer money on frivolous lawsuits.

Focus on restoring our city's financial health. This council doesn't need to "make H.B. great again" — H.B. has been great long before you ever stepped onto this dais.

Andrew Einhorn
Huntington Beach

but it certainly wasn't history, philosophy or international relations.

I can only hope that the students of Chapman University are not as ignorant as Struppa, and that King was right about the arc of the moral universe being long but bending towards justice.

Hayden Ellis
Corona del Mar

I felt nothing but hope and pride last spring when so many brave and compassionate young people formed encampments and protested against what certainly appears to be war crimes by Israel against innocent civilians in Gaza, a good half of whom are women and children.

Chapman University President Daniele Struppa, buckling to political pressure, sent out a campus-wide email condemning Students for Justice in Palestine for receiving an award during the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Awards ceremony. The student group was later stripped of the award after pressure was exerted by the ADL.

What the hell is going on in my country? The vast majority of the demonstrators were advocating for justice for innocent Palestinians, not for anti-semitic, anti-Israeli groups like Hamas. The only documented violence during these demonstrations was by a UCLA Zionist group at the UCLA campus.

I wonder if anyone took a close look the bronze bust of Martin Luther King Jr. that stands at Chapman University? If there were no tears falling from his eyes, there should be.

Ron Terranova
Huntington Beach

President doesn't know King

Re: Pro-Palestinian student group at Chapman University stripped of MLK award, Daily Pilot & TimesOC, Feb. 2: Chapman University President Daniele Struppa displays almost unbelievable ignorance about Martin Luther King Jr. if he thinks King would not have been a leader in the Pro-Palestinian movement. Does he actually believe that King would have been a supporter of genocide and apartheid? Can he possibly be unaware of King's opposition to the Vietnam War, another anti-colonialist struggle in which the United States was on the wrong side? I don't know in what academic discipline President Struppa trained,

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