

Daily Pilot & Times OC

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Community's soul lit up on stage

Pacific Symphony and the Arts & Learning Conservatory partner to present "Symphonic Soul: A Celebration of African American Artistry" in Costa Mesa.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Debra Wondercheck is the force responsible for organizing some of Orange County's most unique art and music programming. The founder of the nonprofit Arts & Learning Conservatory spearheads culturally inclusive arts education for more than 3,800 local children each year, and she has made a tradition of bringing "Gospel Voices of OC" to Orange County for Juneteenth.

This season, the arts advocate has partnered with the Pacific Symphony to present "Symphonic Soul: A Celebration of African American Artistry," as part of the symphony's 2024-25 Specials series.

Taking place on Jan. 25 at the Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa, the dynamic performance is intended as a tribute to African American artists who have profoundly influenced American music, ahead of Black History Month.

"We've designed the performance from a historical perspective using spoken word to bring the audience in to authentically connect with and understand the paths of each musician's journey," Wondercheck said in a statement.

Blending classical music, jazz, spirituals and opera, the multimedia event will cele-



Courtesy of Pacific Symphony

See **Soul**, page A2 "SYMPHONIC SOUL: A Celebration of African American Artistry" comes to the Pacific Symphony this Saturday, Jan. 25.

Elevating digestive health in Orange County

UCI Health

Chao Digestive Health Institute



Democratic Party of O.C. elects new chair with focus on labor, housing

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Orange County Democrats on Monday selected a new leadership team to guide the party into the 2026 midterm elections, with labor attorney Florice Hoffman as its new chair.

Running unopposed, Hoffman, 66, succeeds Ada Briceño, who served as chair for the past six years before she stepped down during the Democratic Party of Orange County Central Committee meeting held in Garden Grove.

Hoffman, an Orange resident, has held various positions within the party throughout the years, most recently as secretary.

As its new chair, she is focused on key objectives ahead of the midterms.

"Our main goal is to register, recruit and elect more Democrats in Orange County," Hoffman said. "There are different strategies for different parts of the county. Although there are many of the same issues across the county, the way people and candidates handle them are different."



James Carbone

FLORICE HOFFMAN is ready to lead Orange County Democrats as the party's new local chair.

Hoffman heads the party with a strong labor background that stretches back to her family roots.

In Pennsylvania, both of Hoffman's parents organized with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The garment industry is where she met her ex-husband, who was a labor organizer with the National Union of Healthcare Workers when he died of COVID-19 during the pandemic.

Briceño, who served as co-president of Unite Here

Local 11 while being the second Latina to ever chair the party, brought an organizing approach to the party shaped by her labor movement experience.

Hoffman's own background as a labor attorney ensures that the labor movement will continue to be a key constituent for Democrats.

"Our economic message has to be strengthened," Hoffman said. "I hope that

See **Labor**, page A10

New O.C. GOP chair calls on grassroots candidates to help push against state

BY ERIC LICAS

The Orange County Republican Party's new chairman, former Newport Beach Mayor Will O'Neill, believes "good competent conservative governance" can bring voters back to the GOP who are put off by unpopular policies championed by liberal lawmakers in Sacramento.

To accomplish that, the party will need to "recruit candidates from communities who reflect the community's values," O'Neill told the Daily Pilot during an interview at the Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve Thursday. He said bringing grassroots leaders who are already advocating for their neighbors to the forefront of the O.C. GOP will be his focus as the head of the organization.

"The truth is, the face of the party is always the person knocking on a door and asking someone for a vote," said O'Neill, who was elected to his new role on Jan. 13. "... Ideal candidates at the local level are people who are already doing the work. Sometimes they're coaches in Little



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

NEW ORANGE COUNTY GOP Chairman Will O'Neill, stands at Upper Newport Bay Park on Wednesday.

League. Sometimes they're Rotarians. Sometimes they're working in the PTA."

O'Neill won what would up being the first contested race for the chairman's seat since 2011. He enters the role as Republicans trail Democrats in Orange County by about 40,800 registered voters, according to the county registrar's office.

That shift in what had traditionally been known as a Republican stronghold in deep blue California happened around 2019, af-

ter a wave of Democratic challengers won upset victories in the previous year's midterms. Since then Orange County has become a battleground, with Democrat Derek Tran's ousting of longtime Republican incumbent Michelle Steele from her seat in the House of Representatives documented as one of the most expensive campaigns in the country in 2024.

Regaining an advantage over Democrats at the polls will mean rebuilding trust

See **Calls**, page A10



G L Askwed II

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:

SAN CLEMENTE ADDRESSES WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS AFTER DEVASTATING L.A. COUNTY BLAZES PAGE A2

SUPERVISORS SHRINK O.C. HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION IN REVAMP PAGE A4

O.C. CHEFS, RESTAURANTS TEAM UP TO SERVE WILDFIRE RELIEF PAGE A9

APODACA: THE FIRES TO OUR NORTH COULD HAVE EASILY HAPPENED HERE IN ORANGE COUNTY PAGE A6



Courtesy of Bracken's Kitchen

College district taps firm to conduct audit

BY SARA CARDINE

Rancho Santiago Community College District officials have selected an accounting firm to conduct a forensic audit into an off-books account — held in the district's name by a third-party insurance vendor — that accrued \$8 million without board members' knowledge.

Trustees in a regular meeting Monday approved, in a 4-1 vote, contracting with Houston-based firm Weaver & Tidwell, LLP, by-passing the top recommendations of a selection committee for what one board member described as possible conflicts of interests involving the vendor in question, Cerritos-based risk pool operator Alliance of Schools for Cooperative Insurance Programs (ASCIP).

Phil Yarbrough, a longtime trustee who chairs the district's fiscal and audit review committee, chaired Monday's meeting in the absence of Board President Daisy Tong. Trustee Tina Arias Miller was also absent.

Yarbrough suggested the district abstain from considering the top firm recommended by the selection committee, North Dakota-based Eide Bailly LLP, which currently provides annual audit services under a three-year contract with Rancho Santiago CCD.

That firm in 2019 acquired Vavrinek, Trine, Day & Co., which had formerly served as an annual auditor for both ASCIP and for the district. In 2012-13, Vavrinek audited both entities without revealing that Rancho Santiago, at that time, had nearly \$1.3 million in an interest-bearing risk management deposit fund held by ASCIP, a public joint powers authority.

The fund comprises dividends, or rebates, amassed by public school district risk pool members during periods in which premiums paid into the pool exceed



Sara Cardine

RANCHO SANTIAGO Community College District headquarters in Santa Ana.

claims paid out by the insurer.

And while ASCIP audits include a line item indicating the entirety of the fund, no breakdown of how much of it belongs to individual districts appears to be accounted for in its audits, nor by member districts.

"Eide Bailly is compromised because they [as Vavrinek Trine, Day & Co.] did the audits for ASCIP," Yarbrough said Monday. "And so they knew this money was there, and they did our audit and didn't tell us."

Trustees Yarbrough and Zeke Hernandez recommended the district hire Weaver & Tidwell to conduct the forensic audit, but at least one board member expressed hesitation.

Trustee David Crockett inquired about the ranking system

employed by the selection committee, assembled by Rancho Santiago Chancellor Marvin Martinez. That body created a rubric to generate scores and ranked Eide Bailly first among eight bidding firms, while Weaver & Tidwell ranked fifth.

"The score was lower, so I'm confused," Crockett said during Monday's meeting. "If I'm looking at the data and the folks who are professionals and taking this seriously and going through their process, and [Weaver & Tidwell] came up toward the bottom. Why would they be better, in your view, if they had a lower score?"

Trustee John Hanna said he had no assumptions about what the forensic audit of the fund might find and wondered why none of the top three recom-

mendations of the selection committee were considered.

Yarbrough said Weaver & Tidwell had historical experience investigating school district finances in California and its staff were knowledgeable about California Education Code. He further explained that the committee's second-ranked firm, CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, could also be perceived to have conflicts.

The Minneapolis-based entity in 2017 acquired another accounting firm, Vicenti, Lloyd & Stutzman, which the Pilot learned in 2023 had previously employed individuals with connections to ASCIP and a Hawaii-based subsidiary it created in 2005 — Captive Insurance for Public Agencies (CIPA).

CIPA's board of directors com-

prises mostly retired school district administrators, two of whom, vice chancellors John Didion and Peter Hardash, served at Rancho Santiago for decades, and others with ties to Vicenti, Lloyd & Stutzman.

Many of those administrators served in positions related to the procurement of insurance but did not disclose their CIPA service in public meetings and staff reports related to that procurement, the Daily Pilot reported in September.

Representatives of Eide Bailly did not respond to requests for comment; ASCIP attorney Robert J. Feldhake, who currently serves on CIPA's board of directors, refused to comment for this story.

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ucihealth.org/ChaoDHI



G.L. Askew II

CINDERS REMAIN of homes in Altadena burned by the Eaton Fire earlier this month.

San Clemente addresses its wildfire preparedness in wake of L.A. disaster

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

San Clemente City Councilman Victor Cabral held up a long, dried-out weed plucked from a hillside during a special meeting on fire preparedness.

He snapped off a barren branch as a cautionary tale.

"These weeds that are growing out there ... they're ready to burn," Cabral said. "If these caught fire, those hillsides would be up in flames very easily."

In the wake of the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires, San Clemente called Tuesday's special meeting to assess the

threat to the beach town's hillsides, which have caught fire before.

"We think this all happened in L.A., but we're still at risk here," Cabral said. "We need to take this seriously."

San Clemente hasn't experienced significant wildfire losses since warm, dry Santa Ana winds fanned a January 1976 blaze that torched 2,400 acres and burned 15 homes.

But with stark images of widespread destruction in L.A. County, council members unanimously approved a slew of measures aimed at clearing brush before a blaze ignites.

The special meeting followed a news conference

by Laguna Beach city officials on Monday that highlighted efforts to maintain adequate water supply to hydrants, a lesson learned after the 1993 Laguna Beach fire.

San Clemente City Manager Andy Hall felt confident on that front.

"We test our hydrants on a regular basis," he said during the meeting. "We try to make sure all of our reservoirs are full."

Hall did cite an area for improvement with the need for a closer reservoir for helicopters to use as a dipping station when helping efforts to contain and extinguish wildfires.

See *Wildfire*, page A9



James Carbone

DEBORA WONDERCHECK, founder of the Arts & Learning Conservatory, at a dress rehearsal for Gospel Voices of OC, an artistic concert she produced in Orange County.

SOUL

Continued from page A1

brate renowned musicians, singers and composers from the African American community, educating the audience about its history, with an emphasis on its impact on music as a whole.

"By sharing their stories, family roots, career paths and everything in between, the audience will leave feeling inspired, as if they now know each of them personally," said Wondercheck.

The performance will also be conducted in part by Pacific Symphony music director Carl St.Clair, who worked closely with Wondercheck to curate and produce the program.

"We feel this is a concert that will resonate deeply with our community," said St.Clair, who has served as the symphony's music director for 35 years. "I am excited to collaborate with her and the many talented artists on this program."

The first half of the program will feature classical works from different artists,

including a piece from Duke Ellington's "Night Creature" and Margaret Bonds' Selections from "Montgomery Variations" while the second half will focus on spiritual and gospel with pieces like Abel Meeropol's "Strange Fruit," Eugene Rogers/Mark Foster's "Glory" and Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come."

Under the artistic direction of Dr. Lesa Terry, with music director and arranger Duane Benjamin and production manager Bruce Cecil, the concert will also include theatrical elements, like live narration from performance poet and storyteller Christina Miles, dancers, actors and I-MAG visuals to bring the stories onstage to life along with the music.

Attendees can also look forward to a performance by the Singers of Soul choir, founded by Dedrick Bonner. Bonner began his career as a solo performer but also has a rich history as a vocal coach, background vocalist and music director. His powerhouse choir is made up of talented vocalists, Amber

IF YOU GO

"Symphonic Soul: A Celebration of African Artistry" takes place Jan. 25 at the Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa. For more information and tickets, visit pacificsymphony.org.

Liekhus, Eran Scoggins, Sha'Leah Nicole, Alfred Jackson, Joslyn James, Morgan Williams, Summer Greer, Donell Foreman and Terika Jefferson.

Wondercheck is excited for the upcoming show, which she feels will honor African American artists in a deep and meaningful way.

"The timing of the performance following Martin Luther King Jr. Day and leading up to Black History Month makes the production even more special," Wondercheck said. "We look forward to sharing the stories of the muses we admire most."

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Supervisors revamp O.C. Human Relations Commission

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

The Orange County Board of Supervisors voted to overhaul a county commission tasked with tackling discrimination and issuing annual hate crime reports.

During Tuesday's board meeting, a majority of supervisors cited a need to reorganize the Orange County Human Relations Commission in downsizing it to seven members, five of whom would continue to be directly appointed by supervisors.

Chairman Don Wagner referred to the previous 11-member board as "large and unwieldy."

At the same time, supervisors increased the number of law enforcement positions on the commission to two, with a representative of the Orange County Sheriff's Department set to be seated in addition to an at-large police commissioner.

Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento opposed the overhaul on several grounds.

"We're heading down the wrong path," he said. "It's clearly a moment that we should be leaning into something like this, rather than retracting and confining it, and making it much, much more limited than it once was."

The shakeup comes on the heels of the commission quietly issuing its 2023 Orange County Hate Crime Report, which charted a 52% decrease in overall reported hate crimes from the previous report.

It was the first such decrease charted in several years, though the report urged "caution" as four local police departments submitted partial data.

Groundswell, a nonprofit previously known as Orange County Human Relations, began compiling data for the 2023 report, but supervisors elected not to renew its contract in June.

In key departures, the 2023 report relied on law enforcement data only, did not collaborate with community-based organizations and did not include hate "incident" statistics on bias-motivated conduct that wasn't otherwise prosecutable.

At Tuesday's meeting, Supervisor Katrina Foley stressed the need to revamp how future hate crime reports are compiled.

Foley aired concerns about a lack of a uniform standard on



Eric Licas

SUPERVISOR DON WAGNER addressed the commission in support of Rabbi Rick Steinberg during a meeting last year.

hate incident data, duplicate reporting and other forms of inflated data, including counting the number of attendees at a hate event each as an individual hate incident.

"If we're going to include hate incidents in a hate crimes report, which I believe we should, we need to create a methodology that is credible," she said. "That is something I would expect this the new purposed commission to be charged with developing at the outset."

The 2023 report also appeared to revise historical data, dropping the number of reported hate crimes in 2022 from 162 to 112.

A county spokesperson deferred TimesOC questions about the discrepancy to Groundswell.

Alison Edwards, chief executive of Groundswell, noted that under-reporting is always a key issue in trying to identify hate trends but stood by past reports her nonprofit helped produce.

"We were consistent year over year in working with our partners," she said. "With the help of law enforcement agencies, community organizations and our own work to cross reference and take away duplicates, past reports produced great trend data to try to see if hate activity was, broadly, on the increase or decrease in county."

The Council of American-Islamic Relations' local chapter, which partnered with Groundswell on past hate crime reports, agreed that hate incidents should be vetted before being included in the data in noting that its classification of hate incidents aligns with the California Civil Rights Department.

"CAIR-LA would not count the number of attendees at a rally as multiple hate incidents, nor should other organizations," said Amr Shabaik, CAIR-LA's legal director.

In addition to shrinking the

commission's size, supervisors also decided to cut commission meetings down from monthly to quarterly.

Other changes include a ban on statements or press releases issued by the commission.

After the Israel-Gaza war erupted, the commission released a pair of statements against anti-semitism and Islamophobia.

Pro-Palestinian activists packed commission meetings to demand two commissioners who voted against the Islamophobia statements be removed.

Jewish organizations called criticisms of Commissioner Rabbi Rick Steinberg "antisemitic" during the fray.

With the commission now downsized, the local Arab-Muslim community lost its only commissioner, Reina Obeid, who was appointed by a committee process scrapped in the overhaul.

The changes have concerned CAIR-LA.

"Those tasked with selecting commissioners must ensure that the commission is reflective of the diverse community of Orange County," said Shabaik, "especially those who have been historically marginalized, such as the significant Arab-Muslim population."

So far, bringing the commission's work in-house has fallen on the shoulders of one county staffer in the chief executive's office.

Foley acknowledged that the 2024 hate crime report for the county is already behind schedule.

"We need to create a plan [that] the commission needs to look at," she said. "If we have gaps in terms of representation, I would be open to increasing the representation, but I feel like we need to get it organized first."

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THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

- ACROSS**
1 Very fast
6 "Waterloo" band
10 Notion
14 With nobody else around
15 Lion's sound
16 Unkind
17 "I'll be there with _ on!"
18 Toward sunrise
19 Over and done
20 Morning meal
22 Lymph clusters
23 _-bitsy
24 Filled in for: 2 wds.
26 Sport from Japan
28 It moves when you wink
32 Electric guitar attachment
35 Rectangle part
37 Finished
38 Female deer
39 First Lady Roosevelt
42 Royal flush card
43 Statistics
45 Depend (on)
46 Short sleep
47 Position
49 Fishing spot
51 Gambling spots
54 Taylor Swift's _ Tour
58 Plait
61 Protestant denomination
63 Green fruit
64 Sitarist
65 Prefix meaning "five"
66 Unlock
67 Matures
68 Pavarotti, for one
69 Flexed
70 Part of a school year

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|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | |
| 14 | | | | | 15 | | | | 16 | | | | |
| 17 | | | | | 18 | | | | 19 | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | 21 | | | 22 | | | | | |
| 23 | | | | 24 | | | | 25 | | | | | |
| | | | 26 | 27 | | | | 28 | | 29 | 30 | 31 | |
| 32 | 33 | 34 | | 35 | | 36 | | | 37 | | | | |
| 38 | | | | 39 | | | 40 | | 41 | | 42 | | |
| 43 | | | 44 | | | 45 | | | | | 46 | | |
| 47 | | | | 48 | | | | 49 | | 50 | | | |
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| 58 | 59 | 60 | | | 61 | | | | 62 | | | | |
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| 66 | | | | | 67 | | | | 68 | | | | |
| 69 | | | | | 70 | | | | 71 | | | | |

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.

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 9 | 7 | 3 | | | | | |
| 1 | | 2 | 5 | 6 | | 3 | | |
| | | 2 | 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | | | 7 | | | | 6 | |
| | | 5 | | | 7 | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 9 |
| | | | | | 2 | | | |
| 6 | 3 | 5 | 2 | | | | 7 | |
| | | 6 | 8 | | 3 | | | |

For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A6.

- 71 Intelligent
DOWN
1 Synagogue leader
2 Watchful
3 Fishing rods
4 Mosaic patterns
5 Work station
6 Phone number part: 2 wds.
7 Brag
8 Moisten, as a turkey
9 Museum works
10 Was a burden
11 Deceased
12 Relaxed feeling
13 _ on a log (kids' snack)
21 Groups of
- relatives
22 Anti vote
25 Destroy
27 _ it or lose it
29 Lend
30 Ancient Peruvian
31 _-dish pizza
32 Puts in
33 Water around a castle
34 Anti-fur group: Abbr.
36 Body part with a canal
40 Kind of favoritism
41 Dark bread
44 Age-old
48 Ungentlemanly man
50 Cash in
52 Picture
53 At no time
55 Actress Lisa
56 John Jacob _
57 Kick off
58 Amorphous lump
59 Fully mature
60 End of a prayer
62 Makes a choice
64 Subway rodent
- Tribune Media Services



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forum

COLUMN | PATRICE APODACA

The fires to our north could have easily happened here in Orange County

As the Los Angeles area burned, residents of coastal Orange County watched in horror. We stayed glued to our TVs, phones and computer screens, monitoring live updates as whole communities were consumed by the unrelenting flames. Houses, churches, schools, community centers, museums and markets were destroyed by the merciless inferno that rampaged across highly populated areas.



Many of us kept in touch with friends and relatives in harm's way, and some of us even hosted evacuees who escaped through choking smoke and orange skies, not knowing when they could return home or if their neighborhoods would be spared.

Firefighters from Orange County were called up to assist. As grateful as we are for their courage and commitment to public safety, it was hard to miss the despair in the voices of agency spokespeople who warned that the multiple conflagrations were pushing the limits of what emergency services were capable of handling.

We here in Orange County understand quite well that what we were witnessing could easily



FIREFIGHTERS ARE silhouetted against an engulfed home while keeping the flames from jumping to an adjacent home during the Eaton fire on Jan. 8 in Altadena.

have been us. At some point, it probably will be us. And though many among us probably don't want to hear it or admit it, we are partly to blame for that. Yes, wildfires are natural phe-

nomena. And yes, California is particularly fire-prone. Our history has been marked by cycles of burning and renewal.

But what we are witnessing now is different. Fires have grown

larger, more frequent, more intense and difficult to control. And as bad as the current situation in Los Angeles County is—it is expected to be one of the costliest disasters in U.S. history — it is

but a forerunner of worse to come. That feeling that many of us now have, that nowhere is safe any longer, is entirely rational. Nowhere is safe.

We can no longer deny that we are the coauthors of our own habitat destruction. Our beautiful state is burning at unprecedented levels because we have altered the natural terrain, building subdivisions where native trees and vegetation once covered the landscape, just as we've poured ever larger amounts of climate-warming fossil fuels into the atmosphere. That is a fact, and we should not become distracted by the misinformation propagated by those who benefit from shifting the focus elsewhere.

Human-caused climate change is warming the planet in exactly the way that scientists — the ones that have been shamelessly attacked for sharing hard truths — predicted. The year 2024 was the hottest on record, surpassing the previous record set in 2023, and blowing past the 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming that we've been warned was a dangerous threshold.

We are now perilously close to the point of no return, after which we will be locked in an age of such extreme weather events that some areas in which people

See Apodaca, page A9

A WORD, PLEASE | JUNE CASAGRANDE

When 'each' isn't a pronoun, the rules can get tricky

OK, fellow wordy types: See if you can spot the grammar mistake I fixed when editing the following sentence.



"Our team wrote, published and promoted a series of 12 human interest stories that each honors a California veteran who has served our country proudly."

Don't see a problem? Don't feel bad. This was a tough one. In this sentence, the verb "honors" should be "honor."

If you have an advanced understanding of the word "each," this edit may seem wrong to you. But hear me out, because this isn't your typical "each."

Grammar buffs know that "each" is usually singular, which means it gets a singular verb. "Each has its issues." "Each knows the way." "Each is better than the last."

We can also see the singular nature of "each" in sentences like "to each his own." If "each" were plural, we'd get "to each their own," which is

clearly wrong. When "each" refers to a unit that contains multiple individuals — for example, a family — it may be more natural to treat "each" as plural: "A number of families will participate and each have their own priorities." This is called "notional agreement," and it's a legitimate reason to give "each" a plural verb, according to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage. Otherwise, if "each" could only be singular, we'd have to write: "A number of families will participate and each has its own priorities." That could work, too. But you can see how the rule loosens up in these situations.

But that doesn't explain why I changed "each honors" to "each honor" in our original sentence. To understand why the plural verb "honor" is correct, we have to dive deeper into the word "each."

Those of us who were taught that "each" is singular didn't get the full

story. That rule deals with only one form of "each" — the pronoun form. But "each" isn't exclusively a pronoun. It can also be an adjective or an adverb. In those cases, "each" is not the subject of the verb. Instead there's some other noun or pronoun in the sentence that governs the number of the verb.

Here's an example from Merriam's: "They each have too many possible meanings." There's no disputing the correctness of that verb conjugation. The alternative, "They each has," is clearly ridiculous. The subject of the verb is "they," which is plural, and not "each."

Another example from Merriam's: "If we and our Atlantic community partners each take our respective share." The subject here is the plural "we and our partners." So "its share" or "my share" wouldn't work. We need the plural "our share."

Merriam's says these are examples of "each" as an adjective. That's not how I

See Word, page A8

MAILBAG



James Carbone

THE THUNDERBIRDS split up doing acrobatic maneuvers at the Pacific Airshow at Huntington Beach in October.

Huntington Beach repeats history

Buckle up Huntington Beach residents because here we go again!

On the very same day the front page of the Daily Pilot contained yet another article highlighting the waste of further public funds, Huntington Beach residents learned our cosplaying elected officials are once again more focused on culture war headlines rather than simple competence in local governance.

Apparently, our City Council and city attorney are planning to do more political posturing and preening for MAGA adulation instead of taking constructive steps to improve our community. Perhaps worst of all, this time, it's a repeat! It seems like only yesterday that I was criticizing then-mayor Mike Posey and his "political hucksters" in the Daily Pilot for wasting valuable public meeting time to instead host "a pep rally for professional agitators and out-of-

town haters." Sadly, here we are again.

While I could revisit all the points that prove this action to be little more than just another cheap political stunt masquerading as public service, what's the point? Matt Szabo's article "Huntington Beach sues state of California over sanctuary law" (again) does an excellent job of pointing out the insanity, and if you want a more "tongue and cheek" take from an H.B. resident, go back to the April 5, 2018 Daily Pilot Mailbag for my previous critique of this nonsense.

Sadly, it is the same as it ever was.

Steve Shepherd Huntington Beach

Regarding Daily Pilot reporting on the recently filed Pacific Airshow lawsuit, City Atty. Michael E. Gates came so close to actually speaking the truth. Had his quote read: "The (state of California) spends

way too much taxpayer money defending frivolous lawsuits from vexatious litigants," he would have accurately described the situation surrounding the recently filed suit regarding SB 54 (Huntington Beach sues state of California over sanctuary law, Daily Pilot, Jan. 8).

Frivolous, yes, but not without purpose. Can Tony Strickland distract Senate District 39 voters from focusing on a \$4.9-million payout that swims and quacks like a corrupt gift of public funds? A public servant with integrity would demand that that payment be paused until important questions on the propriety of the settlement can be answered.

I have significant doubts about Strickland's integrity. Indeed, if Strickland and Gates had anything but contempt for the city and its residents, they would

See Mailbag, page A8

Advertisement for Cabinet Factories Outlet featuring kitchen photos, awards, and contact information (714.538.9100).

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

Crossword puzzle grid with words filled in.

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers filled in.



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Cultivating a new culinary gardening business

BY MATT SZABO

Courtney Norton relishes the idea of community.

She lives with her husband in the same Newport Beach neighborhood she grew up in. Her two teenage sons are students at Newport Harbor High School, just as their parents were.

Norton counts some of her favorite moments of the day as the time when she's gardening in her front yard. She enjoys producing edible food for meals, but it's also about talking to neighbors as they stroll past.

"I love it, because it just connects me with the community," she said. "I just am really excited to bring that energy and aspect into my community. Everyone's kind of in their houses, so I'm trying to break that a little bit."

That community spirit of collaboration has led Norton to her new business venture.

She launched Homegrown Culinary Gardens at the start of the month.

The idea is fairly simple. Norton offers a one-hour consultation where she meets with a client in their space.

But that's just the beginning. She also offers design, coaching, installation and maintenance. The services can be for those with less than a green thumb or experienced gardeners who just need a bit of guidance.

Norton, 48, previously worked as a social worker. But a trip to Tanzania with a group of Newport Beach



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

COURTNEY NORTON cuts fresh produce in her home kitchen. Norton just launched Homegrown Culinary Gardens, her new full-time business project in Newport Beach. She was inspired by a trip to Tanzania, where people grow their own food.

women last year, taken through the nonprofit Sojourn Foundation, inspired her. The group stayed on a farm while working at a local school.

Norton is returning to Tanzania next month with her older son, Charlie, through another group, Asante Sana.

"They grow all of their own food there," she said. "It's all a very sustainable society. It really lit a fire in me."

Homegrown Culinary Gardens features an inten-

sive planting method, Norton said, using companion herbs and plants for pest control rather than insecticide. The result is a little ecosystem.

It's fully organic and everything is edible, including flowers that can serve as a stylish garnish.

Norton installed a salad garden at Mercedes Meserve's Newport Beach home earlier this month, with items like herbs, mixed lettuces and kale. She brought over worms and ladybugs, and Meserve

said her family enjoyed doing a ladybug blessing of the garden that night.

"Courtney really educated me and literally gave me the tools for how to maintain my salad garden," Meserve said. "This is the person I need in my life to help me get going. Courtney has been such a little angel, a little garden fairy for me. She is a gem, and I really enjoy my salad garden."

Newport Beach resident Kathy Purdy sees herself as another happy client. She's

been gardening for the last couple of years at her home, with mixed results.

"I just reached a place where I've done it a lot myself," Purdy said. "My kids have given me books to read, and I've listened to a couple of a podcasts, but I just wasn't progressing."

Purdy, a therapist by trade, understands the supportive power that the Homegrown Culinary Gardens product can provide. Norton is showing her the need to harvest regularly, for example, so things

don't get out of hand.

"It feels really good to give me some structure around what I'm doing," Purdy said. "With Courtney's energy, it's all about seeing the space, using it really well organically."

Norton said she wants to meet clients where they're at and cater to their needs. For cocktail lovers, a cocktail garden with basil, rosemary and mint makes sense.

Clients only need the desire to connect and learn, she said, and shouldn't be afraid of failing or feel intimidated.

Norton has always shopped at farmer's markets and also uses a service called Avocado Toast and Grocery to procure some edible items from Los Angeles.

"It's kind of that farm-to-table concept, but making it really easy for people and very accessible," she said. "I do everything from little herb gardens to big installations. It's really exciting. I've just been having a really good time with it."

A byproduct of the new business is fostering that sense of community she values, one romaine lettuce or Swiss chard head at a time. In the future, Norton could see herself hosting workshops at her home.

"Everyone's so disconnected and lonely," she said. "For me, I love having big dinners, friends over and people at the table."

"For me, food and community is very tied together."

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Casa Romantica exhibit digs into the art of storytelling

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Two young children pose for a picture in front of a vibrant bat mural painted by local artist Kelly Gallaher. They smile and hold up their little bat "paws," props from a nearby basket intended to help them get in the bat spirit. The photo opportunity is part of the latest offering from Casa Romantica's exhibition programming, an interactive exhibit unlike anything the Cultural Center and Gardens in San Clemente have offered before.

"We like to have a diverse program of visual arts," said Kylie Travis, executive director of operations and programming at Casa Romantica. "We have done photography, contemporary art, mixed media, plein air, and we wanted to do something we haven't quite done yet. We haven't done something specifically



The National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature | Brian Lies

AN ILLUSTRATION of an underground map from "Wombat Said Come In," by Brian Lies.

geared toward children."

Although all of the programming at Casa Romantica is family friendly, "Brian's Magnificent Garden by Brian Lies" is meant to spark the imagination of children. On view through March 9, the show features the whimsical artwork of the award-winning chil-

dren's author and illustrator, organized by the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature in Abilene, Texas.

"We started by looking at the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature because we thought that was a great way to bring in art that kids have

seen," said Travis. "People often forget that children's books are illustrated by artists; it is art. Often children's first exposure to visual art is through storytelling."

Lies is perhaps best known for his popular bat

See **Exhibit**, page A9



Courtesy of Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens

A YOUNG ART lover in front of a bat mural by local artist Kelly Gallaher at Casa Romantica in San Clemente.

MAILBAG

Continued from page A6

have immediately disclosed the corrupt-appearing settlement. In which case, Gina Clayton-Tarvin would not have had to sue to make the settlement public. In which case, I have no doubt that we would have already had multiple judgments in court preventing this travesty.

Throughout history, carbagging interlopers have always needed the assistance of local collaborators to work their evil magic.

Galen Pickett
Huntington Beach

My business experience has taught me to evaluate financial spreadsheets and demand fiscal responsibility. I expect city officials to manage taxpayer money prudently — not waste it on irrelevant litigation. Hiding legal costs and failing to respond to public records requests is not only unethical but illegal.

Let's examine the financial irresponsibility in Huntington Beach. In 2023, an airshow settlement caused by an oil company saddled residents with millions in future costs for 40 years to cover police, fire, cleanup, environmental reports and permits. The city refused to release the settlement, forcing a local courageous citizen to seek legal action. A judge ordered the city to release the document and awarded the plaintiff \$182,000 in legal fees — another unnecessary expense due to the city's lack of transparency.

Future waste is already on the horizon. The council plans to pursue voter ID measures, despite legal experts predicting costly and futile litigation. The Orange County Grand Jury has confirmed election integrity in the county, but Huntington Beach officials seem determined to ignore facts and spend taxpayer money frivolously.

Further legal battles loom as city officials insist Huntington Beach's charter city status allows them to challenge state laws, including sanctuary city policies. These lawsuits serve more as political distractions than governance, incurring additional taxpayer-funded legal costs. Public records requests for these expenditures remain unanswered. What are they hiding?

According to Voice of O.C., for every month the city's plan is out of compliance with state housing rules, a court can charge it at least \$100,000, and if the fines are not paid that can

increase to \$600,000 per month. After a year of being out of compliance, that means the city could end up on the hook for anywhere from \$1.2 million to \$7.2 million.

This pattern of financial mismanagement and litigation overreach is a disservice to taxpayers. Huntington Beach deserves leaders focused on governance, not costly distractions.

Judy Morris
Huntington Beach

Librarians are indeed experts

In the Jan. 2 Daily Pilot article "Library issues likely to head to voters," Huntington Beach City Councilwoman Gracey Van Der Mark expressed her belief that parents and librarians with a Masters in Library and Information Sciences are equally qualified to select and reject children's materials for the Huntington Beach Public

HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

Send an email to erik.haugli@latimes.com and include your full name, hometown and phone number (for verification purposes). All letters should be kept to 350 words or less and address local issues and events. The Daily Pilot reserves the right to limit the frequency of publication and edit accepted submissions for clarity, accuracy and length.

Library. Specifically, Van Der Mark asked, "Does her piece of paper, her degree, make it OK for her to reject books?"

As a parent of two school-age children, a longtime resident and a children's librarian with almost 15 years of experience in a local public library I feel it is "in my wheelhouse" to explain how being a parent and a master's-holding librarian are two different areas of expertise. Any children's librarian worth their salt knows a parent is the "expert" on their own child and their family's values. Because each family has different values and each

child has their own tastes, information needs and comprehension levels, children's librarians are tasked with the awesome job of selecting materials to best serve their diverse communities. The constraints of budget and physical space require that they do so in a way that gets the community "bang for its buck" while ensuring no one group or viewpoint is left out.

So how do we librarians do that? Yes, a "piece of paper" called a master's is part of it. That "paper" represents two years of graduate-level study in

See **Mailbag**, page A10

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WORD

Continued from page A6

see it. To me, these sentences show "each" in its adverb form, describing not the noun or pronoun but the action. In "We and our partners each take," I see "each" as modifying the

verb "take," which would make it an adverb.

Back to our original sentence: "We wrote, published and promoted a series of 12 human interest stories that each honors a California veteran who has served our country proudly."

If "each" had been the

subject of the verb — "each honors a veteran" — then the singular verb "honors" would be correct. But that's not how the sentence is structured. Instead, the true subject of the verb is "stories," plural. The "each" isn't a pronoun, so it's not the subject of the verb. We're not saying "each

honors." We're saying "stories honor," which is why I made the edit.

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.

O.C. chefs, restaurants team up to serve

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Beginning on the afternoon of Jan. 10 and lasting late into the night, donations for Los Angeles wildfire victims poured in at Kaizen Fusion Shabu Shabu in Santa Ana. Cases of bottled water were stacked high and trash bags filled with gently used clothing were piled in the corner of the restaurant space next door.

"We haven't started construction in the new space yet, it is just a full-on empty space, so I told my friend let's put it use," said owner Lamson Nguyen of the location she recently acquired.

More than 12,000 structures had been damaged or completely destroyed since in the three days prior, when flames first blazed through the Pacific Palisades and Altadena leaving many residents displaced. In the days that followed, Orange County restaurants, chefs and other industry professionals mobilized to provide support to L.A. neighbors affected by the fires.

Nguyen's friend Maynard Manalac organized a donation drive, and Nguyen offered the space as a drop-off location. Nguyen put together a flier for Kaizen's social media outlets with a call for water, toiletries, feminine care products, pet food, flashlights, batteries and more. On that Friday and Saturday from noon until 11 p.m. people came through with donations, and the team ended up collecting enough cases of water to fill a trailer and enough food to fill four trucks.

"On Sunday we realized we had such an influx of donations, we made it a priority to deliver the perishables first," said Nguyen.



Courtesy of Bracken's Kitchen

BRACKEN'S KITCHEN in Garden Grove has partnered with World Central Kitchen to feed people affected by the fires in L.A.

Nguyen and Manalac partnered with friend Ricky Ortigoza, who provided trucks to transport the donations to Santa Anita Park's massive donation site. On Monday, they rented a U-haul truck to transport the remaining clothing and other non-perishable items to Monrovia High School's donation site.

"It has been amazing to see," said Nguyen. In Garden Grove, Bill Bracken of Bracken's Kitchen also jumped in to action when news of the fires spread, utilizing his resources to partner with World Central Kitchen.

"We were watching the news, and we are not naturally a disaster response organization, World Central Kitchen are the godfathers of it," said Bracken. "They

do it so well."

Bracken's Kitchen is a local nonprofit combating food insecurity through food rescue, a culinary training program and its food truck feeding program. World Central Kitchen is an organization founded by Spanish American chef/restaurateur José Andrés to provide food relief in disaster areas. A sous chef with Bracken's Kitchen was contacted by World Central Kitchen about the need for volunteers, and Bracken offered his services.

"On Friday [Jan. 10] at about 9:30 at night WCK called and said they need help in Sylmar where a whole bunch of seniors that needed care had been evacuated to a facility," Bracken said.

Bracken's team put out a call for volunteers via social media, but they had more volunteer applicants than they could use.

"I think we all know somebody, somewhere who is affected by this, so it has become very personal for everybody about how we can help," said Bracken. "Our heart just goes out to all of these people."

Bracken's Kitchen assembled meals like roasted chicken in Carolina-style BBQ sauce over stir-fried rice before loading up to distribute the meals wherever World Central Kitchen sent them.

While Bracken's Kitchen doesn't have experience feeding people during disaster response, Bracken said they are well versed in sharing food with people in



Courtesy of Kaizen Shabu

KAIZEN SHABU owner Lamson Nguyen stands among the donations his team collected.

a vulnerable state. The response from the Orange County restaurant industry didn't surprise him.

"There really isn't a more giving business than the hospitality business," said Bracken.

The efforts of the O.C. restaurant community continued with nearly 90 restaurants coming together to raise funds in support of the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank on Tuesday, Jan. 14, when participating restaurants donated 20% of all sales to the food bank.

General manager Jill Cook Morris and chef-owner Marco Criscuolo of Aliso Viejo restaurant Trattoria Trullo spearheaded the campaign.

"We are in the business of feeding people, and now is the time for our businesses to feed those who need it most," said Criscuolo. "These donations will enable the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank to continue their support of

600 partner agencies and ensure that those most impacted by the fire have one less thing to worry about."

Morris, who has experience in cause-based marketing, tapped two other local Orange County restaurant public relations professionals: Niyaz Pirani of Knife & Spork Public Relations and Jennifer Wales of Wales Communications, to form OC Restaurants Give, uniting their respective clients. The list of participating restaurants grew to almost 90.

"As a native Californian, I know we all live with the recognition that we could be next," said Morris. "Food is one of our most basic needs, and we want to ensure it's the last thing that any of these people need to worry about as they move forward and rebuild."

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EXHIBIT

Continued from page A8

book series, which features the nocturnal creatures playing baseball or having fun at the shore. The books "Bats at the Beach" and "Bats at the Library" are just two of the titles that convinced Travis the show was a good fit for the community.

"Brian Lies' work stood out to us because a lot of the animals he uses, especially the bats, speak to our coastal ecosystem," said Travis. "Bats are also misunderstood. They are a very important part of our ecosystem in Southern California, and this is a

great way for kids to learn about them but also befriend them, in a way."

One side of the exhibition is entirely dedicated to Lies' bat series, with art from books like "Bats in the Band" and "Little Bat at Night School." His use of light and dark stands out in illustrations from titles like "Little Bat Up All Day," with the harsh sunlight contrasting with the bat's dark dwelling and the way a thin rail of light peeks through an open blind.

Lies isn't just a master of composition but of content. In his 2019 Caldecott Honor-winning book, "The Rough Patch," a farmer fox witnesses the transformation of his garden after he

loses his loyal pet dog.

A touching tale of how love can grow anywhere, "The Rough Patch" is among the titles in the reading nook at the exhibition. Multiple books by Lies are available in a corner made cozy with throw pillows. Nearby, a table with coloring sheets invites children to imagine their own story, and a photo mural encourages play, which can be its own kind of storytelling.

"We talked with our local artist that we work with for our classes, and we wanted it to be a life-size page," said Travis. "The kids can put on a costume and almost be a character within a page of the book."

It's a storytelling couple of months for Casa Romantica, with a Story Book Sunday planned for March 2 followed by a performance on March 8 by "We Tell Stories" called "Let Them Eat Books," where the troupe will inspire a love of reading through acting out beloved tales.

Travis said she hopes kids will find a connection to art and reading through the exhibition as well as the other activities.

"Storytelling is an art form, and kids have the power to be part of that," said Travis.

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The National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature | Brian Lies

"BATS AT the Ballgame" follows the winged creatures as they play ball.

WILDFIRE

Continued from page A2

To strengthen abatement efforts, council members authorized Hall's office to accept donated chainsaws, rakes and other tools from local hardware stores. Volunteers will also be allowed to help with canyon clearing, provided they sign a waiver with the city.

Hall can also negotiate right of entry agreements with property owners for wildlife prevention efforts.

Before the special meeting, San Clemente had already looked into goat grazing strategies for its hillsides.

Laguna Beach has used such a program for nearly three decades. More recently, Anaheim turned to goats to clear brush from the eastern part of the city.

San Clemente will soon begin a pilot program that is expected to clear a 10-acre swath of hillside over three months of grazing.

"Other cities have done it," said Mayor Steve Knoblock. "It's an inexpensive, environmentally friendly project."

Towards the end of the special meeting, council members declared a wildfire prevention week with the same designation slated for this fall.

An Orange County Fire

Authority community forum on wildfire safety and preparedness is expected to be announced soon.

Knoblock stressed the need to be proactive in the face of wildfire threats but drew a distinction between the risks in L.A. and O.C.

He claimed arson was responsible for the L.A. fires and, in the case of one fire, an immigrant lacking documentation was apprehended with "five cellphones and a UN money card on him."

The cellphones and UN card claims, which were popularized on social media on apps like X, drew a quick disclaimer from Councilman Mark Enmeier.

"I would just say that before we make accusations that we know what the facts are, that we wait for reports to come out before we say something that may not be accurate, fully," he said.

An immigrant lacking legal authorization to be in the country who was arrested on a probation violation is considered a person of interest in connection with the smaller, contained Kenneth fire.

No arson arrests have been made with regard to the much larger Eaton and Palisades fires.

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APODACA

Continued from page A6

now reside will no longer be livable.

We see it happening before our eyes. In California, fire season is now year-round, and the fires are growing bigger and hotter than ever before. The conditions that led to the Los Angeles-area catastrophe — extreme dryness coupled with monstrous winds — will happen again.

We even have new terms to describe such events — firenado, gigafire and fire siege, to name a few. One fire scientist coined the word "Pyrocene," to reflect the age of fire that we are moving into.

As the realization of our circumstances finally sinks

in, the conversation is shifting as well. Many people now speak as if climate change is a foregone conclusion. Much of the talk centers around treating the symptoms rather than the cause.

But we must not ignore the danger of focusing solely on trying to adapt to a harsher world of worst-case scenarios. It's hard to talk about dollars and cents in the face of human suffering — 25 deaths confirmed as of this writing and thousands of homes reduced to ash. But it bears noting that any financial burden of converting to renewable forms of energy will be dwarfed by the costs linked to climate change, including those associated with escalating adverse health effects, property damage, crop

failures, and water-delivery and firefighting systems.

The global cost of climate change damage is estimated to be between \$1.7 trillion and \$3.1 trillion per year by 2050. So I ask the same question that's often posed when the subject is ditching fossil fuels in favor of cleaner alternatives: How will we pay for that?

Surely Californians are aware of the soaring price tag. Homeowners here are bracing for expected insurance rate hikes, even as many insurers are fleeing the state because of heightened fire risk.

As dire as the situation has become, we can still save ourselves from the most grim outcomes. Remember that we as a nation have done big things before. Now we need to

harness that same combination of urgency, pride and tenacity that won world wars and sent us to the moon.

The first and possibly most vital step is to tell our elected representatives, emphatically and repeatedly, that we demand policies that will speed our transition to renewable energy. This must be our top priority, lest we pass the ever-so-near line from "before it's too late" into a realm that's ghastly to contemplate — but which we have recently seen is all too real.

PATRICE APODACA is a former Los Angeles 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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CALLS

Continued from page A1

with Orange County's more than 3.1 million residents, O'Neill said. He believes Republicans are already accomplishing this at the local level by enacting conservative policies that focus on the needs and desires of their constituents. He pointed to the Huntington Beach and Newport Beach city councils, which are now both comprised entirely of conservative-leaning members following November's general election.

"If every day all we're do-

ing is fighting over the differences between presidential candidates, we're never going to be talking about the cleanup efforts in the Back Bay of Newport Beach, or the need for undergrounding of electricity in Laguna Beach, or the traffic congestion concerns that they have in Irvine," O'Neill said.

The newly elected GOP chairman went on to say that many are dissatisfied with liberal leadership in Sacramento. He pointed to widespread voter approval in the most recent general election for Proposition 36, a ballot initiative restoring harsher penalties for prop-

erty crimes and drug-related offenses, as well as pushback from cities in response to the state's efforts to dramatically increase zoning for housing or mandates to include ethnic studies in the curriculum of California's classrooms as evidence of a "rightward shift."

"If we agree 80% of the time it doesn't mean we're enemies 20% of the time," O'Neill said, "and in a state right now where I think most people will find themselves disagreeing with the policies coming out of Sacramento probably 80% of the time, we are at that moment where a big tent Re-

publican Party is very realistic."

Looking forward, O'Neill said he would like to put more of the party's energy into Orange County's school board races. He also highlighted Huntington Beach Councilman Tony Strickland's bid to replace newly elected County Supervisor Janet Nguyen in the state Senate, as well as a special election for the Irvine City Council Seat vacated by recently elected Mayor Larry Agran as key upcoming races for the O.C. GOP.

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James Carbone

HUNTINGTON BEACH residents hold signs during a City Council meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2023.

LABOR

Continued from page A1

we can continue to work together with labor because most people in this county don't want to be focused on culture wars issues. They want to focus on people being able to live and having their children be able to afford housing."

Hoffman's first foray into O.C. Democratic politics came in 1995 when she knocked on doors for former Rep. Loretta Sanchez's victorious congressional campaign, which signaled

that the county was on the verge of a demographic and political shift.

Thirty years later, Hoffman takes helm of a party that has realized that shift mostly to its advantage, one that largely held after a bruising 2024 election season.

Democrats now hold all but one of O.C.'s congressional seats after Rep. Dave Min and Rep. Derek Tran won election in tight races as the county's newest faces in the House of Representatives.

The party also maintains a slim majority on the Orange County Board of Su-

perisors.

Democrats did suffer setbacks in local elections, most notably in Huntington Beach where a pro-Trump slate wiped out three Democrat incumbents and bore "7-0" red Trump hats while taking the oath of office last month to flaunt total control of the city council.

Hoffman hopes that with a central committee that's as big as it has ever been and six vice chairs spread throughout the county, Democrats can make deeper inroads into purple political terrain.

As the majority party in

O.C., Democrats hold a roughly 40,000 voter registration edge over Republicans, according to O.C. Registrar of Voters data.

But O.C.'s biggest third party is no party, with 23.1% of voters registered as independents.

Hoffman believes Democrats can make gains within that demographic, especially by enlisting the help of its state legislators and young Democrats.

"I am going to have a special Youth Advisory Committee with a focus on messaging to younger voters, and both in terms of outreach and registration,"

she said. "I'm hoping to see a lot of young Democrats participate and focus on ways of bringing younger people into the party."

Hoffman said the committee will be chaired by Perry Meade and newly elected Garden Grove Councilwoman Ariana Arastegui.

In addition to upping voter registration, Hoffman believes that the Democrats' performance in key congressional races, which limited Republican control in the House to just five seats, warrants more attention on the local party, one that can help translate into

a higher fundraising profile that builds on its base of smaller contributions.

Going forward, she hopes to build on the legacy of those who once held her position.

"I'm proud to stand on the shoulders of Ada Briceño, Fran Sdao and the chairs before them," Hoffman said. "What we share in common is that we believe the values of the Democratic Party, but we all have different ways of getting there."

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MAILBAG

Continued from page A8

areas that might include statistics, budgeting, surveys, children's literature, child development, professional ethics and service to underserved populations. But that "paper" is just the foundation. A working librarian uses a wide variety of tools to tackle what we call "collection development," better known as picking books.

First off we read published book reviews on new materials offered by children's book publishers to see what's likely to be the next "hot" book but

also what new titles would fill subject gaps in the library's collection or help replace outdated nonfiction books. To do that we use tools such as library material usage statistics, overall knowledge of the library's current holdings and, most importantly, personal experience gained through day-to-day interaction with our library's children and families.

So what do you think, reader? Is a seasoned librarian selecting a broad range of materials for the entire community going to pick or reject the same materials as a parent choosing books for their

own child? Would you like other parents you do not know to be final word in what our library holds? As a Huntington Beach parent with very different views from Councilwoman Van Der Mark, I know who I would prefer to do that job.

Lindsay Klick
Huntington Beach

In defending her book advisory board, Huntington Beach Councilwoman Gracey Van Der Mark impugned the expertise of librarians by stating "Does her piece of paper, her degree, make it OK for her to reject the books? But if us parents reject one, we're

banners. That's actually pretty insulting, to say, 'Well, you don't have a library degree, so you're not worthy of reviewing a book.'"

I actually agree with her statement, just not the sarcasm.

Try replacing "library degree" with another profession. "Well, you don't have a medical degree, so you're not worthy of performing the operation." "Well, you don't have a pilot's license, so you're not worthy of flying the plane." "Well, you don't have a degree in nuclear physics, so you're not worthy of operating the nuclear reactor." Absolutely true in

each case!

Just because Van Der Mark doesn't respect librarians doesn't mean that librarians don't actually have knowledge and expertise that they use to do their job and make better decisions than a parent without a master's degree in library science.

Dave Courdy
Huntington Beach

Another idea for new mascot

Just read about a suggestion to change Fullerton High's mascot from Indians to possibly Fenders (Daily Pilot & Times

OC, Jan. 12).

Fenders is a great suggestion. Fantastic, in fact! I attended John Burroughs High School in Burbank and they switched mascots from Indians to the Bears. Pretty boring.

Please let me make another suggestion: If not the Fenders, then I would propose the Strats. No guitar player ever calls their Stratocaster by its full name, so Strats would be appropriate.

Add to the marching band a person playing electric guitar, and you're all set.

Edgar Kaskla
Garden Grove

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Los Angeles Times

TimesOC

California State Parks seasonal lifeguard Sierra Fockler discovered a 14-inch Pacific football fish around 2:30 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 13, near the lifeguard station located at Crystal Cove State Park in Orange County. It's the second such case of the fish washing ashore over the last three years. (Courtesy of California State Parks)

Good morning. It's Wednesday, Oct. 25. I'm Carol Cormaci, bringing you this week's [TimesOC newsletter](#) with a look at the latest local news and events.

Watch where you're stepping on O.C.'s famed sands, because you may encounter a rare specimen of marine life. One, in fact, that has very sharp teeth.

That's what happened on a recent afternoon to lifeguard Sierra Fockler, who found a spooky-looking black angler fish, specifically a Pacific football fish, while she was walking near the lifeguard headquarters building on Moro Beach, located within Crystal Cove State Park.