



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

DONNA CLERVI, a healthcare industry veteran, trains in non-contact boxing with client Brian Ditkin as part of a holistic way to improve the quality of life to those living with Parkinson's disease on Tuesday at OC Fit Sky Park in Irvine.

Working to knock out Parkinson's disease

Donna Clervi uses boxing and strength training to help Parkinson's disease patients as she works toward opening a Parkinson's Development Center.

BY MATT SZABO

A group of older men greeted each other in the OC Fit Sky Park gym in Irvine on Tuesday morning.

Music from a playlist by the rapper Nas blared out of the speakers. The men readied themselves as they sat on the benches, smiling as they saw another from their ranks walk through the gym doors.

After some warm-ups, their one-hour non-contact boxing class had begun.

Some of the participants are women, and some of the instructors are too, including head coach Peggy Calcagnie and Donna Clervi. They both encouraged and challenged the fighters, along with Marlon Ealy,



MARLON EALY from Rock Steady Boxing works in a boxing workout with client Cathy Walsh at OC Fit Sky Park in Irvine.

who's a retired amateur boxer.

Ealy yelled out combinations — "Double jab, straight!" — and the boxers obeyed. It built up to getting them to throw 10 punches in quick succession.

"They're all pretty astute boxers," class participant Jim Obergfell of Coto de Caza, 82, said with a smile after the class. "If one of

See **Working**, page A4

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Courtesy of Segerstrom Center for the Arts

SEGERSTROM PLANS MONTH OF COMMUNITY-ORIENTED EVENTS TO MARK LATINX HERITAGE MONTH PAGE A5

A SPELLBINDING HALLOWEEN BOUTIQUE IS WHERE YOU'LL FIND GHOULISH GOURDS AND WITCHY WARES PAGE A9

Former O.C. election official's book recalls serving in midst of unrest

BY SARA CARDINE

Jackie Wu had a deep background in politics in 2020, having worked for a California legislator, served as manager for the Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance and three years into a job with the county Registrar of Voters.

But all her training and experience could not prepare her for the chaotic events of that year — a bellwether moment not only for Orange County but for the nation and, arguably, the democratic process itself.

A graduate of UC Irvine's political science program who'd worked for former state Assemblywoman Carol Liu (D-La

See **Book**, page A5



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

FORMER ORANGE COUNTY election official Jackie Wu chronicles her experience administering the 2020 elections in her book, "On the Front Lines of Democracy: An Election Official's Story of Protecting the Vote in 2020."

Jewish groups file bias lawsuit

Santa Ana School District denies its ethnic studies steering committee met in secret and supported antisemitic coursework.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

An ethnic studies curriculum at Santa Ana Unified School District is headed for a court battle in an ongoing lawsuit that alleges courses were developed in secret and "infected" with anti-semitism.

Before a scheduled Sept. 19 hearing, the Anti-Defamation League, Brandeis Center and American Jewish Committee point to the term the "Jewish Question" appearing on an ethnic studies steering committee agenda in making their case.

Attorneys also obtained text messages that appear to show senior district officials discussing a strategy of the school board to hold votes on Jewish holidays, like Passover, to approve ethnic studies classes without protest from the Jewish community.

See **Lawsuit**, page A2



Eric Licas

NEWPORT BEACH Harbormaster Paul Blank shows of the HDEV, the first EV service vehicle in the nation, on Tuesday.

Newport's all-electric boat is a first

California's first publicly accessible electric vessel charging station is also undergoing installation in Newport Beach.

BY ERIC LICAS

Newport Beach's Harbor Department became the first public agency in the U.S. to add a boat powered entirely by electricity to its fleet of vehicles last month, unveiling the floating EV at a ceremony Tuesday.

Council members Robyn Grant and Lauren Kleinman broke bottles of champagne over the bow of the "HDEV" to celebrate both the boat and the newly opened pier near 29th Street and Lafayette Avenue where it was on display Tuesday. The all-electric vessel will be used to rescue swimmers, paddle boarders or kayakers in distress, patrol mooring

See **Boat**, page A4



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Cypress official files suit over past censures

Twice censured by fellow council members, Councilwoman Frances Marquez seeks lost wages, other damages in litigation against her colleagues.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Frances Marquez has felt like a marked woman ever since winning election to Cypress City Council.

On the morning before a recent council meeting, Marquez delved into why she filed a federal lawsuit that alleged she was censured twice in “unconstitutional retaliation” against her vocal support of district elections.

“I was impeded from doing the job that the residents of Cypress elected me to do,” she said. “It’s critical for people to know the story of my harassment. I never asked for any of this. I just wanted to help people.”

The suit, which was filed on Aug. 20, names Cypress City Manager Peter Grant and council members Bonnie Peat, Scott Minikus and Anne Mallari as defendants.

“The city has not been served with the lawsuit and it would be premature to provide any substantive response,” said Cypress Mayor Minikus in an Aug. 23 comment. “Nevertheless, the allegations appear to be without merit. Rather, they represent yet another effort by someone to blame others for their failure to follow the laws and procedures that apply to all local elected officials.”

Marquez, who has previously worked for four congressional representatives,

wore a gold House of Representatives mace pinned to her red coat jacket to remind her of where her political life has taken her, as she recalled tense times on Cypress City Council.

Less than a year into Marquez’s term, Cypress received a demand letter from Malibu attorney Kevin Shenkman that alleged the city’s at-large election system discriminated against Asian American voters in violation of the California Voting Rights Act.

Cypress City Atty. Fred Galante called Shenkman’s allegations “boilerplate” in a response letter and cited Marquez’s electoral victory as a Latina on her second run for council in 2020 as evidence that district election reform didn’t need to be adopted.

But Marquez dedicated her master’s thesis at Claremont Graduate University to the subject of district elections and quickly became a vocal supporter of the reform.

“In my thesis, I found that minority candidates had to raise three times the amount of money in comparison to a white candidate not to win, but just to compete,” she said. “I shared that with my colleagues. I told them this is about doing the right thing. This is about democracy and having all voices heard.”



Courtesy of Howard Pasamanick

FRANCES MARQUEZ stands outside her Cypress home. Twice censured, the Cypress Councilwoman is seeking lost wages among other damages in litigation alleging unlawful retaliation against her colleagues.

Cypress City Council voted 4-1 to reject Shenkman’s demand letter, with Marquez being the sole dissenting vote.

She alleged that the retaliation began soon after.

Cypress City Council called a special meeting over whether she was complying with a massive records request that even asked for bank statements.

Council members finally censured Marquez on June 27, 2022, with a resolution stating, in part, that she “interfered” with the city

manager’s selection process for hiring a new department head.

A firm representing Marquez at the time deemed the censure “meritless” as it claimed the resolution presented no supporting evidence of an actual charter violation.

Months later, on Sept. 26, council members censured Marquez again after she spoke to Cypress High School students about government and politics.

The censure framed Marquez’s talk as having

“started out about politics and running for office, but quickly changed to how nobody gets along, how everybody is out to get her, how the City is being sued due to redistricting, and how the City Council is going against what the residents want.”

It claimed that Marquez had been advised of impermissible topics by the high school only to ignore its guidance.

As Helen Le, a Cypress City Council candidate, and Troy Tanaka, a Cypress School District candidate, joined Marquez for the appearance, the resolution cited that parents and students felt the talk was less about civics and more about promoting candidates favored by Marquez.

The second censure came down with a heavy hand.

Council members instructed Marquez to issue a written apology to the Anaheim Union High School District, fined her \$100 and suspended her pay for 90 days.

Marquez refused to write an apology to the district.

“What the council did was wrong,” she said in reference to the censure. “They turned the talk into something that it wasn’t because they were upset that there were two candidates running against their candidates.”

But Marquez did pay the fine and continued to carry out her duties as a councilwoman for three months without pay.

“I worked for free for the

people of Cypress,” she said. “I love this community. After all this harassment, I think any other person would have stepped down.”

In addition to seeking lost wages, Marquez also claims that Cypress has refused to reimburse her \$3,834 in attorney fees when she hired Lee Fink to represent her during a deposition for a lawsuit over district elections.

Cypress voted 4-1 in January to settle that suit. Minikus was the sole dissenting vote and blamed Marquez for the city not prevailing in court.

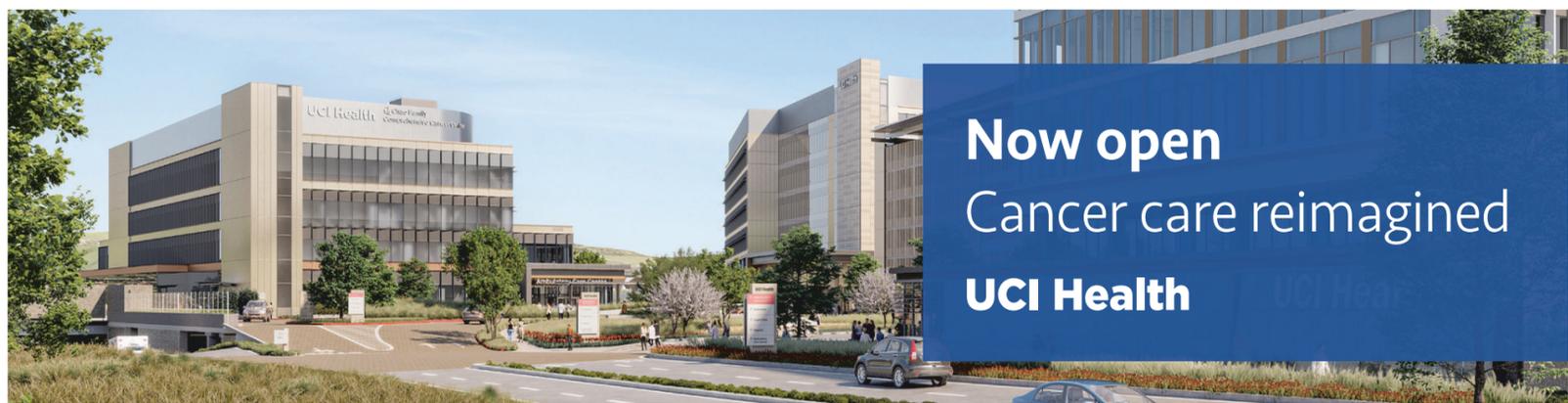
Months later, the council approved a \$835,000 settlement payment.

With newly drawn districts debuting in November, Marquez is not seeking reelection to Cypress City Council. She has her sights set on becoming the first Latina ever to serve on the Orange County Board of Supervisors in a race against State Sen. Janet Nguyen.

But before her term expires in a few months, Marquez wants to leave Cypress City Council with her name cleared.

“They need to pay for the reputational damage that they’ve done,” she said. “I leave this council in December. I want to see good governance and civility going forward. I want to see people get along and accept difference. I was never accepted.”

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LAWSUIT

Continued from page A1

“The policy-making committee that was established saw Jews as an obstacle to exclude in the process,” said James Pasch, the ADL’s senior director for national litigation. “Due to that exclusion, the end result was the creation of anti-Jewish, anti-Israel classes being implemented into the curriculum.”

Similar pitched battles framed the original attempt to draft an ethnic studies model curriculum at the state level in 2019. The draft faced criticisms, including charges of antisemitism, and was significantly revised before Gov. Gavin Newsom signed AB 101 into law, requiring the state’s students to take a semester of ethnic studies as a graduation requirement for the class of 2030.

But the state allowed school districts flexibility in developing ethnic studies curriculum.

In April 2023, the Santa Ana school board approved World Histories and World Geography ethnic studies classes that later drew protest from pro-Israel groups. Pro-Palestinian activists packed a school board meeting last year to defend the classes, one of which included lessons critical of the Israeli government in its course outline.

The lawsuit that followed claimed those lessons overstepped the bounds of legitimate criticism and unfairly demonized Israel as a uniquely evil settler colonial enterprise. It also alleged the district’s steering committee developed ethnic studies classes, including the pair approved last year, in private to avoid a replay of the fight that happened over the state’s model curriculum.

Groups took legal action after deeming a series of meetings between district officials and the Jewish Federation of Orange County as “lip service.”

“We are disappointed that the district remains unrepentant regarding its violations of state law and the deeply offensive statements made by district officials,” Pasch said. “Our evidence is based primarily on the district’s own records.”

Four years ago, Santa Ana Unified positioned itself at the vanguard of ethnic studies instruc-



JEWISH ADVOCACY groups spoke out against two ethnic studies classes at a Santa Ana Unified School District meeting in 2023. A new lawsuit alleges courses were developed in secret and are antisemitic.

tion in Orange County. The district’s teachers have taught such courses as electives for years. But on June 9, 2020, the school board voted to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement by the class of 2026, four years before the state’s own requirement.

The resolution also directed the district’s superintendent to establish a task force consisting of school board members, administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students to develop an action plan by the following month on how best to implement the new graduation requirement.

The suit alleges that the task force morphed into a steering committee dominated by board members Rigo Rodriguez and Carolyn Torres, so as to avoid a “watered-down” ethnic studies curriculum.

It further claimed that the steering committee met regularly, took meeting minutes and voted on items but violated the Brown Act by never meeting in public.

David Loy, legal director for the First Amendment Coalition, said that such bodies warrant a careful look at the open meeting law.

“If the superintendent, without involving the school board, creates a task force to advise the superintendent, that’s not necessarily covered by the Brown Act,” he opined. “If, in fact, the school board directed the superintendent to create this body to advise on curriculum, and if it, in fact, did that consistently over time, then yes, there’s a very substantial Brown Act concern there.”

The suit alleges that the steering committee became an arena for antisemitism itself with one member dismissing another as having “a colonized Jewish mind” in text messages over them raising the issue of antisemitism during a meeting. Another staffer complained about “thinly veiled antisemitism” from a committee leader.

In addition to questions about government transparency, the debate over the ethnic studies classes that emerged from the steering committee and antisemitism continue ahead of the September court date.

In referring to the World Histories and World Geography ethnic studies classes approved last

year, the suit alleges that the course outlines contain “false and damaging narratives” about Israel and Jewish people and cites the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism in support.

Earlier this year, Congress passed a bill that would have the U.S. Department of Education adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism when enforcing federal antidiscrimination laws.

Shira Klein, a Chapman University history professor, independently evaluated the district’s courses last year and didn’t find that they reflected or promoted bias or bigotry. As a scholar, she finds the IHRA definition “deeply flawed,” as a majority of its contemporary examples surround criticisms against the state of Israel.

“Hundreds of scholars of antisemitism, the Holocaust and genocide, and the Middle East took a stand against it in the well-known Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism,” she said. “Even Kenneth Stern, the main drafter of the IHRA definition, now opposes it. Antisemitism is the ha-

tried of Jews as Jews. Criticism of Israel, however harsh, is not in and of itself antisemitic.”

Books listed in course outlines have also come under sharp criticism.

Michael Mann, an emeritus professor of sociology at UCLA, has defended his book “The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing,” as it appeared as a teacher reference for World Histories.

A significant portion of his book is dedicated to the Holocaust, but the latest court filing against Santa Ana Unified criticized the scholarly work for its brief characterization of Israel as the main contemporary example of a “settler conqueror” case.

“I stand by what I wrote,” Mann said in a statement to the Los Angeles Times last year. “My book instances the Israel case as a settler conquest case, which is an accurate label used by numerous Israeli historians and social scientists — in fact I reference one of them, Oren Yiftachel.”

As students have returned to Santa Ana Unified classrooms, World Histories is currently being offered as an ethnic studies class that counts towards the graduation requirement.

But amid the acrimony, the district put the World Geography ethnic studies class on hold.

Jewish advocacy groups taking legal action are asking the court to invalidate any ethnic studies classes that were approved, in part, through the steering committee.

When initially contacted by TimesOC, a spokesperson said ongoing litigation prevented district officials from commenting.

But the following day, Santa Ana Unified issued a statement in response to the suit’s allegations that its ethnic studies classes were passed in violation of the Brown Act and are illegally biased against Israel and the Jewish community.

“The district denies these claims and will present counter arguments and facts to the court for consideration and is optimistic that the court will ultimately find in favor of the district,” the statement read.

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Courtesy of Newport Landing Sportfishing

BRADEN BOONE, left, Matthew Hartman, center, and Carter Voorhis hold up a 172-pound striped marlin caught aboard the Patriot sportfishing boat on Tuesday.

Deckhand endures in battle against 172-lb marlin

BY ANDREW TURNER

Patience and persistence have proven to be essential virtues in a variety of fields, and certainly, each has its place in the realm of sportfishing.

Carter Voorhis, an off-duty deckhand, had those qualities put to the test during a recent trip off the coast of Newport Beach.

The Patriot, a sportfishing vessel based out of Newport Landing, was on a three-quarter-day trip on Tuesday, rods trolling behind the boat, when there was a tug at one of the lines.

Voorhis, 20, sprang into action in what wound up being a 40-minute fight to

reel in the catch of the day — a 172-pound marlin.

“I’m still kind of thinking about it a lot today,” Voorhis said when reached for comment on Wednesday evening. “It was probably my most exotic favorite in a long time. ... It’s a fight, go ahead and get tired after so long, but you kind of just have to take a breath and recover when you can, keep going on it. At some point, you know that fish is going to give up and get tired just as much as you are, so it’s kind of an endurance battle with those bigger fish.”

A deckhand since he turned 18, Voorhis said he

See **Marlin**, page A10

Ocean Institute, CHOC partner to bring digital content to young patients

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

For young children receiving treatment at the Children’s Hospital of Orange County in Orange, a trip to the ocean might not be possible. So the Ocean Institute in Dana Point has decided to collaborate with CHOC Hospital to bring the ocean to them.

The community-based nonprofit organization will provide educational marine life video content to young patients and their families staying at CHOC. The project is facilitated

through Seacrest Studios, an initiative of the Ryan Seacrest Foundation.

“Our goal is to provide CHOC’s patients with a fun, educational program; helping them learn more about ocean animals and maritime history,” Ocean Institute’s education programs senior manager, Robyn Takeshita said in a statement. “We are thrilled to spark joy and curiosity for both the patients and their families during their hospital stay, and hope that it’s a welcomed distraction.”

Seacrest Studios is CHOC’s in-house multimedia broadcast center located on the second floor of the Bill Holmes Tower. The 700-square-foot studio is run by a full-time program manager with experience in broadcast journalism and television production. Seacrest Studios gives patients the chance to explore radio and television production, create content and interact with live broadcasts while they heal.

Through this collabora-

See **Content**, page A10



Courtesy of the Ocean Institute

DANA POINT’S Ocean Institute will bring digital content to young patients at CHOC hospital.

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

ACROSS

- 1 Base layer for a painting
- 6 Hoover’s agency: Abbr.
- 9 Take potshots
- 14 Bold poker bet: 2 wds.
- 15 Male sheep
- 16 Choral voice
- 17 Playground fixture
- 18 _ and abet
- 19 Foreshadow
- 20 Spread paired with jelly: 2 wds.
- 23 Included on an email: Abbr.
- 24 The P in MPH
- 25 Aristocrat’s home
- 28 Angry
- 30 Picnic pests
- 34 Lion’s sounds
- 35 West African nation
- 36 Turkish currency
- 37 Ice Bucket Challenge cause: Abbr.
- 38 Gardening tool
- 39 Atlantic food fish
- 40 Location
- 42 Gets free (of)
- 43 “Come sit a _!”
- 45 Biblical garden
- 46 One or more
- 47 Every 12 months
- 48 Floral necklace
- 50 Small salamander
- 51 Mental puzzles
- 56 Room and _
- 57 Sturdy tree
- 58 Second-guess
- 61 Stovetop
- 62 Draw upon
- 63 NBA star nicknamed “Diesel”
- 64 Furry river creature
- 65 A Kennedy

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|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 6 | 7 | 8 | | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | | | | | | | 15 | | | | 16 | | | |
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| 25 | 26 | 27 | | | | | 28 | 29 | | | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 |
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| 40 | | | 41 | | | 42 | | | | | 43 | 44 | | |
| 45 | | | | | | 46 | | | | | 47 | | | |
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| 56 | | | | | | | 57 | | | | 58 | | 59 | 60 |
| 61 | | | | | | | 62 | | | | 63 | | | |
| 64 | | | | | | | 65 | | | | 66 | | | |

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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| | 3 | | | 5 | | | | |
| | | | | 9 | 6 | | | |
| | 8 | 9 | | | | 7 | 6 | |
| | | | | | 8 | | | 7 |
| 5 | | | 2 | | 9 | | 3 | 6 |
| 8 | | | 4 | | | | | |
| | 1 | 3 | | | | 5 | 4 | |
| | | | | 9 | 4 | | | |
| | | | | 1 | | 3 | 2 | |

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

- 66 “Bye Bye Bye” band
- DOWN**
- 1 Car’s fuel
- 2 Right-angle shape
- 3 Minor mistake
- 4 Cognac cocktail
- 5 Short plays
- 6 Criminal
- 21 Formerly called
- 22 High hairstyle
- 25 Clear a chalkboard
- 26 3D shape
- 27 Have a bite of
- 28 Temperamental
- 29 Gets older
- 31 More pleasant
- 32 Online troublemaker
- 33 “Alas...”
- 35 Slender
- 41 Embiggen
- 42 Water from the sky
- 43 Attached with thread: 2 wds.
- 44 Customers
- 47 “Uh-huh!”
- 49 Downy duck
- 50 Wearing nothing
- 51 Canoe or dinghy
- 52 Tirade
- 53 Hype up
- 54 Make less complicated
- 55 Chop _
- 56 “Dude!”
- 59 Prohibit
- 60 “90 Day Fiancé” channel

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BOAT

Continued from page A1

fields and monitor public docks to make sure boaters haven't parked there longer than the three hours they're allowed, Newport Beach Harbormaster Paul Blank said.

"The Harbor Department has a fleet of work vessels and we were overdue for the replacement of one of them in particular," he said Tuesday. "So this boat made perfect sense in terms of a replacement vessel."

The new boat was manufactured by VITA and cost \$229,000, which is comparable to the price of a similarly capable gas-powered vessel, Blank said. And it qualified for a Clean Off-Road Equipment (CORE) voucher, so about half of what the city spent on it was refunded by the state.

The electric vessel has a top speed of 30 knots and can run a full 10-hour shift



Eric Licas

NEWPORT BEACH City Council members Robyn Grant and Lauren Kleinman christen the Harbor Department's new electric-powered service boat during an event held Tuesday.

without having to recharge. One advantage it has over other boats in the Harbor Department's fleet is its soft hull, which allows it get right next to another

boat and make contact with it without causing damage. That makes it easier for the service vessel to help people hook up to and detach from moorings,

Blank said.

EVs could eventually wind up replacing all of Newport Beach's service vessels, Blank said.

"Provided it proves to be

all the vessel we expect and that we were promised, then ideally, yes, a vessel like this or very similar to it would replace the other vessels in our fleet as they reach the end of their service lives," Blank said.

The idea to purchase an electric-powered watercraft first popped up about five years ago and was a by-product of another project the city has taken on: the installation of EV charging stations for boats in Newport Bay, Blank said. The manufacturer who won that bid works with a sister company that builds electric vessels, sparking conversations about their potential use by the Harbor Department.

Meanwhile, efforts to reduce emissions in the bay by promoting the use of EV watercraft are making progress. In about a week, the city hopes to break ground on California's first publicly accessible electric vessel charging stations, Blank said.

"There are two other charging stations in Northern California and they're in private marinas," he said. "One is on San Francisco Harbor in Redwood City. The other is on Lake Tahoe. So there's no way to get an electric vessel from one of those stations to the other unless you put it on a trailer."

The charging station being built in Newport Beach will be at Marina Park, and another will go up in the town of Avalon on Catalina Island, Blank said. It will be the first link in what officials hope will become a network across the state and beyond, similar to what's available for electric cars.

"It just takes somebody with the vision and wherewithal to establish the first link," Blank said. "... We're very proud that this is going to be in place, we think, by the end of the year."

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Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

DONNA CLERVI and partner Marlon Ealy from Rock Steady Boxing prepare for a non-contact boxing class for those with Parkinson's disease on Tuesday.

WORKING

Continued from page A1

these women hit me with a right, I'd be dead. I'd be dead with Marlon before he even got to me."

Obergfell, who was first diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2020, shouldn't underestimate his own toughness. He and his fellow seniors are participating in the local version of Rock Steady Boxing, a national organization designed to help those with Parkinson's through a boxing and fitness-based curriculum.

Clervi incorporates Rock Steady Boxing into the work with her nonprofit, the Donna Clervi Foundation, which she created in 2021 to help bring into existence a holistic Parkinson's Development Center in Orange County.

"The purpose of the foundation is to open a place like this," Clervi said. "It's a gym for them to come to, where we can provide them not only exercise but places for our support groups, continuing education, vocalization. We can provide a lot of the programs that they need."

Clervi said she's close to signing a lease for a building space in Mission Viejo, which she hopes Parkinson's Development Center can move into by the end of the year.

She's been strength training and boxing with Ealy for a decade and started doing Rock Steady Boxing with him shortly before the coronavirus pandemic struck.

"He had heard about it, and he asked me to look into it," Clervi said. "I was an executive in the healthcare field for years. He asked me to look into it, asked my opinion. The minute I saw it, I started to cry. I told him I wanted to be a part of it."

Isolation struck during COVID-19, so Clervi brought the gym to a park near her Dove Canyon home.

"It took us an hour and a half to set up a gym in the park for five people," she said. "I had freestanding bags, I brought weights, I brought chairs. I brought everything for them, and we grew within a year from five to 20 people. Then the gyms reopened, and Marlon and I continued to grow the business."

A weekly schedule for her Parkinson's fighters consists of two to three boxing classes, plus strength training. On Fridays, one-on-one sessions are offered, where the Parkinson's patients work

on things like balance, walking, posture and cognition.

Speech language pathologist Renee LaVelle also works with them, once a week. A study released earlier this year found that more than 90% of those with Parkinson's experience difficulties with speech, including slurring, mumbling and stuttering.

Rebecca Lassen of Mission Viejo said the classes have helped her keep up her fitness since being diagnosed with Parkinson's in June 2023. She's even pushing for Saturday classes, as she fights back against her disease.

"When I was diagnosed with Parkinson's, it was a natural thing to want to continue to exercise," said Lassen, 73. "Donna offered this safer space for all of us. It's been great, and we've connected now as friends over the same illness, so to speak. I like every aspect of it. It's so much fun."

Obergfell was one of the original handful of boxers from the park in Dove Canyon. He said he had never boxed before that summer, but four years later, he's still here.

"I'm glad I got involved," he said. "It really is good for the body, good for the soul, good for the mind. Good for a lot of things."

Clervi, a certified Parkinson's fitness coach, feels that she's created a community through her foundation, which also offers a care partners support group every other Monday.

A picnic earlier this month drew more than 75 people. A holiday fundraising brunch will come in December at the Dove Canyon Golf Club.

The foundation charges a monthly rate to participants but also offers scholarships to those who can't afford that rate.

Clervi said the men and women with Parkinson's have touched her heart.

"This is a safe, happy, enriching, encouraging environment," she said. "When you're diagnosed with something where there's no cure, you have choices. You can go home, put the covers over your head, pretend it's not happening and die. Or, you can do what these people do and say, 'I am going to make the best of the remaining days of my life, and I'm going to have fun doing it.'"

For more information about the Donna Clervi Foundation, email info@thedonnaclervi.org.

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CLIENT MIKE FULMIS shares a laugh with speech pathologist Renee Lavelle, left, during a boxing work-out at OC Fit Sky Park location in Irvine on Tuesday.



Courtesy of Segerstrom Center for the Arts

GRAMMY-WINNING Mexican American singer Lila Downs returns to Segerstrom Oct. 13 for a Día de los Muertos concert.

Segerstrom plans events for LatinX Heritage Month

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

National Hispanic Heritage Month will soon be upon us, and Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa is preparing a fiesta. The annual national celebration of the influence and contributions of Latino Americans takes place Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, and the center has a series of programming for what it calls LatinX Heritage Month to mark the occasion.

The series will kick off on Saturday Sept. 14 with a family-friendly fest from 1 to 4 p.m. at the outdoor Julianne and George Arguros Plaza, featuring live music, dance and vendors. Local band Betty's Mustache will headline the event, playing distinct music that fuses hip-hop and Cumbia.

Betty's Mustache was formed by cousins Martin and John as a tribute to their twin parents, John's mom and Martin's dad, who performed as a folklorico dance duo. Both passed away in 2007, and the cousins started the band the next year as a way to honor them and their musical legacy. The group is known for infectious and danceable songs like "Cuantas Veces" and "Sangre."

Also at the event, Santa Ana-based DJ AllieRockk will spin early 2000s R&B and Spanish pop, and a special dance performance by Diablada Espectacular Zulemar de Bolivia, a Bolivian dance group, is scheduled.

Attendees will have multiple ways to participate in the fun. Food trucks, lawn games and a photo booth will be on hand along with a DIY screen-printing cart and crafts for the kids. Segerstrom will host raffles and giveaways, and the Orange County Public Library Mobile Library will pull up for the event with books and magazines to check out and other services like library card applications.

Admission to the LatinX Heritage Month Kickoff is free with a downloadable Plaza Pass that allows access to other community programming at the Julianne and George Arguros Plaza year round.

For National Dance Day on Sept. 21, the center will present different Latino dance styles with a bilingual emcee from 1 to 5 p.m. All ages and levels of dance ability are invited to take part in this event, which is presented in partnership with American Dance Movement, an organization dedicated to building healthy communities through dance.

This year's event will begin with a warmup from Studio D: Arts School for All Abilities followed by a Queerchata bachata workshop with Spanish-friendly, trans nonbinary artist and Latin dance instructor Bex. Other highlights include a performance by students from the American Ballet Theatre Gillespie School and a ballet folklorico performance by Alianza Translatinx, the first transgender and gender nonconforming dance organization of its kind in Orange County.

The center's LatinX Heritage Month will close out with a Día de Muertos performance from Grammy-award winning singer songwriter Lila Downs at 7 p.m. on Oct. 13 in Segerstrom Hall. The Mexican American artist uses her songs as a platform for storytelling and activism.

"At one point, I decided to compose and sing songs that narrated important causes to me, about women, about indigenous women, about being a woman, of course, and violence against women, which is something that is taboo and was not easy, and still isn't, to sing about," Downs told Time-SOC in 2023.

Growing up, Downs

See *Heritage*, page A10



Dr. David I. Lee is a nationally recognized fellowship-trained urologist who specializes in prostate cancer surgery.



Courtesy of Segerstrom Center for the Arts

SEGERSTROM CENTER for the Arts will celebrate LatinX Heritage Month with some diverse performances.



Photos courtesy of Jackie Wu

JACKIE WU, a former community outreach manager with the Orange County Registrar of Voters, sits in front of a ballot drop box during a filming break in 2020.

BOOK

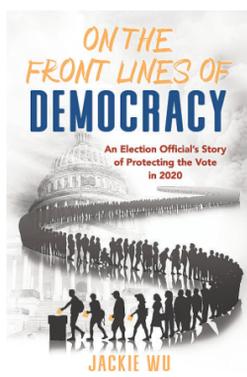
Continued from page A1

Cañada Flintridge), Wu was working under then-Orange County Registrar Neal Kelley as a community outreach manager responsible for developing and executing a voter outreach plan for the nation's fifth largest voting jurisdiction while also overseeing the agency's communications and materials translations.

"If Orange County was its own state, it would be the 35th largest state — so bigger than 15 other states, essentially," Wu, 34, said in an interview Wednesday. "So, we're operating [the equivalent of] many states' elections here, in one county."

Despite the enormity of the jurisdiction, which comprises more than 1.8 million voters, Kelley and his team conducted primary and general elections with remarkable efficiency, often certifying results well ahead of a 30-day deadline.

But 2020 was not a typical year, nor was it a typical



"ON THE Front Lines of Democracy" was released Aug. 12.

election cycle, as election officials contended with statewide changes to the voting process, a global COVID-19 pandemic, evacuations from the Silverado wildfire and unprecedented organized acts of hostility and intimidation culminating in a bomb scare and other threats of violence.

Wu's recounting of that troubled time — and the

role election officials and workers played in administering elections in Orange County as it became a locus of political unrest — is chronicled in her new book, "On the Front Lines of Democracy: One Election Official's Story of Protecting the Vote in 2020."

Released Aug. 12, the book follows Wu's experiences administering the county's presidential election and its tumultuous aftermath, as conspiracy theorists across the nation decried the election results and the integrity of the officials who oversaw the process.

Among the many notable figures who endorsed "On the Front Lines of Democracy" is Kelley himself, who retired from the agency in March 2022 and now serves as the chair emeritus for the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections, a cross-partisan voter and election worker advocacy group.

Kelley recalled in an email the unique challenges posed during the 2020 primary and general elections,

acknowledging most people still are not aware of the real people who work behind the scenes of an election.

"So much goes on to ensure elections are conducted transparently, securely, accessibly, and with integrity," Kelley wrote. "However, many Americans don't know what happens behind the scenes of running an election."

Written as a chronology, "On the Front Lines of Democracy" leads up to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, which Wu recalls now as a pivotal moment, not only in her career but in her personal life.

Coming back from a winter holiday break, Kelley's team was about to go into a debriefing of the November election and begin preparing for the 2021 recall election against Gov. Gavin Newsom when news of the assault on the Capitol broke.

"For me the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection felt like an epiphany," Wu said, re-

See *Book*, page A10

forum

MAILBAG

A COUPLE walks along the jetty at the mouth of the Newport Harbor. A reader writes in praise of the Orange County Board of Supervisors consideration of a Climate Action Plan.



File Photo

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Orange County Climate Action Plan has promise

The Orange County Board of Supervisors is to be lauded for taking on the overdue task of making changes to minimize climate change by developing an Orange County Climate Action Plan. In particular Supervisor Katrina Foley deserves major credit for making this task one of her top priorities. The draft plan may not be perfect, but it goes a long way in moving Orange County in the right direction. The proof will be, after it is adopted, will we see major changes as a result of the plan.

Larry Kramer
San Juan Capistrano

ment experience, Lisa Lane Barnes, to be their designated hitter. Despite her alleged "business" credentials, Barnes' qualifications seem purely political. This is why she has quickly received endorsements (and no doubt big money contributions) from not only the previously mentioned partisan special interests but the right-wing City Council majority members and their appointed minions. It was no accident that her sole civic connection has been her appointment to the city's Community and Library Services Commission in 2022 by Councilman Tony Strickland despite no background for that position, either.

This contrasts with her opponent, Regina Blankenhorn, who has a long and distinguished career of municipal government service and is well-qualified to represent our city in this position. All the opposition can do is try and tear her down and discredit her accomplishments from another city. They should be ashamed! Who would our outgoing city clerk rather see take her place? Go ahead, ask her!

Pushing a political puppet into an elected position is further evidence of the council majority serving themselves and not the citizenry. Robin Estanislau has reliably represented the community and not the powers that be during her entire length of service. Under her, the city clerk's office has been fair, honest and competent. It would be a disgrace to lose this important office to the vagaries and vicissitudes of partisan politics.

Tim Geddes
Huntington Beach

The question is who do you want as a city clerk?

Google Lisa Lane Barnes and Regina Blakenhorn. Barnes comes up as a real estate agent and as a library commissioner appointed by Tony Strickland. Regina Blakenhorn comes up as a senior executive coordinator for the city of Tustin. I don't know how much experience one gets from being a real estate agent and an appointed library commissioner who did absolutely nothing when our Huntington Beach Library was under threat of being privatized. Compared that to someone who has actual experience working with city management and protocols. No wonder Barnes and company hired an attorney to challenge Blankenhorn's ballot designation. Barnes knows that besides being endorsed by the MAGA council members and city attorney, she has no background or real qualifications to be a city clerk well versed in city policies and procedures, and of course, being neutral when it comes to city politics.

Barbara Richardson
Huntington Beach

It's common sense! Huntington Beach has a choice in the election of city clerk. We can vote for Regina Blankenhorn, a longtime Huntington Beach resident successfully employed for 11 years by Tustin in a similar position who will be ready on day one to serve. Or we can vote for Lisa Barnes, a local Realtor with no municipal government experience. Barnes was appointed to the Huntington Beach Library Commission last year with the sole purpose of destroying our public libraries through book banning, privatization and culling of professional librarians. While it is not common that election choices are so clear, it is common sense to vigorously support the best qualified candidate for our city's future.

Nora Pedersen
Huntington Beach

Low voter turnout puts H.B. at risk

If you want a continuation of intolerance, hatred and MAGA-style conservatism, you have three Huntington Beach City Council candidates who will give you a full house of deuces and jokers: Chad Williams, Butch Twining and Don Kennedy. Unfortunately those choices will assure the joke is on us, namely in the expectation of four solid years of good government, integrity, responsible spending, and inclusion — all qualities we could easily sacrifice as well on the national scene this November. The selection seems to hinge on the num-

HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

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

ber of people who follow governing decisions and cast votes accordingly. A good example is our lack of awareness regarding Huntington Beach's effort to replace "Surf City, USA" with "The Soul of SoCal." Most of us also lack awareness that in 2016 we spent \$65,000 for a Texas-based advertising agency to provide it. Turns out a poll of H.B. residents revealed over 90% hate the new slogan. The abysmal voter turnout in H.B. last June gives cause to expect poorly vetted choices in the next election as well.

Jim Hoover
Huntington Beach

Support for former president is a turnoff

According to the Aug. 29 Daily Pilot article "7 make bids in Costa Mesa election," Adam C. Ereth and Mike Buley are the two candidates running for the Costa Mesa District 1 council seat.

I live in District 1 and have a real interest in this election because the previous councilman was not a very good representative. In contrast, I am confident that Ereth will be a much better councilman.

The Daily Pilot article did a good job of describing the background of each candidate, particularly Ereth's experience and involvement in Costa Mesa's city governing functions.

However, the article did not describe Buley's most concerning trait. Even though City Council positions are nonpartisan, Buley confirmed to me by email that he supports Donald Trump. To me this is a statement that he doesn't care about truth, morality or legality. We don't need this on the Costa Mesa City Council.

As a result, I will be voting for Adam Ereth for Costa Mesa's District 1 Councilman, and I hope all District 1 voters will do the same.

Charles Mooney
Costa Mesa

H.B.'s city clerk race is easy choice

While Matt Szabo's insightful article ("Heated contest for city clerk in H.B.," Daily Pilot, Aug. 24) hints at this, the struggle for another elected position in Surf City's local government goes much deeper. Ever since our outstanding city clerk, Robin Estanislau, announced her retirement earlier in the year, partisan special interests have been eyeing this office to further control our city.

First, it was partisan City Atty. Michael Gates, who was prepared to foist his wife, Kelly, on our local government despite her lack of municipal government experience. When that didn't work out, those partisan special interests (especially the Republican Party of Orange County) have now settled on another "pro-business" candidate without municipal govern-

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Marguerite Stemler

September 12, 1930 - August 19, 2024

Marguerite Stemler, fondly known as Peggy, passed away on August 19, 2024, just days before her 94th birthday. Throughout her entire life, Peggy remained deeply devoted to God and her Catholic faith.

Peggy was born in Detroit, Michigan on September 12, 1930. She was her high school's valedictorian and went on to graduate from Western Michigan College. Peggy became an educator and taught grade school in the Detroit area for years.

In 1952, Peggy met the love of her life, Joseph Stemler, and the two married in 1954. Joe and Peggy had three sons and were married for 66 years, until Joe passed away in 2020.

Peggy and her family lived in Detroit, Rochester, New York and since 1978, Newport Beach. Peggy was actively involved with her boys' lives and activities, including sailing, skiing, all sports and scouting. Peggy was also involved in numerous philanthropic activities throughout her life, including Strong Memorial Hospital, Children's Hospital of Orange County, UCI Medical Center and several Catholic Churches in California and Nevada. She was instrumental in establishing a USC scholarship in the family's name.

Peggy loved to travel and spending time in the California mountains at the family home in Big Bear Lake. Peggy enjoyed reading, swimming, boating and needlepoint. She was also an avid golfer and a founding member of the "Niners" group at Big Canyon Country Club.

Peggy is survived by her three sons, Paul, Jim and Bob, their wives, Polly, Kathleen and Janet, her seven grandchildren, Phil, Peter, Kelly, Katie, Pierce, Lian and Reed, her six great grandchildren, Wyatt, Weston, Kylee, Weston, Olivia and Henry, and her brother, Dwight.

A funeral mass will be held at St. John Vianney Chapel on Balboa Island.

Shop maps out Southeast Asian flavors

Kei Coffee House takes inspiration from a blend of Asian cultures for a new kind of shop.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Restaurateur and executive chef Viet Nguyen has opened many successful dining concepts in Orange County.

As the chief executive officer of hospitality group Kei Concepts, based in Little Saigon, Nguyen is the founder of Súp Noodle Bar, Nép Cafe and Vox Kitchen. When the group decided to add a coffee shop to its portfolio, Nguyen said he wanted to make sure the concept was different.

"There really are a lot of good Vietnamese coffee shops around here already," said Nguyen. "We are all about adding value to the community."

Besides many Vietnamese-owned businesses and coffee shops in Westminster, Nguyen said he also noticed Japanese bakeries and Taiwanese boba shops. The blending of cultures reminded him of his home in Vietnam where the culture is so rich because of the country's port infrastructure.

Nguyen took inspiration from the blending of cultures in Orange County and abroad for Kei Coffee House.

"I didn't want to just do a Vietnamese coffee shop but a coffee shop that is influenced by the whole region of Southeast Asia," said Nguyen.

Kei Coffee House opened in late July on at 15691 Brookhurst St. in Westminster with limited hours. On a recent Friday morning a line was gathered outside the shop where umbrellas and a water station were set up for those waiting in the heat. Inside the 4,000-square-foot space, guests circled for a table, and



THE MENU at Kei Coffee House takes influences from Korean, Vietnamese and Filipino cuisine.

groups of friends chatted over drinks and pastries.

The coffee is brewed using Arabica and Robusta beans, but the menu isn't limited to espressos, cappuccinos, lattes and cold brew. There are also teas, blend drinks and milk teas that use flavors like coconut, pandan, Thai banana and sweet potato. A Quattro milk latte, for instance, using whole dairy milk, oat milk, cashew milk and condensed milk is inspired by a popular Indonesian beverage.

"Our ice blended triple coconut coffee comes from Thailand," said Nguyen. "When we went to Bangkok we saw that they blend coconut water, coconut meat, coco cream and condensed milk in to a



Sarah Mosqueda

KEI COFFEE HOUSE is now open in Westminster, showcasing Southeast Asian flavors.

Courtesy of Kei Concepts

slush, and it is so good. I couldn't find anything like that here."

A sweet corn latte, orange Thai tea and an espresso tonic made with

house-made honeydew-melon syrup are among the unique offerings too.

Pastries are baked in house daily. Speed racks of hot and fresh croissants

and cookies wheel out of the kitchen constantly. Round and flaky pâté chauds, a Vietnamese savory meat pastry pie filled with beef, are avail-

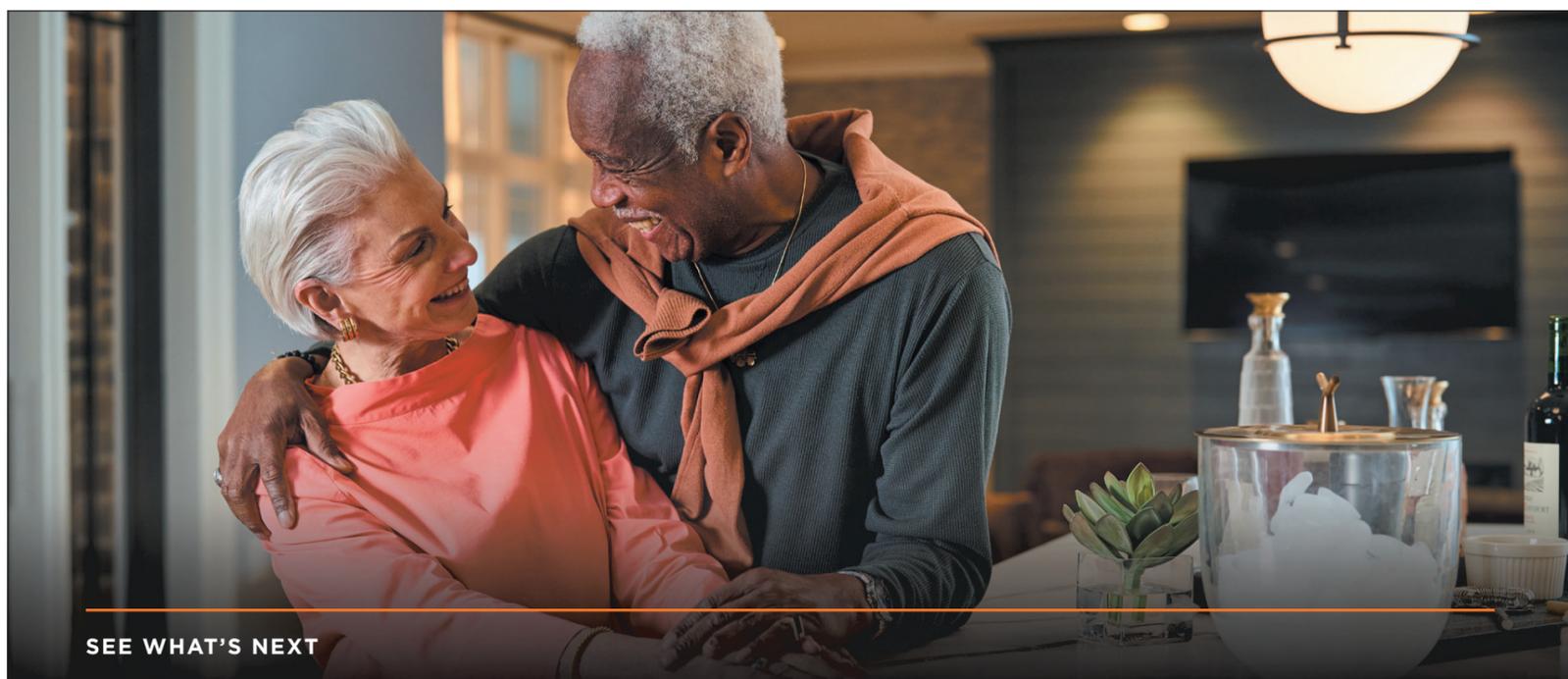
able along with Señorita bread, an oblong Filipino bread roll that is usually buttery and also known as Spanish bread or pan de kasta. Kei Coffee House bakes a cream cheese-filled variety and also a more traditional milk-and-butter flavored version. The Korean-inspired corn cheese cookie is a favorite — both savory and sweet with a crispy edge and chewy center.

A tight selection of more substantial bites includes a five-spice popcorn chicken served with an yuzu mayo and sweet bolognese spaghetti, a Filipino standard. Adapted from the Italian version by resourceful Filipinos looking to recreate dishes American troops stationed on the islands missed from home, the dish is traditionally made using banana ketchup and sliced hot dog or longganisa. The hallmarks of sweet sauce, sliced hot dog and shredded cheddar cheese are incorporated into the version at Kei Coffee House.

Nguyen hopes people will use Kei Coffee House as a place to gather with friends as well as a place to experience unfamiliar but delicious new tastes. He said he isn't looking to take away from Westminster's existing coffee shops, which he thinks are a vital part of the Southeast Asian community.

"I still go to some Vietnamese coffee shops. I go to Da Vien all the time, I go to Seven Leaves all the time. We can't take away from them; that is their lane," said Nguyen. "What I am trying to do is say, 'If you like Vietnamese stuff, have you tried Filipino stuff? Have you tried Indonesian stuff, have you tried Malaysian stuff?' They are very interesting too, and here it is."

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Noodles, soul food and more

Georgia's, Le Shrimp Ramen and other popular eateries are looking to expand into Irvine Spectrum Center in coming months.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

The Irvine Spectrum Center is already home to popular Orange County dining destinations like Javier's Cantina & Grill, and it's an outpost for some fast-casual brands like Sweetgreens and Shake Shack's first ventures into the O.C. market. Now the outdoor dining, retail and entertainment center is expected to get even more fresh new flavors in the coming months.

Authentic soul food concept Georgia's Restaurant will open a location at the Spectrum as early as next week. This will be the fourth Southern California location for the family-owned restaurant. The first opened 10 years ago at the Anaheim Packing House, in Eastvale and the Long Beach Exchange. All four are run by co-owners Nika Shoemaker-Machado, her husband, Marlon, and her mother, Gretchen.

Inspired by "Nana Gretchen's" home cooking and the catering company she ran out of her kitchen until the 1990s, Georgia's serves a menu of family-driven recipes like crispy fried-green tomatoes accompanied with a lemon aioli, slow-roasted St. Louis barbecue ribs, Creole-seasoned farm-raised fried catfish and the family's signature buttermilk fried chicken, which is herb-

seasoned and cornmeal-crusted.

"Featuring only dark meat chicken and a special brine, our fried chicken has developed quite a following for being extra crispy, insanely juicy, perfectly golden and utterly addictive," said Shoemaker-Machado in a news release.

Other Southern favorites include red beans and rice, jambalaya, collard greens, black-eyed peas and of course, mac 'n' cheese. Owners anticipate a soft-opening for Georgia's by next week at suite 732, near the Regal Irvine Spectrum movie theater.

Also expected to open soon is Le Shrimp Noodle Bar, a concept from the Singapore-based Paradise Group, which operates Paradise Dynasty inside Bloomingdale's South Coast Plaza.

Best known for its umami-rich shrimp ramen made from a flavorful prawn broth, Le Shrimp Noodle Bar is expected to open at the Spectrum before the end of the month at suite 705, near Dave & Buster's. A Fountain Valley location is also slated to open this summer. Both new locations will feature an expanded menu that will add to its selection of vermicelli, ramen and rice noodles as well as appetizers and sides like silken tofu in oyster sauce, chilled crunchy cucumbers, vege-



Courtesy of Anne Watson Photography

GEORGIA'S RESTAURANT, specializing in Southern soul food, will open its fourth SoCal location at the Irvine Spectrum.

table spring rolls and teriyaki chicken.

Looking even further ahead, the Tustin-based traditional Thai cuisine restaurant Manaao Thai Comfort Food has plans to expand with a second location at the Spectrum in mid-2025.

"This new location will allow us to share our passion for Thai cuisine with even more people while maintaining the authentic experience that our loyal customers love," said Manaao owner, Kanate Ungkasrithongkul, in a news release.

The idea for Manaao began during the pandemic when the engineer and web-developer used his time in lockdown to work at recreating the food from his childhood in Thailand. Ungkasrithongkul and his wife, Anita Lin, opened the first Manaao Thai Comfort Food at a small space in a strip mall in Tustin in 2023. Open for lunch and dinner, the

restaurant often has a long wait list. Ungkasrithongkul said he hopes the new space, which will feature an indoor dining area and an outdoor patio, will help them serve more customers more efficiently.

"Our Tustin location is quite small with just 30 seats," said Ungkasrithongkul. "It was important to me to ensure that this location was big enough to cut down our guests' wait times while being easily accessible to visitors."

Manaao Thai Comfort Food at the Irvine Spectrum will be located near Old Navy.

If those forthcoming eateries don't have you hyped, sources have confirmed that xiao long bao giant Din Tai Fung will open a location at the Spectrum in the near future too.

The Taiwanese soup dumpling restaurant already has a large presence in Orange County with a



Emily Davis

KHAO SOI Noodles at Manaao Thai Comfort Food in Tustin.

busy location at South Coast Plaza and an even busier one at the Downtown Disney District in Anaheim that opened earlier this summer. There is no word yet on when

diners can anticipate the opening of Din Tai Fung, Irvine.

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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.

Ghoulish boutique pops up in CdM

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

A trio of black-cloaked witches hover over a willowy arch inviting Halloween enthusiasts into a seemingly foreboding forest at Roger's Gardens in Corona del Mar.

For those who dare to step inside the Gathering, an unrivaled immersive retail experience awaits in the form of a themed boutique full of unique spooky seasonal décor and merchandise.

Seven themed areas in all, including the collectibles crevice, midnight nook, and mystical pumpkin patch room, offer everything from rubber rats to decorative skulls, foggy jack-o'-lanterns and even the Evil Queen's poisoned apple.

Featured artist Vergie Lightfoot's ghastly variegated gourds with expressive eyes bulging out of them exemplify the ethos of Roger's Gardens' approach to Halloween.

"It's a special place to be able to house one-of-a-kind pieces that you can't find at Michael's or at Home Depot," said Crystal Pittman, holiday and home décor buyer for Roger's Gardens. "That's what sets us apart."

The Gathering opens this weekend and carries on until Halloween.

For much of the year, the nook nestled in the nursery is stocked with indoor plants and decorative accessories. But in preparation for the Halloween season, a crew of visual merchandisers and prop artists transformed the space into an overgrown woody coven of witches in about two weeks' time.

The conceptual planning began much earlier, in the thick of last year's the Witching Hour boutique.

"When you're putting something like this together, you're already getting inspired with new ideas for the future," Pittman said.

Pittman began purchasing merchandise as early as January.

The head start also gave artists like Lightfoot, Marianna Nardin, Stacey Mead and Allen Cunningham time to curate their creations in accordance to the new theme.

"These artists have worked with us for a long time," Pittman said. "They are curious about the theme each year. It gets them inspired. They want to create pieces around that."

Roger's Gardens has hosted Halloween boutiques for decades but its annual spooky season transformation has soared in popularity in the past five years.

Last year, the Witching Hour took guests inside the imagined realm of a witch's house. Like a scary movie sequel, this year's boutique creates a garden party gathering of witches



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

ARTIST VERGIE LIGHTFOOT'S expressive pumpkins on display at Roger's Gardens annual Halloween boutique in Corona del Mar. This year's installment is called the Gathering and centers around a witchy theme.



GUESTS WALK around a centerpiece witch prop in the main showroom of the Gathering at Roger's Gardens.



"SMOLDERING PUMPKINS" on display at the Gathering.

in the forest.

Inside the Gathering, a shadowy witch summons a flapping flame from a cauldron while a broom whirls around the floor in an impressive centerpiece display.

About 500 items are currently displayed on shelves for purchase, but as unique as some of the décor pieces are, they don't hang around the Gathering for long.

That may be especially true of the originally designed cloches that run from \$500 to \$700. Each comes with a card telling the backstory of the art inside like the skeletal "Frost" king imbued with powers to spread chaos through darkness and ice.

The bigger prop pieces that decorate the space are set to be released for sale on Oct. 21.

For Pittman and crew,



A "GATHERING" OF skeleton witches at Roger's Gardens' annual Halloween boutique.

there's a sense of magic in delivering a spellbinding experience like the Gathering.

"There's nowhere else around here where people

can go through a total experiential, retail experience like this," she said.

"We want guests to feel completely immersed. We want them to leave happy

and excited about Halloween."

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CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

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Shirl Goedike, *Water Games—Calais Sur Mer*, 1964, Oil on canvas, 30 x 41 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art.

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UCI Jack & Shanaz Langson
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BOOK

Continued from page A5

membering the scenes of panic, violence and confusion that unfolded. “What we had certified in Orange County is what they were trying to stop at the Capitol, even though it was on the completely opposite side of the country.”

“If it could happen at the Capitol, who’s to say it couldn’t happen here?”

In the weeks and months that followed, Wu began to feel herself being called to an even greater purpose. She wanted not only to share the stories of election officials, working in all corners of the U.S. to protect the rights of citizens but to apply her knowledge on a broader scale.

“I felt, now that I know what I know, I wanted to take that to work with nonprofits, coalitions, community groups and just individuals so they could empower themselves,” the Tustin resident recalled.

Wu also began to feel a



Courtesy of Orange County Registrar of Voters

NEARLY TWO MILLION county voter information guides are stored in the Orange County Registrar of Voters’ warehouse in Santa Ana before being mailed out to voters.

growing need for a greater work-life balance. For too long, she had worked long days that stretched into nights, forsaking commitments to her partner, friends and family members.

So, in June of 2021, she

left her position at the Registrar of Voters without having another job lined up. She later took a two-week trip to Hawaii, a dramatic pause that gave her time to reflect on the traumatic events she’d lived through, process what she’d learned

and begin planning for the next chapter.

Today, Wu is founder and president of the Newport Beach-based firm J Wu Consulting, which specializes in civic engagement, voter outreach and education, communications and

nonprofit advocacy.

One of her assignments is assisting Cal State Fullerton in the California University and College Ballot Bowl, a friendly voter registration competition hosted by the California Secretary of State’s office to see which colleges and universities can register the most student voters.

Through her consulting work and her book, Wu hopes to tell the story of election workers as part of a wider call to action.

“I want to see where this book can go. I’m hopeful it can get into the hands of students and everyday people who are curious about what it takes to run an election and what goes into it,” she said Wednesday.

“As citizens, as residents, as members of this society, we all have a role to play — no matter how big or small — there’s something for everyone that we can do to play our role in protecting democracy.”

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HERITAGE

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divided her time between Oaxaca with her Mixtecan mother and Minnesota with her Scottish American father, and the duality of her identity often influences her Mesoamerican music. For her Día de los Muertos performance at Segerstrom, Downs will celebrate the traditions of the Day of the Dead holiday on both sides of the border. The show will also be an interactive one, and audience members are encouraged to attend in Día de los Muertos costumes and makeup and bring photos or other mementos of loved ones.

Tickets for Lila Downs’ performance start at \$32.77 and are available at SCFTA.org.

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CONTENT

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tion, patients using Seacrest Studios will have access to prerecorded and live content that explores Southern California’s marine life and the maritime history of California. There will also be activity sheets to accompany the videos, which the institute hopes

will help create a hands-on learning experience.

“We are incredibly excited to work with CHOC and Seacrest Studios to bring the beauty and knowledge of our coastline to young patients,” said Takeshita.

The team at Children’s Hospital of Orange County also expressed excitement about the collaboration. Interacting with educa-

tional and immersive programming can help create a connection with the ocean for patients who aren’t able to experience it firsthand.

“We value the opportunity to expose patients and families to such unique and educational content through the Ocean Institute’s programming,” said Luke Morand, media programs coordinator for the

Cherese Mari Lauhere Child Life Department at CHOC. “Through this initiative, kids at CHOC can learn, have fun and have moments of respite during their time at the hospital.”

The Ocean Institute was founded in 1977 and is located on 2.4 acres of land in Dana Point Harbor, near a marine protected area. As an ocean education center, the institute receives

100,000 visitors each year and offers 60 marine science and maritime history programs, including an annual summer camp, public tours, harbor cruises and community events like the upcoming 40th annual Maritime Festival from Sept. 13 to Sept. 15. The event will include a School for Scallywags and a Pirate and Mermaid Ball, food trucks, beer gardens, a sail-

or camp, local marine life and tall ships.

The collaboration with CHOC is just another way the Ocean Institute intends to fulfill its mission of “using the ocean as our classroom” while helping young patients’ hospital stays feel like a day at the beach.

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MARLIN

Continued from page A3

began spending more time on the water only a couple years prior as an outdoor activity during the coronavirus pandemic. He grew up in Irvine and attended Tustin High.

The catch, he said, was made possible with a “whole crew and boat” effort, from Captain Mike Jensen chasing down the fish to others staying clear of the line. Voorhis added

that a clump of kelp or seagrass had to be negotiated about 10 minutes into the exchange.

“It was my first marlin that I’ve ever caught,” Voorhis said. “I will definitely say I think fighting a bluefin was significantly easier than that. It takes some longer runs, definitely more exciting watching it come up, surface, jump around, kind of put on a bit of a show for everyone on the boat. I think everyone enjoyed seeing that. I know I definitely did.”

The Patriot was not far into its trip toward Catalina Island, where Jensen said marlin tournaments take place annually in Avalon. He described marlin sightings as “not uncommon” but also said that they are not caught every day.

Jensen, 32, who said he is in his 10th season as a captain, added that the 172-pound marlin was on the “bigger end” of what is regularly seen among striped marlin in the area. He said the species is normally found in the range of

100 to 130 pounds.

“Once we hooked the fish in the stern, he came up to the front of the boat, so I’m looking straight ahead at him,” Jensen said. “It’s an easier way to do it for the way that our boat is set up. A lot of them, one of the guys will fish and stay in the stern and back down and chase them in reverse. The private boats do it that way, but for us, it’s much easier to have them in the front of the boat and drive forward, especially because we’re a complete, true walk-around

boat.”

Jensen added that he began his life on the water working as a pinhead. The role, generally reserved for a kid, allows them to fish throughout the day in exchange for helping to set up the boat and cleaning it at the end of the day.

Sometimes, fish may be caught, then released. Everyone aboard the Patriot shared in the spoils of Tuesday’s big catch. The crew and patrons divided the marlin among themselves to be enjoyed later, as it

sustained injury during the fight.

“The marlin, unfortunately, during the fight went ahead and got [its] tail wrapped, so we didn’t go and let it just float off into oblivion trying to release it,” Voorhis said. “We cut it up and dispersed it among everyone on the boat. I have not personally tried it yet, but I do have a few pieces waiting for me at home.”

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