

Daily Pilot

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Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

GIRLS IN Girl Scout Troop 1253 fill gift boxes with toys and necessities during Operation Waymakers in Huntington Beach on Tuesday.

Scouts bring holiday joy to Waymakers

One hundred gift boxes with “wants” and “needs” were delivered to the Huntington Beach youth shelter Tuesday evening as part of this year’s effort.

BY MATT SZABO

Many in Orange County may have more wants than needs, but Girl Scouts in one Huntington Beach troop are learning that’s not always the case.

The girls of Troop 7370 gathered Tuesday afternoon at Huntington Beach Church to construct 100 gift boxes, headed to children at the nearby Waymakers Huntington Beach Youth Shelter.

Each girl in the 23-member troop wore a Santa Claus hat as she assembled the gifts, with girls from other troops also helping out during Operation Waymakers.

The boxes featured four “need” items — essentials like toiletries, socks and soaps —

and two “want” items, including stuffed animals, nail polish and sunglasses.

“We do have badges in Girl Scouts that teach wants versus needs,” Troop 7370 co-leader Nicole Gaylord said. “This has taught the girls to go to a store and say, ‘Do I want this or do I need this?’”

Kaitlyn Eun, 9, is a fourth-grader at Smith Elementary School in Huntington Beach. She had fun as she assembled the boxes with her friends. The girls also designed cards to be placed inside.

“I feel really happy that we get to contribute back to our community,” Kaitlyn said. “There are people that need stuff that we

See **Scouts**, page A3



A GIRL SCOUT draws on a gift box during the Operation Waymakers project to benefit the Huntington Beach youth shelter.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Minter miracle lifts Edison to Division 1-A title

BY ANDREW TURNER

MISSION VIEJO — Tears of joy streaked down the face of Jake Minter from a moment that was almost too good to be true for the Edison football team.

Edison’s offense had largely gone dormant in the second half, but it took just 32 seconds for the Chargers to rewrite the script of what had been a defensive struggle after halftime.

Sam Thomson threw a 54-yard touchdown pass to Minter with 20 seconds remaining, the decisive score in a 21-14 victory over Fresno Central in the CIF State Division 1-A final on Saturday at Saddleback College.

“It doesn’t feel real,” Minter said in helping the Chargers to their first state title as a program. “It feels like a dream.”

Edison (12-4) took over at its own 32-yard line with 52 seconds left in regulation, having survived a red-zone visit from Central (12-3) that ended with three incompletions from the Chargers’ 6-yard line. An interception by Xavier Jones had wiped away Edison’s lone red-zone trip of the second half.

Thomson, who began the drive with 87 passing yards to his credit, was called upon with an opportunity to win the game late. The Chargers had two timeouts in their pocket, but they

would need neither.

The drive began with a throw to star running back Julius Gillick in the flat for a moderate 5-yard gain. Gillick was targeted again for 9 yards, but this time, the clock kept running.

Thomson’s next pass went to Minter on an inside-breaking route about 15 yards down the field. Minter flew through the defense, outrunning five defenders while also getting a key lead block from Ayden DeGiacomo to

traverse the sideline. He stretched the ball out over the right pylon and tumbled into the end zone.

“That was something special,”

See **Minter**, page A5



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

EDISON CELEBRATES winning the CIF State Division 1-A championship game with the trophy after defeating Fresno Central on Saturday at Saddleback College.

State to appeal judge’s ruling on voter ID

Order issued Monday paves the way for the state to fight Huntington Beach’s controversial voter ID requirement.

BY MATT SZABO

An Orange County judge said Monday that he would enter a formal order in Huntington Beach’s ongoing legal battle with the state of California over voter identification laws.

Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta and Secretary of State Shirley Weber decided not to file an amended complaint after Judge Nico Dourbetas granted Huntington Beach’s motion for dismissal of the state’s case against the city, which was filed following the passage last spring of Measure A. The measure’s approval allowed officials to ask people to present ID before casting a ballot in Huntington Beach municipal elections.

Because Huntington Beach voters approved Measure A, Section 705 of the city charter now states in part that the city may implement voter ID for local municipal elections beginning in 2026.

Dourbetas concluded last month that the issue was “not ripe for adjudication” and Surf

See **Voter**, page A2

Inmates learn life lessons as they train rescues

Cell Dogs program pairs incarcerated people to train pets rescued from shelters. The hard part is letting go afterward.

BY ERIC LICAS

Surviving a 20-year sentence for his role in a 1997 gang-related homicide in Westminster forced Nhut Thanh Vo to disassociate from his emotions. By the time he was three-fourths of the way through his prison stint, he was starving for an opportunity to form a relationship with another soul.

A program that taught inmates dog handling by pairing them with pets rescued from shelters allowed him to bond with another living being for the first time in over 16 years.

“Being in a prison environment, being in that culture, there’s a lot of things lying dormant within you that you’re not able to share with the next person,” he told the Daily Pilot. “Vulnerability is not a good trait in prison. But

See **Lessons**, page A2

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



James Carbone

COSTA MESA BOYS’ BASKETBALL ROUTS CROSSTOWN RIVAL ESTANCIA
PAGE A6

Sage Hill breaks ground on new middle school and gym

BY ERIC LICAS

Educators at Sage Hill School last week celebrated the beginning of construction last week that will allow them to add grades 7 and 8 to their curriculum.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place Dec. 12 at the school's campus in Newport Beach, on the site of a planned 38,658-square-foot building. In addition to classrooms that will allow Sage Hill to expand into middle school instruction, it will also feature a cafe and a second gym that can seat up to 1,000 spectators.

"The new middle school and second gym is more than just a building," said the chair of Sage Hill's board of trustees, Mike Bolen. "It is an investment in the promise of tomorrow. It will be a space where curiosity soars, character is shaped and connections are built, within the classroom and beyond."

The school began raising funds for the new structure in the summer of 2023, and the project was approved by the Newport Beach Planning Commission the following December. Sage Hill plans to open the facility and welcome its first cohorts of seventh and eighth graders in the fall of 2026.

The private school currently has about 560 students enrolled. Expanding into grades 7 and 8 will increase the size of the student body by about 140 more children.



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

MEMBERS OF the board of trustees gather for a picture during the groundbreaking ceremony at Sage Hill on Dec. 12.

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MIKE BOLEN, chair of Sage Hill Board of Trustees, and Head of School Patricia Merz throw dirt at a groundbreaking ceremony for Sage Hill School Middle School and a second gym.



HEAD OF SCHOOL Patricia Merz makes comments during the groundbreaking ceremony for additions to the private school Sage Hill.

LESSONS

Continued from page A1

with a dog, you need to be vulnerable. That's the only way you can connect with them."

The experience also gave him a valuable skill that opened a path to a career after incarceration. He started his own dog training business and also works with programs similar to the one he participated in while he was locked up.

One he joined recently, Cell Dogs, held a graduation ceremony at Orange County Juvenile Hall Tuesday. Seven of the detention facility's wards who were chosen as fledgling trainers in the program showed off some of what they have learned by leading chocolate Lab Snickers, Australian shepherd mix Ziggy and Nova Scotia duck tolling retriever Penny through a series of commands. The pups obediently sat, stayed, rolled over and shook hands.

Vo and Cell Dogs program manager Anna Gilnets supervised the trainers as they worked with the animals for more than two months. The



A YOUNG MAN incarcerated at Orange County Juvenile Hall who helped train Penny, a dog rescued from a local shelter, watches as the pet's new owner, Carolyn Thomas, fits a leash onto the Nova Scotia duck tolling retriever's collar on Tuesday.

young adults did more than provide baths, walks as early 6 a.m. and plenty of love. They got to know each pet and helped them recover from any abandonment or trauma held over from their pasts.

The incarcerated youth

did this while managing their own studies, court dates and a host of other things going on in their lives, Vo said. And they had to learn to work together, covering for one another whenever any of these issues might interrupt one of

the dogs' training schedules.

"Throughout this experience I've discovered the importance of being nurturing and compassionate," one of the wards told attendees of the graduation ceremony. "Each dog has its own per-



PENNY, a rescue dog trained by youth incarcerated at O.C. Juvenile Hall who participated in the Cell Dogs program, performs tricks for visitors on Tuesday.

sonality and needs. And I've learned to adapt my approach to make sure they feel comfortable and loved. But this journey wasn't just about the dogs. Everyone has been a quick learner, constantly observing and adapting to challenges on a whim."

The dogs didn't all get along with their trainers from Cell Dogs at first. Gilnets said Snickers and Ziggy were extremely apprehensive toward humans when she picked them up from shelters. Penny was

friendly but, like Ziggy, practically oblivious to commands.

"I hate this dog," Gilnets recalled one of the wards telling her shortly after meeting Ziggy.

But he and the others in the dog training program succeeded in bonding with the animals thanks to perseverance, patience and a healthy amount of treats for added encouragement. The process enabled the pets, as well as the people they

See **Lessons**, page A4

VOTER

Continued from page A1

City voter-backed changes via Measure A currently presented no conflict with state elections law.

Instead of amending their complaint, Bonta and Weber sought an appealable order, and now will have it, following Monday morning's hearing.

Preparations for the 2026 elections are expected to begin late in 2025, leaving

the state eager to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

Huntington Beach Mayor Pat Burns heralded Monday's decision in a statement, calling it a big loss for the state of California and a major success for the city of Huntington Beach while acknowledging the battle is not over.

"My City Council colleagues and I will not back down amidst pressure from the state, we will continue to fight for the will of our

residents," Burns' statement read. "I want to thank our City Attorney Michael Gates for his hard work and ongoing efforts in defending our city from state overreach."

Gates, who has maintained that Huntington Beach's charter city status allows it to hold local elections as it sees fit, took to social media platform X to post a video addressing Bonta.

"Obviously, the next step is probably going to be that

they appeal," Gates said in an interview Monday. "They have different options available, but it's obviously a good win for Huntington Beach to get some closure on that, at least at this stage, and it's a good win for election integrity measures and voters in the city."

Bonta has maintained that voter ID violates state law. California is one of 14 states nationwide that typically do not require any form of identification when

voting, though identities are verified during the registration process.

Bonta and Weber sued the city in April and vowed to appeal Dourbetas' decision earlier this month.

"We sought, and have now secured, an appealable order from the Orange County Superior Court," Bonta said in a statement Monday. "We look forward to filing our appeal and making our case before the California Fourth District Court of Appeal that Hunt-

ington Beach's voter ID policy is unlawful."

Another wrinkle to the voter ID issue is Senate Bill 1174, prohibiting local governments from requiring ID in elections. The bill was authored by state Sen. Dave Min (D-Irvine).

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed it into law in September, but Gates has called it unconstitutional as it relates to charter cities.

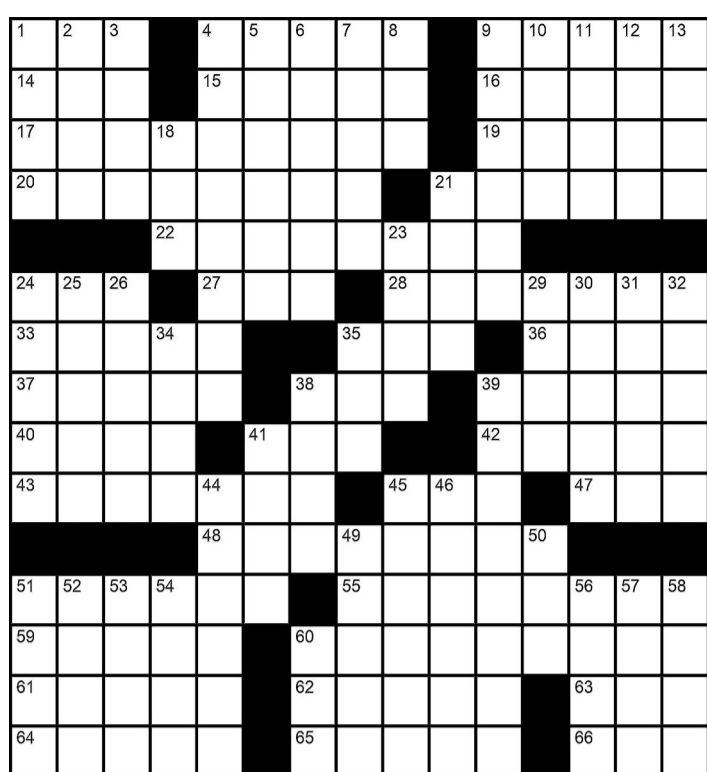
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THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

ACROSS
 1 Cured pork
 4 St. Teresa of _
 9 Go off-script: 2 wds.
 14 Flying saucer: Abbr.
 15 _ and eggs
 16 Honking birds
 17 Elvis's estate
 19 Gets better
 20 Paying tribute to
 21 Red gemstone
 22 Capital of Belgium
 24 Feeling low
 27 "Te _" (Spanish "I love you")
 28 Old pro
 33 Sing like Bing Crosby
 35 _ a la mode
 36 Gripping tool
 37 Grownup
 38 Compete
 39 Boxer's "dukes"
 40 "Copacabana" showgirl
 41 Newton fruit
 42 On the ball
 43 Church service parts
 45 _ Lanka
 47 Contact info: Abbr.
 48 Educators
 51 Slender in build
 55 "O'er the _ we watched..."
 59 Actress McDonald
 60 Award hung on a ribbon
 61 Monty Python's Michael
 62 "Aida," for example
 63 Paid player
 64 Velvety leather
 65 Annoying
 66 Do some stitching

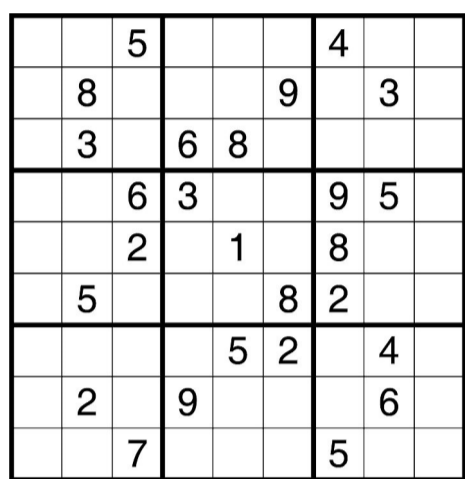
DOWN
 1 Actor Grant
 2 Jimi Hendrix hairstyle
 3 Complain
 4 Deviant
 5 Antianxiety drug



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.



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

6 "Just watch me!": 3 wds.
 7 Years
 8 Salt _ pepper
 9 Mortified
 10 Stag or doe
 11 Low in fat
 12 Archipelago part

13 Second to none
 18 Male swan
 21 Sheer delight
 23 "The Lost Bookshop" author
 24 Top of the head
 25 Intense feeling
 26 Childbirth

helper
 29 Wicked
 30 Resurrected
 31 Houston MLB player
 32 Birds' abodes
 34 Drugstore skincare brand
 35 Sow or boar
 38 MasterCard competitor
 39 Honorable game conduct: 2 wds.
 41 Worry
 44 Gas used as fuel
 45 Color variations
 46 Comment
 49 Thin French pancake
 50 Comedian
 51 Drains energy from
 52 Hawaiian feast
 53 Just sitting there
 54 Part of a crossword
 56 Lacerates
 57 Went at top speed
 58 Winter weather
 60 Floor-cleaning tool

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THU, DEC 19 VERY WHITNEY CHRISTMAS
 FRI, DEC 20 A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS
 SUN, DEC 22 GARY HO HO HOEY
 SAT, DEC 28 DRAMARAMA

- 12/19 A VERY WHITNEY CHRISTMAS
- 12/20 A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS
- 12/21 AMBROSIA (HOLIDAY SHOW)
- 12/22 GARY HO-HO-HOEY
- 12/27 BEATLES VS STONES (A MUSICAL SHOWDOWN)
- 12/28 DRAMARAMA
- 12/29 L.A. GUNS
- 12/31 THE ENGLISH BEAT NEW YEARS EVE!
- 1/3 QUEEN NATION
- 1/4 QUEEN NATION
- 1/8 QUINN SULLIVAN & HAMISH ANDERSON
- 1/9 ALL FIRED UP (PAT BENATAR TRIBUTE)
- 1/10 TOMMY CASTRO & THE PAINKILLERS
- 1/11 AC/DC vs OZZY (ROCK N ROLL SHOWDOWN)
- 1/12 BURTON CUMMINGS (OF THE ORIGINAL THE GUESS WHO)
- 1/17 DADA
- 1/18 DSB (JOURNEY TRIBUTE)
- 1/23 PAT TRAVERS
- 1/24 GENE LOVES JEZEBEL & BOW WOW WOW
- 1/26 WHAT'S NEW PUSSYCAT? (TOM JONES TRIBUTE)
- 1/30 CANNED HEAT
- 1/31 DESPERADO (EAGLES TRIBUTE)
- 2/1 DESPERADO (EAGLES TRIBUTE)
- 2/2 RICKIE LEE JONES
- 2/5 LEO KOTTKE
- 2/7 DAVID COOK
- 2/8 LED ZEPAGAIN (LED ZEPPELIN TRIBUTE)
- 2/14 OTTMAR LIEBERT & LUNA NEGRA (VALENTINES SHOW)
- 2/16 INCENDIO with ARDESHIR FARAH (OF STRUNZ & FARAH)
- 2/20 THE HEART OF ROCK & ROLL
- 2/21 CHEST FEVER (TRIBUTE TO THE BAND)
- 2/22 FAST TIMES (ULTIMATE 80'S TRIBUTE)



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

YOUNGSTERS IN Girl Scout Troup 7370 Kaitlyn Eun, Morgan Gibbons and Ann Nguyen, from left, fill gift boxes during Operation Waymakers on Tuesday evening.

SCOUTS

Continued from page A1

have a lot of, and we can spare some of that stuff to them. I bet it'll make a lot of kids happy this Christmas."

This is the third straight year that Troop 7370 has participated in Operation Waymakers, Gaylord said. The multi-level troop, which includes girls from kindergarten to 17 years old, previously made gift boxes to be shipped worldwide via Operation Christmas Child.

But the troop, which already participates in the Waymakers Light a Light of Love holiday parade each December, wanted something that would benefit kids living a little bit closer to home.

The boxes were set to be delivered to the Waymakers shelter by another co-leader of the troop, Jordan Young.

Devon Noonan, a fifth-grade student at Moffett Elementary School, has been in Troop 7370 for a few months but had participated in Operation Waymakers before.

"It makes me happy to pack the boxes and give back to the community and kids that are less fortun-



A GIRL SCOUT from Troop 7370 lines up her "Neds" knit hat collection for Operation Waymakers.

nate," said Devon, 10. "This might be the only Christmas presents that they get, so it makes me happy that we get to give back to them. It's important that they just are happy this holiday season."

Waymakers Huntington Beach Youth Shelter program director Nancy Galeana said the gift boxes will be distributed to children at the shelter, their parents and even children in the Oak View community of Huntington Beach through a partnership.

"I always say that it's kids helping kids," Galeana said. "That has been one of the mottos that we follow."

Gaylord said all of the girls in the troop look for-

ward to Operation Waymakers each year, as one of several community service projects throughout the year. To raise money for the project, they took orders from their families and friends for chocolates, nuts, magazine subscriptions and other items, earning \$300 for their efforts. They also welcomed the receipt of gift items and additional money from other troops and Girl Scout families for the purchase of the gift boxes, presents and cards.

"Granted, they love to take cookie money and go on trips, too," Gaylord added with a laugh.

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SUN, DEC 29 L.A. GUNS
 JAN 3 & 4 QUEEN NATION
 WED, JAN 8 QUINN SULLIVAN & HAMISH ANDERSON
 THU, JAN 9 ALL FIRED UP

- 2/23 ALWAYS ADELE
- 2/26 HUMMEL HARP BLOWOUT
- 2/27 VANESSA COLLIER
- 2/28 G LOVE & SPECIAL SAUCE
- 3/6 ALTAN
- 3/7 COCO MONTOYA & RONNIE BAKER BROOKS
- 3/8 MARC COHN
- 3/9 MARC COHN
- 3/13 SONS OF CREAM FT KOFI BAKER, MALCOM BRUCE, ROB JOHNSON
- 3/14 THE FENIANS ST PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION
- 3/15 WALTER TROUT
- 3/16 WALTER TROUT
- 3/21 THE THIRD MIND FT. DAVE ALVIN, JESSE SYKES, MARK KARAN, VICTOR KRUMMENACHER, MICHAEL JEROME
- 3/22 KING'S X
- 3/26 RUSSELL HOWARD
- 3/28 KIDS OF CHARLEMAGNE & PENROSE
- 3/29 SUPER DIAMOND (NEIL DIAMOND TRIBUTE)
- 3/30 COLIN JAMES
- 4/1 JORMA KAUKONEN
- 4/4 THE SMITHEREENS WITH ROBIN WILSON
- 4/5 HERMAN'S HERMITS FT PETER NOONE
- 4/6 HERMAN'S HERMITS FT PETER NOONE
- 4/7 LEARNING TO FLY (A TOM PETTY TRIBUTE)
- 4/11 DON CARLOS
- 4/13 BOBBY GRAY
- 4/19 KEVIN NEALON
- 4/24 THE WAILERS
- 4/25 TOM GREEN - HOME TO THE COUNTRY
- 4/26 PIANO MEN: GENERATIONS
- 5/3 THE OCEAN BLUE
- 5/8 ROBERT CRAY
- 5/9 ROBERT CRAY
- 5/11 ISRAEL VIBRATION & ROOTS RADICS
- 5/16 RONSTADT REVIVAL (LINDA RONSTADT TRIBUTE)
- 6/6 THE WINEHOUSE EXPERIENCE
- 6/7 YYNOT (TRIBUTE TO RUSH)

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