# Daily Pilot

#### FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2024 /// dailypilot.com

# 'I never meant for it to be this way'

Contrite 22-year-old Tibet Ergal, of Irvine, receives 6-year sentence in Costa Mesa Planned Parenthood firebombing. **BY PAUL ANDERSON** 

A 22-year-old Irvine man was sentenced today to six years in federal prison for his part in the firebombing of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Costa Mesa two years ago.

Tibet Ergul pleaded guilty Feb. 29 to participating in the firebombing of the clinic with a Molotov cocktail March 13, 2022. Ergul pleaded guilty to conspiracy to damage an energy facility and intentional damage to a reproductive health services facility.

Co-defendant Chance Brannon, 24, of San Juan Capistrano, was sentenced to nine years in prison. Co-defendant Xavier Batten of Brooksville, Fla. was sentenced to 3½ years in federal prison.

Ergul struggled blending into Newport Beach when he emigrated from Turkey, U.S. District Judge Cormac Carney said.

"He did not fit well with the teenagers in Newport Beach and was bullied," Carney said.

was bullied," Carney said. He also suffers from bipolar disorder, depression, an anxiety disorder and ADHD, Carney said.

"In the past, he has also had suicidal thoughts," Carney noted. But Carney said the defendant wasn't as "culpable" as Brannon, who was the ringleader of the at-

who was the ringleader of the attacks. "Clearly, Mr. Brannon had an adverse influence on Mr. Ergul."

adverse influence on Mr. Ergul." Carney praised Ergul for at-



Photos by James Carbone

**THE UNITED STATES** Olympic women's water polo team poses for a picture during a news conference announcing the roster at République Café Bakery & Restaurant in Los Angeles on Thursday.

# Newport Beach athletes back on Olympic water polo team



#### BY MATT SZABO

The United States women's water polo team went to Paris earlier this month in advance of this summer's Olympic Games.

Thanks to some maneuvering by team manager Ally Beck, the players got to enjoy a Taylor Swift concert on the Eras Tour, in the same La Défense Arena venue where the Olympic women's water polo quarterfinals, semifinals and title match will be played this summer.

"It was an unbelievable, dream-come-true trip," team member Kaleigh Gilchrist said. "I think it just got us all that much more ex-

## Laguna Beach repeals zoning rule

Council members nix ordinance relating to building height, mass, bulk and parking in face of referendum.

#### **BY ANDREW TURNER**

An ordinance refining development standards in Laguna Beach will be repealed in its entirety, as the City Council considered its options Tuesday in response to a qualified referendum.

The zoning code amendment being repealed dealt with building height, mass, bulk and parking within the commercial districts, especially the downtown area.

It placed restrictions on lot mergers to no more than 15,000 square feet for properties within 500 feet of the downtown specific plan. The language in the ordinance excluded public facilities and parking structures from that restriction. Additionally, the ordinance established a height limit of 36 feet for any element of new buildings.

The ordinance was adopted on Aug. 16, 2022, leading up to that year's November election. The City Council had chosen to formally oppose a Laguna Residents First ballot initiative that sought to have residents vote on the approval of major development projects along Coast Highway and Laguna Canyon Road. Mea-

See Zoning, page A3

**ABOVE:** Ashleigh Johnson, left, and Newport Beach natives Kaleigh Gilchrist, center, and Maddie Musselman during Thursday's press conference. **RIGHT:** Olympic women's water polo team captain Maggie Steffens answers questions from the media during Thursday's press conference.

#### **CLASS OF 2024**



## cited for us to be there in August. We can't wait to get back, for business, not for play."

Team USA, gunning for its fourth straight Olympic gold, is rooting against a cruel summer for its relatively inexperienced squad.

The 13-player Olympic roster was revealed Thursday at a news conference at République Café Bakery & Restaurant in Los Angeles, and Newport Beach natives Gilchrist and Maddie Musselman again made the cut.

Gilchrist, 32, and Musselman, 25, will both be seeking their third Olympic gold. The labyrinth over the years has led them back to the team in search of further glory for Team USA.

Gilchrist, a former Newport Harbor High and USC standout, is the oldest player on this year's team, which includes seven firsttime Olympians. Her sweeter than fiction story largely involves how she has preserved

See Team, page A4





**HAPPY GRADUATES** Dalena Tang, Jamila Toumi, Yandel Urbano and Gracelyn Valencia, from left, prepare to walk into the Early College High School commencement ceremony at the Robert Moore Theater at OCC. Photots by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**SETH BARKER** walks the hand-shake line after receiving his diploma from NMUSD's STEP program Wednesday in Costa Mesa.

## NMUSD celebrates Early College, STEP grads

#### BY SARA CARDINE, LILLY NGUYEN

Newport-Mesa Unified School District officially commenced its graduation season this week, celebrating the achievements of matriculating seniors from Early College High School and those enrolled in STEP, the district's adult transition program in separate ceremonies in Costa Mesa.

A group of 52 Early College graduates convened Thursday at Orange Coast College's Robert B. Moore Theater to receive their diplomas on the same campus where they took college-level courses under ECHS's dual enrollment program.

Newport-Mesa Unified School District reports this year's class has earned the highest number of academic honors, graduation cords and diploma seals in the school's history.

Among this year's graduates, 36 will continue their studies at four-year colleges and universities, while 15 will head to twoyear colleges. One graduate plans to enroll in a trade school.

Students from ECHS' class of

2024 received more than \$700,000 in scholarships.

Thursday's ceremony included student speakers Paxton Onstott and Marcelina Sanchez, who joined Early College Principal Dave Martinez in marking the special occasion.

"The class of 2024 has been a

See Grads, page A4

# Fountain Valley expands efforts to notify residents of pending projects

#### **BY ANDREW TURNER**

Fountain Valley will expand its efforts to provide notice of public hearings for development projects by

outreach. The city will now mail notices to property owners within a 1,000-foot radius of a project. Previously, notice

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ON A 3-2 VOTE May 21 the Fountain Valley City Council approved expanding the notification of pending projects to owners of property within 1,000 feet of the work. Until now, the notices concerned projects within 500 feet.

of public hearings had been sent out via mail to properties within a 500-foot radius of the subject property.

State law requires that public notice be mailed out to property owners within a 300-foot radius.

The public notification enhancement passed by a 3-2 vote of the City Council at the May 21 meeting, with Mayor Glenn Grandis and council members Kim Constantine and Jim Cunneen casting the deciding votes. "I don't think there's a

single developer who would have an issue with it," Grandis said. "It's not cost-prohibitive. It's not going to be passed on to the consumer. It's a one-time cost. One of my four goals this year is to make sure that we're informing the residents and transparency, and I think this falls in line with that."

Constantine had hoped to see the noticing range in-

crease further — to at least 3,000 feet — but 1,000 feet was where she could find support from the panel.

'I'm not in favor of increasing the notification radius," said Councilman Patrick Harper, who along with Vice Mayor Ted Bui dissented. "I think we talked about some things that would not incur any additional costs, such as kind of having a recap in the City Council, maybe allowing more email options if people want to opt in for notifications, but sending out postcards to increase from 500 to 1,000 feet, I think, is a waste of time and money."

Additionally, the panel opted to provide notification of public hearings via various social media platforms, including Instagram, Nextdoor and X.

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#### **CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS**



R E	3	8	4	9	5	6	7	2	1
Ν	7	1	5	8	2	3	6	9	4
D S	2	6	9	1	4	7	5	8	3
Ν	1	4	8	7	3	9	2	6	5
Е	5	9	7	2	6	4	1	3	8
W	6	3	2	5	8	1	4	7	9
Ρ	4	2	1	6	9	8	3	5	7
L	9	7	6	3	1	5	8	4	2
A Y	8	5	3	4	7	2	9	1	6

## Newport Beach man faces charges of swindling Chicago resident out of \$2M

#### BY CITY NEWS SERVICE

A Newport Beach man is facing federal fraud charges in Chicago for allegedly bilking \$2 million from an Illinois resident through a bogus investment scheme.

Raymond Echavez Villamor, 60, was charged with five counts of wire fraud and pleaded not guilty to the charges last week, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Chicago.

According to prosecutors, Villamor operated a company called Rainbowork LLC, and during a sixmonth period last year, he convinced a Glenview, Ill., resident to make a \$2-million investment.

"Villamor made false representations about the performance and value of the investment, and falsely promised to repay all of it with an added return within a specified period of time, even though he knew he did not have the capability to do so," prosecutors said

Villamor instead used the money to pay for personal expenses, including vehicle purchases, according to prosecutors.

Each of the fraud charges carries a potential prison term of 20 years.

dailypilot@latimes.com Twitter: @TheDailyPilot

## SENTENCE

#### Continued from page A1

tending classes and participating in self-help programs while in custody.

too late to turn yourself around and redeem yourself."

Carney noted the defendant's father flew in from Turkey for Thursday's

MARKETPLACE



hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City of

Laguna Baech at, or prior to, the public hearing. This project is categorically exempt pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, Section 15303 -New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, in that the project consists of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small structures. This project is located within a non-appealable area of the Coastal Zone. *Pursuant to the Americans* 

Include within a lion-appealable area of the Coastar Johns *Fursham to the Americans* with Disabilities Act, persons with a disability who require a disability-related modification or accommodation in order to participate in a meeting, including auxiliary aids or services, may request such modification or accommodation from the City Clerk's Office at (949) 497-0705 (telephone) or (949) 497-0771 (facsimile). Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to assure accessibility to the meeting.

are a person interested in the estate, you may file with the court a Request for Special Notice (form DE-154) of the filing of an inventory and appraisal of estate assets or of any petition or account as provided in Probate Code section 1250. A Request for Special Notice form is available from the court clerk

Petitioner: ALICIA MARIE SOLOMOS 7510 N CROSSWAY RD, FOX POINT, WI 53217 (323) 854-9143

Published in the DAILY PILOT

Ergul faced between 63 to 78 months, according to his plea deal.

"I want you to know I am ashamed," Ergul told Carney. "This country gave me everything. ... I wouldn't have had back in Turkey, and I squandered it all." He added that he regretted doing something that "divided" people.

"I want to take responsibility for my actions," he said. "I know what I did was wrong."

He said his "12 months of reflection" in custody helped him understand the nature of his offenses.

"I was educated, I had intelligence, I thought I was being a productive member of society," he said. "But I just pushed it all away with my hate." He said his internal "anger" was directed outward.

"I'm sorry to the government, to my victims. ... and all the women and doctors and staff at Planned Parenthood," he said.

He also apologized to his parents. "I never meant for it to be this way," he said. "I wish I could go back in time. I really do."

Ergul asked to be sent to a prison where he can continue his education and to participate in a drug rehabilitation program. Carney made a recommendation for the defendant, noting how his drug addiction factored into his behavior in the crimes.

"I really want to continue my life and make my parents proud of me again," Ergul said.

Carney told the defendant, "Obviously, you have great potential the way you write and speak. ... It's never

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hearing. "Mr. Ergul, in a way you're a very fortunate man," the judge said. "Despite what you did there are people who love you very much to come to this hearing. ... It's a testament to their love for you."

Ergul still faces domestic violence charges in Arizona, where he attacked a roommate while under the influence of LSD, Carney said.

Batten provided advice on crafting a Molotov cocktail, and Brannon and Ergul ignited the device at the clinic when it was closed, sparking a fire, prosecutors said.

After the firebombing, Ergul "bragged" to a friend and added he "wished he could have recorded the ignition," according to Assistant U.S. Atty. Kathrynne Seiden.

After the Supreme Court's ruling in June 2022 striking down abortion rights, Brannon and Ergul planned another firebombing of a clinic but backed out at the last moment when they saw law enforcement, Seiden said.

Brannon and Ergul "also discussed starting a race war by attacking an electrical substation with the goal of damaging the substation and disrupting the functioning of the power grid in Orange County," prosecutors said.

In March 2022, Ergul identified a target and suggested going at 3 a.m. to a neighboring structure and hurling the Molotov cocktail at the substation, Seiden said.

The duo were also accused of discussing and researching "how to attack the parking lot or electrical room of Dodger Stadium on a night celebrating LGBTQ pride," prosecutors said. They were arrested two days before Pride Night at the stadium.

Paul Anderson is a reporter for City News Service.

for-whether you're seeking a home, apartment, pet or new occupation!

# Water main break floods road in Newport Coast

recycled water pipeline burst at 3:32 a.m. Wednesday, leading to the closure of the intersection of Newport Beach at San Joaquin Road to traffic.

"Initially, this resulted in the closure of northbound Newport Coast Drive and westbound San Joaquin Hills," Deniene Rivenburg, spokesperson for the water district said midday Wednesday. "One lane has been opened on northbound Newport Coast Drive, but westbound San Joaquin Hills remains closed."

The water not only affected the initial site of the breakage but eventually caused a portion of San Joaquin Hills Road to buckle.

Paulus Engineering contracting crews worked throughout the day to repair the 20-inch water main pipe, which belongs to the Irvine Ranch Water District.

Rivenburg said that once the pipe repairs were completed, asphalt restoration would take place.

The city of Newport Beach is acting in a support role to the IRWD, according to spokesman John Pope.

– Susan Hoffman

Continued from page A1

ZONING

sure Q, as it appeared on the ballot, was defeated with 7,965 votes (64.21%) opposing it.

Signatures for a referendum petition against the ordinance arrived on the city clerk's desk a month after its adoption, and on Oct. 28, 2022, the Registrar of Voters certified the signatures and qualified the referendum. A staff report said the ordinance has been suspended since the referendum qualified.

Mayor Sue Kempf, Mayor

THE DAILY

Pro Tem Alex Rounaghi, and Councilman Bob Whalen voted unanimously to have city staff take the steps to repeal the ordinance. The panel also requested that elements from the ordinance that don't conflict with state housing law be incorporated in a comprehensive zoning code update. Councilman Mark Orgill

recused himself from the item due to a source of income conflict, and Councilman George Weiss was absent.

Council members also had the option to submit the ordinance to the voters as drafted.

The discussion opened with Kempf asking City Atty. Megan Garibaldi if the ordinance had any legal issues

"[State Senate Bill] 330 requires objective design criteria for housing-related projects, and there is a potential for that argument in Ordinance No. 1675," Garibaldi replied. "I think it's fixable with a change to an ordinance. Unfortunately, your hands are tied in doing that tonight with the current ordinance, given the referendum.'

Whalen crafted the motion with the threat of po-

16

tential litigation in mind.

"I think the issue we have is the one the city attorney mentioned, which is there's a pending lawsuit," Whalen said. "We've been advised, as the mayor asked and was answered, the ordinance here runs afoul of some of the state housing laws that are now in effect. The problem is that even if it's affirmed by the voters, we're going to have that defect that we can't avoid.

"I think what we ought to do is repeal the ordinance, direct staff to bring it back with these provisions, in a new ordinance that eliminates any concerns relative to housing. We will continue to have these limitations in effect, ... and we'll get them in an ordinance that's not going to be subject to challenge on a housing basis.'

Elections code prohibits the city from passing an ordinance after repealing one that was subject to a referendum that is "materially identical" for one year, Garibaldi said.

During the public hearing, a few of the past supporters of Measure Q called on the three council members considering the item to send the ordinance to the voters.

Rounaghi, a first-term council member who was elected after the vote on the ordinance, backed Whalen in saying that residents would not want public funds used to defend an ordinance with legal issues.

Susan Hoffman

'When I spoke to voters, one of the biggest concerns was the unintended consequence with Measure Q, and that was when voters pass something, it can't be changed," Rounaghi said. "Ballot box planning for land use is not a good idea.'

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A PAULUS CREW employee checks out the buckling on San Joaquin Hills Road where a nearby 20-inch water pipe from the Irvine Ranch Water District broke in Newport Coast Wednesday at 3:32 a.m.

COMMUTER PUZZLE 18 Zawistowski

## 6 South Coast Repertory Family-friendly theatre - LIVE under the stars!

#### ACROSS

By Stella

1 Punjabi sect member 5 Diagrams of places 9 A tribe of Israel 14 "Ah ves": 2 wds. 15 Landed 16 Kitchen range 17 Ski slope transport 18 Old iPod model 19 Asylum 20 Kid's beach buildina: 2 wds. 23 Care for 24 Expected by: 2 wds. 25 Some newspaper ads 27 Wedding garment 30 Firm up 31 Lady 34 Hands out cards 36 Stone worker 40 Video game pioneer 42 Animal companion 43 Send away 44 Number of **Deadly Sins** 45 Benches and chairs 47 Make a seam 48 Tiny bit 50 "Jurassic World" actor Chris 52 Tries a bit of 56 Loses water 59 Sneaker brand 60 Crisp, spicy cookie 64 Singer Kravitz 66 Unkind 67 Turnpike charge 68 Eat away at 69 Fishhook attachment 70 "Frozen" queen 71 Handbag part



#### **SUDOKU**

#### By the Mepham 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.

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

#### For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A2.

5 Florida sea

7 Serving of beer

10 Levy that might

education: 2 wds.

11 Hang in the air

8 Vodka brand

animal

6 "Oh no!"

9 Cigarette

residue

support

72 \_ and sciences 73 Do in DOWN 1 Plops on the sofa 2 "This \_ news": 2 wds. 3 Actor Reeves 4 Did a sheepdog's job

12 Happening 13 Rips up 21 St. Louis ballplayer 22 Navy rank: Abbr. 26 College term 28 Gullible people 29 Take a nap 31 Car fuel 32 Had a meal 33 Bathroom, for short 35 Celebrity 37 Auntie, to Mom 38 Spanish cheer 39 Not used 41 Raccoon-esque creature: 2 wds. 46 Natural gifts 49 Plead 51 Enjoys the flavor of 52 and marketing 53 Fend off 54 Not adult 55 "The Lion King" lion 57 Grassy hill 58 Taco topping 61 Close by 62 Gallop, e.g. 63 Have some fun 65 Informal assent Tribune Media

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### GRADS

#### Continued from page A1

special class of young people," Martinez said in a statement ahead of the graduation festivities. They started ECHS as online learners in August 2020 but navigated the challenges to become the class with the highest number of IGETC certificates and associate degrees earned."

This week was also noteworthy for graduates of Newport-Mesa's STEP, an adult transition program for students with special needs through age 22 that helps enrollees prepare to lead independent lives after school by offering job and life skills assistance.

and friends Family cheered on a cohort of 15 graduates in a ceremony Wednesday at the district's Harper Assessment Center in Costa Mesa. Faculty members and administrators lined up to congratulate students with a handshake walk after they'd received their diplomas.

Examples of accomplishments made possible by the STEP program include Jessie Delgado, who secured a job at Wienerschnitzel nearly two years ago and has since become a valuable and dedicated employee who pulls 30-hour work weeks.

Graduate Seth Barker, with the support of his family and STEP teacher, started a micro-business selling handmade bracelets. The endeavor allows him not only an outlet for creative expression but to help support himself as well.

Special education coordinator Kimberly Doyle, who runs the program, told students that graduation is more than a milestone – it's a testament to students' resilience, courage and dedication.

"As you step forward from the Adult Transition Program at STEP, remember that every challenge overcome you've has shaped the remarkable individual you are today," she said. "Your journey inspires us all, and your future is filled with boundless possibilities.'

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Don Leach | Staff Photographer

EARLY COLLEGE High School grad Marcelina Sanchez, right, walks in a commencement ceremony with her fellow classmates Thursday at Orange Coast College's Robert B. Moore Theatre.

#### TEAM

#### Continued from page A1

through injuries, including those resulting from a balcony collapsing as she was partying with a teammate in South Korea in 2019.

"I don't think anyone would have predicted her to be a three-time Olympian, herself included, but it's a credit to her perseverance and intelligence," U.S. coach Adam Krikorian said. "She's one of the smartest players I've ever coached, and it's just her professionalism and maturity. She's kind of the silent worker."

Musselman, who starred at CdM and UCLA, has been one of the best players in the world for a while now. She earned Olympic MVP honors at the last games in Tokyo.

She's always had a mature mind set, but she also enjoys having fun with her

LOEWE



James Carbone

**UNITED STATES** Olympic women's water polo team head coach Adam Krikorian answers questions from the media during Thursday's press conference.

#### teammates, and sometimes that means performing in TikTok videos.

"I don't know what I'm doing, but it's fun," Musselman said. "I watch all of them do it ... I have to

dance, and I'm not a great dancer. I didn't grow up dancing, doing any of that stuff, so to put myself in that position, I feel like I'm trying something new. It's fun having the younger

|//

generation teach us how to do it."

Musselman also has the fearless nature in the pool that comes with life circumstances, after getting married to former UCLA water polo player Pat Woepse last fall, around the same time he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of lung cancer.

Pat is doing well with his treatments, Maddie said Thursday, and still hopes to go to Paris to watch his wife play.

"I feel like I'm playing the most free I've ever played," Musselman said. "I obviously care about missing [shots] and when I don't do well, but it's easier to brush off my shoulder and move onto the next moment. There are bigger things."

Team captain Maggie Steffens, a three-time gold medalist, also returns to guide Team USA. Goalkeepers Ashleigh Johnson and Amanda Longan are talented returners as well, along with former Los Alamitos High and UCLA standout Rachel Fattal.

Some may be left feeling like everything is changed. There are also seven Olympic newcomers, including defender Jordan Raney, 18-year-old defender Emily Ausmus, former UC Irvine standout Tara Prentice and current Princeton star Jovana Sekulic.

Stanford attackers Ryann Neushul, Jewel Roemer and Jenna Flynn are also firsttime Olympians.

Team USA actually lost by a goal to Italy in the quarterfinals at last July's World Aquatics Championships in Japan, ending its bid for a fifth straight world title, but did come back to win this year's World Championships in Qatar in February and also performed well in exhibition matches earlier this year.

"Those five months following World Championships were enormously important parts to this evolution of our skill devel-opment," Krikorian said. "We got better, we got closer as a team and developed a better understanding of how we want to play. And we got healthy, too, to be quite honest ... There's a little more water under the bridge now, for us."

Rarely if ever down bad on the scoreboard, Team USA remains a favorite to make it back to La Défense Arena with a title on the line.

"What are the odds that she was playing that concert, in Paris, the same week we were there?" Gilchrist said. "It's kind of crazy how that all worked out.

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GIFTS FOR EVERY

### Distinctive gifts for the distinguished graduate

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