

# Daily Pilot

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

Contrite 22-year-old Tibet Ergul, 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.

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 attacks.

"Clearly, Mr. Brannon had an adverse influence on Mr. Ergul."

Carney praised Ergul for at-

See *Sentence*, page A2

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An ordinance refining development standards in Laguna Beach will be repealed in its entirety, as the City Council considered its options Tuesday in response to a qualified referendum.

The zoning code amendment being repealed dealt with building height, mass, bulk and parking within the commercial districts, especially the downtown area.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



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



**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.



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 excited 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 first-time Olympians. Her sweeter than fiction story largely involves how she has preserved

See *Team*, page A4

## CLASS OF 2024



**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.



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

Photots by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

## 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 sepa-

rate 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 two-year 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



# Water main break floods road in Newport Coast

A 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



Susan Hoffman

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.

## ZONING

Continued from page A1

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

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-

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.

"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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## THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

### ACROSS

- 1 Punjabi sect member
- 5 Diagrams of places
- 9 A tribe of Israel
- 14 "Ah yes": 2 wds.
- 15 Landed
- 16 Kitchen range
- 17 Ski slope transport
- 18 Old iPod model
- 19 Asylum
- 20 Kid's beach building: 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

|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  |    | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |    | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 |    |    |    |    | 15 |    |    |    |    | 16 |    |    |    |    |
| 17 |    |    |    |    | 18 |    |    |    |    | 19 |    |    |    |    |
| 20 |    |    |    |    | 21 |    |    |    |    | 22 |    | 23 |    |    |
|    | 24 |    |    |    |    |    |    | 25 |    | 26 |    |    |    |    |
|    |    |    |    | 27 |    | 28 | 29 |    | 30 |    |    |    |    |    |
| 31 | 32 | 33 |    | 34 |    |    |    | 35 |    | 36 |    | 37 | 38 | 39 |
| 40 |    |    | 41 |    |    | 42 |    |    |    | 43 |    |    |    |    |
| 44 |    |    |    |    |    | 45 |    |    | 46 |    |    | 47 |    |    |
|    |    |    |    |    | 48 |    | 49 |    | 50 |    |    | 51 |    |    |
| 52 | 53 | 54 |    |    |    | 55 |    |    | 56 |    |    | 57 | 58 |    |
| 59 |    |    |    |    | 60 |    | 61 | 62 |    |    |    |    |    | 63 |
| 64 |    |    |    | 65 |    | 66 |    |    |    |    |    | 67 |    |    |
| 68 |    |    |    |    |    | 69 |    |    |    |    |    | 70 |    |    |
| 71 |    |    |    |    |    | 72 |    |    |    |    |    | 73 |    |    |

### 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](http://sudoku.org.uk).

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

- 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
- 5 Florida sea animal
- 6 "Oh no!"
- 7 Serving of beer
- 8 Vodka brand
- 9 Cigarette residue
- 10 Levy that might support education: 2 wds.
- 11 Hang in the air

- 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

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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.

Family and friends 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 you've overcome 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



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 first-time 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 development," 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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