

Motion questions role in evidence probe

A court motion sheds light on the Orange County Sheriff's Department's handling of a case involving a detective's alleged misconduct.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Even after the Orange County Sheriff's Department discovered one of its investigators mishandled evidence and lied about it, the department still tasked him with probing into widespread evidence mishandling of his peers, according to a recent court motion.

Assistant Public Defender Scott Sanders alleges in his motion that the Sheriff's Department then tried to conceal information from the district attorney's office to lessen the chances that Det. Matthew LeFlore would be prosecuted.

LeFlore is one of the subjects of the widely reported evidence mishandling scandal, where Orange County sheriff's deputies were found to have booked evidence late or failed to book evidence at all but subsequently lied about it in reports.

For more than a year, Sanders has been revealing details about the scandal in court filings critical of the Sheriff's Department and the district attorney's response to the scandal.

Before the scandal was brought to light by an Orange County Register article in late 2019, the Sheriff's Department conducted two secret audits of the evidence mishandling.

LeFlore was chosen by the department along with a handful of others to take part in the investigations. A third audit conducted by the district attorney's office earlier this year led to 67 charges being dropped or reduced.

In his motion, Sanders says LeFlore had booked evidence late on several occasions and wrote five reports where he lied about when he booked evidence. The motion says the Sheriff's Department was aware of LeFlore's evidence mishandling misconduct before choosing him for the audit.

The Sheriff's Department later investigated LeFlore's misconduct and referred him to the district attorney's office for potential criminal prosecution along with 16 others for evidence mishandling.

Yet according to the motion, the department withheld important information from the district attorney's office, including the five reports in which LeFlore lied about booking evidence when he hadn't. Sanders points out in his motion that this type of information was included in the reports of the other Sheriff's Department personnel who were investigated.

"In hindsight, the 'investigation' and referral of LeFlore was likely only ordered because of concerns that the failure to act would raise potential com-

See **Evidence**, page R2



'CUE IT UP

Try 3 of the newest Orange County BBQ joints this Fourth of July weekend



Edwin Goei

A PLATTER at Heritage Barbecue in San Juan Capistrano is one of the many kinds of BBQ Orange County residents can access while celebrating the Fourth of July.

BY EDWIN GOEI

This is it. The Fourth of July we've all been waiting for. Now that the state has reopened, and you and everyone you know are vaccinated, it's finally time to celebrate the beginning of summer, if not the rest of our lives, by eating tons of charred meat together at a full-bore Independence Day BBQ.

But wait. Your backyard Weber grill is looking a bit rusty, and after slaving over a hot stove throughout the lockdown, you'd rather that someone else do the barbecuing. Thankfully when it comes to BBQ, there's no lack of options out there, especially when you consider that the term means a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

Whether it be a Texas-style slow-smoked brisket, an herb-packed Lao

See **BBQ**, page R5

A park honoring the first people of O.C. could open this summer



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

JUANEÑO SPIRITUAL LEADER Adelia Sandoval stands next to the Mother Tree, an oak on the grounds of one of the first Native American settlements in what became Orange County.

Members of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians are eager to unveil Putuidem Village, a 1.5-acre park on the Northwest Open Space in San Juan Capistrano.

BY BEN BRAZIL

For many years, the descendants of the original people of what is now Orange County have fought for a sliver of land dedicated to their history and tradition.

Tribal leaders have said that the park could be an important tool for educating the public and a vital gathering place for tribal members, where they could perform important ancient rituals.

Some tribal members have been waiting for a piece of dedicated land like the park for decades.

After several delays, the Putuidem Village is finally estimated to be completed by mid-August. The humble 1.5-acre passive park will include an amphitheater area with boulders and log seats, a trail and various depictions of the Juaneño way of life, including ramadas, kiichas — a thatch home, and manos — a ground stone tool. The surrounding areas of the park have native plant hab-

itat.

"We just don't want to be forgotten," said Adelia Sandoval, spiritual leader of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians. "It was a viable, beautiful thing that was going on here. The people living here, they kept everything in balance."

The sacred sites and lands of the Acjachemen descendants, whose history traces thousands of years, have been plundered, desecrated and devoured by development. They became known as the Juaneños after Spanish colonialists built Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1776. Today, there are about 1,900 members in the tribe.

The Putuidem Village was seen as a long-sought tribal victory when the City Council first approved the educational park in 2016. The Northwest Open Space, a 65-acre natural area near the 5 Freeway where the 1.5-acre municipal park is being built, is con-

See **Park**, page R4

OCSD AIR SUPPORT'S
Bell UH-1V Huey "Duke 7," right, after landing from a day of water drops. To the left, OCFA's Bell 412 and Helicopter Express' Bell 205A-1 depart to drop off wildland firefighters. It was at the end of the day's operations in October 2020.



Damon J. Duran

El Toro air station is now a helicopter base for wildfires

BY DANIEL LANGHORNE

Helicopter crews are once again flying into former Marine Corps Air Station El Toro. Rather than training for war, aircraft take on fuel and water to defend Orange County residents from another threat — wildfires.

Since at least 2017, the Orange County Fire Authority has used a stretch of runway as an emergency aviation base to refill as many as 15 helicopters with fuel and water closer to fire lines in South County.

"El Toro is a perfect central location that has really good infrastructure," Orange County Fire Authority pilot Joshua Murphy said. "We can get fuel there, people there and assets there to insure that quick turnaround of helicopters."

Every minute an aircraft isn't dropping water gives fire time to spread, Murphy said.

Last year, helicopters landed on a stretch of runway north of Marine Way. That runway has since been demolished to make way for the construction of a new Wild Rivers waterpark. Irvine still owns a former flight line off Cadence and Pusan Way that was once trafficked by Marine Corps aircraft, specifically CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters.

Hangars emblazoned with the names and insignia of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadrons 163 and 164 still look down on the flight line where fire engines now stage.

This fire season, it's not clear how many helicopters will be able to land on the flight line — primarily because it's much smaller than the former runway — but the Great Park will continue to serve as a staging area for firefighters, Battalion Chief Cheyenne Maule said.

"For helicopter operations, it will be limited there but we will still use parts of the Great Park," Maule said.

Last month, the Irvine City Council took no action on approving the Southern California Veterans Cemetery. The flight line is within the so-called ARDA site that is favored by some Orange County veterans as a cemetery site.

Five Point Communities, the developer of Great Park Neighborhoods, has no current intention to acquire the property from Irvine.

"We are not, at this point, planning or discussing any sort of future use for that land," said Steve Churm, a spokesperson for Five Points Communities.

The Fire Authority is able to activate the Great

Park for air operations during emergencies thanks to a mutual aid agreement with Irvine, Acting Orange County Emergency Management Director Michelle Anderson said.

Orange County emergency planners are studying alternative staging sites, including the OC Fair & Event Center, universities and larger church campuses throughout the county, Anderson said.

Irvine Regional Park has also been used as an emergency helicopter base but had to be evacuated during the Canyon 2 fire in 2017.

"There's definitely a special understanding of what the base meant and continues to mean for Orange County," Anderson said.

After 13 years as a U.S. Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin helicopter pilot, Murphy separated from the service last August and joined the Fire Authority. The Silverado Fire was his first multiday operation as a firefighting pilot. He felt a kinship with the long-departed Marine Corps aviators while flying onto the former El Toro runway.

"Now that I've switched over to the fire service world and it feels so similar," Murphy said. "We're continuing that tradition of agencies and individuals putting in that work where it needs to get

done."

There are also plans for the emergency aviation base beyond wildfires.

Irvine, Orange County Sheriff's Department, Orange Fire Authority and the California National Guard have trained on how the National Guard helicopters would deliver water and other supplies at the Great Park after an earthquake, tsunami, terrorist attack or other major disaster.

Damon Duran, 46, of Lomita photographed helicopters last year as they responded to wildfires from the Great Park.

As a professional services responder for the Orange County Sheriff's Department, he receives privileged access to document air operations.

"It's busy but choreographed," he said. "This area turns into a little airport."

He fondly remembers attending the Marine Corps Air Station El Toro Air Show and the solemn base closure ceremony with his dad.

"It brings back memories of how it used to be when I was a kid," Duran said. "I'd go to Wild Rivers and up in the tube [slide] to watch the aircraft doing their touch-and-goes."

DANIEL LANGHORNE is a contributor to Times Community News.

Household fireworks spread hazardous particles, study finds

BY BEN BRAZIL

Household fireworks spread hazardous materials into the air, especially in minority and lower socioeconomic communities in Southern California, UC Irvine researchers have found.

As the country celebrates Fourth of July this weekend, fireworks will spray fine particles of barium, copper, magnesium, strontium and other elements into the air, which can be inhaled, absorbed into the lungs and passed on to tissues throughout the body. Fireworks get their colors from these chemicals and metals.

The issue is more prominent in Southern California communities where regulations are less strict than the northern part of the state. Cities in Orange County that allow "safe and sane" fireworks include Anaheim, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Santa Ana, Stanton, Villa Park and Westminster.

UC Irvine professor Jun Wu, co-author of the study that was released this week, said the emissions could potentially pose risks to respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological health. She said the noise of the fireworks may also trigger mental health issues.

Wu said these household fireworks include seemingly innocuous sparklers and other fireworks that can be purchased from stands in the county. She also said that the type of fireworks launched at shows or at Disneyland may spread the same materials, but they are less concentrated because the fireworks detonate at a higher elevation.

"The household level can affect more locally because you're doing this on your property," she said.

For the study, researchers analyzed data collected from PurpleAir sensors, a low-cost, air monitoring network throughout the state. Researchers found that there was a steep increase of pollution from household fireworks last year when compared to 2019, likely due to the COVID-19 lockdown causing fireworks shows to be



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

A FIREWORKS stand is shown in Costa Mesa.

canceled, leaving many to celebrate the holiday at home.

Orange County experienced a 71% increase in fireworks emissions in 2020, the seventh most among all 58 counties in California. Los Angeles County experienced the highest emissions around Fourth of July in 2019 and 2020.

The researchers highlighted the finding that fireworks pollution was two times higher in communities with lower socioeconomic status and larger minority-group populations, and higher asthma rates.

"This work highlights the important role that policy and enforcement can play in reducing fireworks-related air pollution and protecting public health," Wu said. "As there is a patchwork of different restrictions and regulations regarding fireworks in our state, it's clear that a more coordinated approach would help people breathe easier during times of celebration."

Wu said the particles can float in the air for up to a week after Independence Day, so the public should make an effort to minimize exposure to the pollution.

"Those with children with asthma and people who are more susceptible will need to pay more attention to this," Wu said. "They can do some preventive measures, such as wear a mask to reduce the fine particulate matter exposure, close their doors and windows during July Fourth. Also, if they have an air filter, they should use that at home. And I really hope we can reduce the household fireworks."

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EVIDENCE

Continued from page R1

plaints of disparate treatment ..." the motion says. "A comparison of the investigation of LeFlore with others carried out by the same investigators makes it abundantly clear that there were very different objectives when it came to LeFlore.

"... The omission from the internal criminal report of other instances of evidence-related conduct by LeFlore was clearly designed to control the process and help deliver impunity for a member of the agency who seemingly should have been held to a higher standard, considering he was engaged in this behavior after investigating others for the same class of misconduct."

Initially, the district attorney's office declined to prosecute any of the sheriff's personnel who were referred but later reopened some of the cases. Sanders has maintained that this was done only after the issue was publicly exposed.

Eventually, at least 16 of the members were placed on the district attorney's Brady List, a record that district attorney's offices are supposed to update with the names of law enforcement personnel who have records of dishonesty, criminality and other issues that could affect their credibility as a witness. The motion says that LeFlore is on the Brady List.

The motion says the only case included in the Sheriff's Department's referral of LeFlore to the district attorney's office was a case in July 2018, following his work on the evidence mishandling audits.

LeFlore collected gun ammunition, methamphetamine, narcotics and a pair of boots while responding to a case and failed to book the items or write up a report on them. Instead,



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

O.C. SHERIFF'S Department headquarters and jails are at 550 N. Flower St. in Santa Ana.

about two weeks later, he left the boots on a counter, with the drugs and pipes inside the shoes, in a Sheriff's Department station with a note that said, "Free."

LeFlore ended up telling his supervisor that he collected the ammunition, then he said that he didn't remember the ammunition, then he told investigators that he may have discarded the evidence, the motion says.

"The timelines and assumptions made by the Public Defender's motion are wrong and serve to purposefully mislead," Sheriff Don Barnes said in an emailed statement. "We trust that the court and the public will see this as a blatant disregard for facts and focus on the criminal actions by the public defender's client in court, and not try a case through the media."

When asked whether the Sheriff's Department concealed most of LeFlore's misconduct from the district attorney's office, sheriff's spokesperson Jaimee Blashaw said in an email that "the district attorney's office was provided all the

information related to the investigation."

Through the motion, Sanders is seeking reports and other evidence that the sheriff's personnel involved in the case of his client, Brittany Shabakhti, falsely claimed to have booked evidence in past cases, lied about when they booked evidence or violated sheriff's policy dictating when evidence is required to be booked. LeFlore is a detective on Shabakhti's case, which involves drug- and gun-related charges.

In the motion, Sanders also says LeFlore improperly recorded and listened to private calls between a defendant and his attorney. For a three-year period, the telephone vendor the county contracts with for its jails recorded thousands of calls between inmates and their attorneys.

Sanders is also seeking further information from the department on sheriff's investigator Arthur Tiscareno, a key witness in Shabakhti's case. Tiscareno was promoted to investigator even though he booked evidence late 44 separate times after lying that he had already booked the evi-

dence, the motion says.

"It remains unclear why Tiscareno was never added to the 17 who were submitted for potential prosecution, as his conduct rivals that of the worst offenders who emerged from the First Audit," the motion says.

In his motion, Sanders also describes the promotions of two other sheriff's personnel. Although neither Victor Valdez or Philip Avalos are involved in Shabakhti's case, they demonstrate, similarly to LeFlore, that the department gives special treatment to certain members, Sanders said over the phone.

"When you're engaging in this favoritism and special treatment, we can't trust you in what you're turning over to us," Sanders said.

Sanders contends that the Sheriff's Department waited until after a Grand Jury report was published to promote current Sgt. Victor Valdez, who allegedly engaged in a sexual relationship with a female informant with a heroin addiction, secretly recorded phone conversations with prosecutors and failed to



Luis Sinco | Los Angeles Times

SHERIFF DON BARNES speaks during a media briefing.



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER Scott Sanders has filed a new motion against the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

book recorded interviews with suspects and witnesses.

"That would not seem to be in most places a good basis for career advancement," Sanders said over the phone.

In his motion, Sanders said that "leadership waited until the ink on the Grand Jury Report had dried and the public's appetite for the issues appeared to dissipate."

Valdez was partners with Avalos, who was also promoted by the department despite filing evidence late in a majority of his cases.

"These objectively unjustifiable promotions to leadership positions eviscerate the notion that the OCSD is authentically trying to

'change the culture and restore trust and confidence,'" the motion says, quoting the Grand Jury report.

The Sheriff's Department disputes the claims.

"The Sheriff's Department has a proven track record of fully cooperating with the Grand Jury's investigations," Blashaw said. "Personnel promotions are not timed to coincide with any report from the O.C. Grand Jury. Employee promotions are a competitive and objective process. In order to compete for a promotion, employee disciplinary incidents must be fully adjudicated."

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THE 7 THINGS TO LOOK FOR AT THE NEW WEED WONDERLAND NOT FAR FROM DISNEYLAND

BY ADAM TSCHORN

The first thing you need to know about the Southland's newest pot-superstore-meets-theme park — Planet 13 Orange County, which opened to the public in Santa Ana last week — is that it's big. Like furniture-store big, city Target big and largest-dispensary-in-California big. The second thing you need to know is that even if you've never heard of Planet 13's over-the-top approach to slinging weed (a larger flagship opened in Las Vegas in November 2018) and your knowledge of pot culture begins and ends with Cheech & Chong's 1978 stoner comedy "Up in Smoke," the immersive, entertaining and totally Instagram-worthy approach to cannabis commerce is going to become only more prevalent as the state's legal marijuana market matures.

That's because the over-the-top visuals and selfie-worthy backdrops are as much — if not more — a savvy marketing play as they are over-the-top entertainment. "We have a hard time advertising, because we keep getting shut down on Facebook and so on because we're cannabis, Planet 13's co-Chief Executive Larry Scheffler said during a pre-opening tour. "[Customers] advertise for us when they take a picture ... It's unbelievable. That's what's helping us grow so fast; it's the social media." Scheffler said the dispensary's proximity to Disneyland (the Anaheim theme park is 8.4 miles away) and the South Coast Plaza shopping center (3 miles away) and its adjacency to the 405 Freeway will help it tap into a Vegas-like flow of tourists. "Las Vegas gets about 55 million visitors a year; there's about 50 million to here — Orange County — so it's almost the same visitor volume," he said. (It doesn't hurt that Santa Ana



Gary Coronado | Los Angeles Times

BRIANNE PUFFER, left, of Long Beach and a friend take a photo in front of a restored VW Bus that emits smoke when a button is pushed from inside at a VIP event at Planet 13, which has an over-the-top superstore dispensary in Las Vegas.



Mark Potts
Los Angeles Times

THE MASSIVE red globe that marks the entrance to Planet 13 Orange County can be seen from blocks away.

is the only city in a county of more than 3 million residents with legal retail cannabis storefronts up and running.)

What, exactly, is on tap for cannathusiasts who trek to this Disneyesque dispensary? Below are the seven trippiest things that caught



Gary Coronado | Los Angeles Times

PLANET 13'S co-CEOs Larry Scheffler, second from left, and Bob Groesbeck, right, chat with guests at the June 24 VIP event at their new Orange County dispensary.

my attention during a walk-through of the O.C.'s newest palace of pot.

1. AIM FOR THE BIG RED GLOBE

The first visual you're likely to see — especially if

you're rolling in off the 405 and heading east — is the massive red orb shimmering with cascading water that marks the entrance to the dispensary. Big enough to be seen from several blocks away, the globe

represents the planet in the Planet 13 branding. (In case you were wondering, the numerical part of the name comes from the fact that the word marijuana starts with "M" — which is the 13th letter of the alphabet.)

2. CHECK-IN UNDER A WOODEN WAVE

In a nod to the surf and sand vibe of Southern California, the interior has several beachy elements, including an architectural wooden wave that crests over the check-in desk just inside the front door to the left.

3. WALK THROUGH A DIGITAL WATERFALL

One of the several focus-pullers in the lobby area is an 80-foot-wide digital waterfall that takes up the entire wall across from the check-in desk. It appears to cascade from the ceiling,

flowing and splashing around the arched portal that marks that entrance to the dispensary sales floor and onto faux rock outcroppings.

4. STROLL THE INTERACTIVE 'BEACH'

If you walk along the interactive computerized beach to the right of the arched entryway, you'll leave footprint-like marks in the digital sand that remain until the faux waves roll in and wash them away. If you're really paying attention, this is where you might spot a message in a bottle hidden near the shoreline and a delightfully mad crab that darts unexpectedly around the edge of the floor.

5. GET ON THE HOTBOX BUS

One of the most popular interactive elements of Planet 13 Las Vegas — a VW party bus — has been duplicated in the lobby here with surfer-stoner tweaks. While the bus' bright yellow, pink and purple paint job and surfboards strapped to the roof certainly make for a fun visual, what takes it to the must-share-on-social-media level of irresistibility is a green button just inside the sliding door labeled, "Get smoked out." Pressing the button fills the bus' interior with fake smoke and makes it appear that the occupants have been seriously hotboxing. ("People wait in line in front of the one in Vegas to get their picture taken," Scheffler said.)

6. CONFRONT A GIANT OCTOPUS

The visual centerpiece of the 16,500-square-foot, 50-cash-register retail sales floor is a 16-foot-tall sculptural installation of a bright red octopus perched — tentacles outstretched — atop another massive red orb. Despite being in the

See *Weed*, page R6



To all our Orange County customers, thank you.

From our Waste Management family to yours, please have a safe and

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!



Skateboard phenom Nyjah Huston, a rising Olympic star, blends in on SoCal streets

BY DAVID WHARTON

When the police show up — which they sometimes do — Nyjah Huston probably looks like any other skateboarder, hanging with friends, grinding rails in the park, doing kickflips off the stairs in front of a library.

His trim build and thin goatee are not so imposing. Maybe the tattoos covering his entire body, creeping up his neck almost to his face, make him seem tougher.

“Cops will sit us down on the curb,” he said. “I’ve never actually been arrested but they’ve put me in handcuffs multiple times.”

They may not know Huston is regarded as the greatest contest street skater of all time. They may not know that prize money and endorsements have made the 26-year-old Laguna Beach resident a millionaire several times over.

And the trick that earned him yet another X Games title last fall, the Caballeria backside noseblunt to fakie? Doesn’t matter. When Huston hits the streets, which he still does on a regular basis, he becomes just another punk skating on public property where such activity is strictly prohibited.

“That part of skating is never going to change and I don’t want it to,” he said. “It’s the cool part. We’re skateboarders, we have rebellious ways.”

Next month, Huston will play this misfit role on an international stage as his sport debuts at the Summer Olympics. The four-time world champion arrives in Tokyo with a backstory that includes both prodigious success and struggle — a difficult childhood, nagging controversy and legal troubles that go beyond curbside detentions. Though he is already famous with skaters and 4.6 million Instagram followers, the Games could make him a crossover star in much the same way that Shaun White became a household name after snowboarding’s debut at the Winter Olympics.

“People think of skateboarding as kids skating at the 7-Eleven down the street,” said Neftalie Williams, a USC postdoctoral scholar and Yale visiting fellow who studies the culture of the sport. “In simple terms, Nyjah is an amazing athlete pushing what we can do and what comes next.”

There wasn’t much conventional about the way Huston grew up. His Northern California family was Rastafarian, strictly vegan, not much television, tight-knit with all four boys and a sister home-schooled.

The father, Adeyemi, was a talented skater, so there were always skateboards around the house. Huston recalls scooting them across the floor as a toddler, soon learning to ride on his knees. In 2005, his parents bought a skate park near their hometown of Davis.

“As a family,” mother



Jay L. Clendenin | Los Angeles Times

NYJAH HUSTON, shown at his skate park in San Clemente, will be representing the U.S. as a member of the skateboarding team at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

Kelle said, “we were there six days a week.”

A young Huston blossomed. He was competitive by nature, refusing to go to bed until he beat his siblings at nightly board games. During the day, he applied an innate meticulousness to practice; he was the type of kid who arranged T-shirts by color in the drawer.

“He would go out into our skate park and do the tricks he already knew and do them in the exact order,” Kelle said. “He would not let himself move on to anything new until he had landed this long line of tricks.”

Though the sport has white, suburban roots, that did not prevent a skateboard company from discovering Huston — the son of a Black father and white mother — and signing him to a contract at age 7. Frail-looking with enormous dreadlocks, he entered a prestigious amateur contest in 2005 and took first place.

“Nyjah’s just sort of a rare breed,” Rob Dyrdek, a former pro skater and host of MTV’s long-running “Ridiculousness,” told the Times in 2010. “Someone that is so gifted and so focused at such a young age.”

For all his talent and devotion, Huston still felt “constant pressure from my dad. He was always pushing me to do really big rails. It was scary.” People in and around the family recall that life with Adeyemi — who could not be reached for this story — grew increasingly difficult as his son became a star.

Adeyemi wanted to “control a lot of situations,” an industry executive said, starting his own skateboard company with his son as



Jay L. Clendenin | Los Angeles Times

HUSTON IS SEEN holding a skateboard in a tintype photo.

front man. He moved the family into further seclusion in Puerto Rico, making it harder for Huston to attend contests and fulfill sponsorship obligations.

The boy turned professional at 11, but he struggled to replicate his amateur success.

“I was really shy because I didn’t have much of a social life,” Huston said. “The other skaters could tell. They could see I wasn’t having any fun.”

When Adeyemi and Kelle separated in 2008, Huston’s siblings returned to the mainland U.S. with their mother while he remained with his father. Two years later, after Kelle filed for di-

vorce and was granted full custody, Huston reunited with her, embarking on a very different sort of teenage life.

“Aside from skating, it was me being a normal kid,” he said. “I had friends. We were just skating and kicking it.”

Contest skating comes in several varieties. Vert style features aerial tricks off tall ramps. Park style is all about concrete quarter pipes and halfpipes common to community parks.

Street style is the most urban, with skaters sliding — or “grinding” — along handrails and the edges of planter boxes, executing



HUSTON, at age 11 the youngest X Games competitor ever, competes on his way to an eighth-place finish in the men’s Skateboard Street competition in Carson in 2006.

Reed Saxon Associated Press

maneuvers off stairs. “It’s closer to the ground,” Williams said. “Can you do all those tricks at speed, looking comfortable?”

Agility and flair have always been Huston’s strength and, if his life were a movie script, he might have started winning contests in those jubilant early days with his mother. But that’s not how it worked. Still young, he suspected that judges held his age against him because every stop on the professional circuit seemed to end with a second-place finish.

“I would give my all and not get what I thought I deserved,” he said. “It really hurt.”

His previous earnings were spent and he owed back taxes, putting his family in a financial pinch. “I didn’t even know what taxes were,” he said. “I was like, what? I have to give my money to who?”

Then, in 2010, Dyrdek

started a tour called Street League Skateboarding. A 15-year-old Huston won the inaugural event in Arizona and finished the season as league champion, bringing home as much as \$150,000 per contest.

“That was the moment when we needed something to happen,” he said. “It was a lot of relief.”

The following year brought an X Games victory, the beginning of a streak that has now reached 19 medals — most of them gold — over a dozen years, making him the most successful skater in the history of the premier competition.

“Not only was he consistent,” Dyrdek says, “he always did the hardest tricks.”

Executing a perfect 5-0 grind with his rear axle sliding along a rail, the board’s nose pointing skyward. Launching himself into the air, reaching down for a tail

See **Huston**, page R6

PARK

Continued from page R1

sidered one of the first Native American settlements in what became Orange County.

But in ensuing years, the city delayed the project, and tribal leadership questioned whether the park would ever be completed.

Though it was expected to be open as early as 2019, the Putuidem Village has been stalled by various financial obstacles.

The first came in 2018 when the city found that it lacked the funds to pay for the annual maintenance. Once that was resolved, construction bids exceeded the budget.

Then the city went back to the drawing board to put together a scaled-down version of the park. The city worked with a committee of Juaneño members — the Putuidem Committee — to revise the park.

“History is important, and this is the genesis of the history of San Juan,” said Thomas Toman, public works director for San Juan Capistrano. “I think everyone who lives here really appreciates that history.”

Construction of the park began in late fall 2020. Most of the elements are currently in the park, including picnic tables, benches, vegetation, an area where grain



Photos courtesy of Thomas Toman and Paul Meshkin

THE PUTUIDEM VILLAGE will honor the history of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians. It is estimated to be completed by mid-August.

can be ground, boulders that are directional markers and ramadas. Toman said they still have to finish the kichas and add some more additional signage.

A statue of Coronado, the Acjachemen’s first female chief, may not be ready by the time the park opens. The original artist of the statue passed away about two years ago.

“We are very close, it’s little things here and there that just need to be buttoned-up,” Toman said.

The project was delayed for about two months at the beginning of the stay-at-home order last year as the city assessed the financial impact of the pandemic before putting it back into motion.

Toman said he hopes the park will become a regular fixture for people who are visiting the historic missions of California.

“It will give you a more comprehensive view of our history,” Toman said. “I’m hoping that it’s really utilized by not just public



TRIBAL LEADERS have said that the park could be an important tool for educating the public and a vital gathering place for tribal members.

but schools, and I hope our local Acjachemen group really get involved. Maybe it brings them closer together and they get more involved putting on monthly events, things of that nature.”

Sandoval hopes she will be able to hold events at the park. Prior to the pandemic and the construction of the village, she regularly held gatherings at an old oak tree on the land, which she called “Mother Tree.”

For years, she visited the tree and honored it by sprinkling sage on it and saying a prayer. To San-

doval, the land is imbued with meaning.

“The European influence pretty much wiped out everything,” Sandoval said. “So for us to have any knowledge or memory of anything that our ancestors did ... we’re lucky we have what we have.”

As a spiritual leader, she hopes the village will be a place where she can educate the public and keep the old ways alive.

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Pacific Symphony returns

The Pacific Symphony's first live in-person performance since March 2020 will be to the tune of Elton John's hits like "Rocket Man" and "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road."

Tonight, the symphony will perform at the outdoor stage in Irvine's FivePoint Amphitheatre along with Craig A. Meyer and the Rocket Band in a tribute to the singer, a salute to the U.S. Armed Forces and a fireworks finale.

Meyer began impersonating John after repeatedly being approached about his close resemblance in looks and sound.

Previously, Meyer toured and recorded with Barry Manilow and Frankie Valli, performed in Broadway productions



Courtesy of Craig A. Meyer

CRAIG A. MEYER will perform the music of Elton John on July 4.

of "Meet Me in St. Louis," "Cats" and "Starlight Express" and appeared in guest roles on "Will & Grace" and "General Hospital" to name a few career highlights.

The concert is part of the symphony's Summer-Fest series, which will continue at the OC Fair &

IF YOU GO

What: Pacific Symphony Orchestra July 4th Spectacular - Elton John Tribute

Where: FivePoint Amphitheatre, 14800 Chinon, Irvine

When: July 4 at 8 p.m.

Cost: \$25 to \$100 for the single concert; \$63 to \$150 for a subscription to the three-concert series

Info: pacificsymphony.org

Event Center's Pacific Amphitheatre in Costa Mesa with "Toy Story in Concert" on Aug. 21 and "Tchaikovsky Spectacular" on Sept. 11 featuring the composer's 1812 Overture with live cannons and fireworks.

— From staff reports

OC Parks kicks off family-friendly summer concert and film series

OC Parks marked the change of the season mid-June with a screening of "The NeverEnding Story" and a performance by '80s cover band Flashback Heart Attack.

It's a kickoff to the department's free outdoor summer concert and film series scheduled every Thursday and Friday through Sept. 10.

"The County of Orange and OC Parks are thrilled to be able to present the summer concert and movie series in person once again," said Andrew Do, chairman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, in a statement.

"These concert and movie events provide a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages to come enjoy entertainment in a beautiful, outdoor setting."



Performance and screening locations rotate throughout Craig, Carbon Canyon, Yorba, Mason, Irvine, Laguna Niguel and Bluff parks. Concerts include Uptown Funk, Surf's Up, the Fenians, Queen Nation, Tijuana Dogs, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Sweet and Tender Hooligans, Family Style and Donavon

Frankenreiter. Film screenings vary from the 1988 "Willow" to "Dolittle," from 2020.

The family-friendly events include free parking with food and drinks available for purchase through on-site trucks and booths.

For the full schedule and COVID-19 guidelines, visit ocparks.com.

— From staff reports

BBQ

Continued from page R1

sausage or Pakistani chicken tikka, what we call BBQ across our cultural tapestry transcends any specific definition, except that it's always best enjoyed with a side of friends and family.

What follows are three of the newest places to eat BBQ in Orange County and get the meat sweats this Fourth of July.

HERITAGE BARBECUE
31721 Camino Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano

heritagecraftbbq.com/
Witness the lines that snake around the block at Heritage Barbecue in San Juan Capistrano, and you'd swear you were somewhere in Texas' BBQ Belt. The outdoor restaurant has inspired the same kind of cult following that brings the brisket faithful to queue up at all hours at such institutions as Franklin BBQ in Austin.

But when you factor in that Heritage opened only last August in the middle of a pandemic, it further underscores the remarkable career path of owner Daniel Castillo from a car mechanic and backyard BBQ hobbyist, to OCC Culinary Arts grad, to Whole Foods corporate chef and, finally, Southern California's buzziest (and busiest) BBQ pitmaster.

The BBQ that he cooks in outdoor smokers resembling SpaceX rocket boosters has garnered nods from the national press.

But taste it yourself and you'll also agree that Heritage Barbecue is very much in the same league as anything found in the Lone Star State.

Cloaked with a peppery concentrate of jet-black bark and gushing melted collagen and fat, Castillo's brisket is so tender and juicy, it's its own sauce.

His beef ribs are like candy and his pulled pork weeps soup. But the most sought-after item is his burnt ends.

The spine-tingling sensations it triggers as you eat it can only be described as orgasmic.

The sides, especially the rich Texas chili, the luscious brisket beans and the kaleidoscopic array of house-cured pickles, are by themselves already worthy of the car trip and the long lines.

After you experience this meal, just like the swallows that fly back to the Mission, you'll be forever drawn to return to Capistrano — but probably much more often than just once a year.



Photos by Edwin Goei

DINERS WAIT in line outside Heritage Barbecue.



BARBECUE offerings at Kra-Z-Kai's Laotian BBQ in Stanton.



WORKERS prepare food inside Bundoo Khan in Fullerton.

KRA-Z-KAI LAOTIAN BARBEQUE
12885 Beach Blvd., Stanton

krazkais.com/

Up until a couple of years ago, there were few places in the state where you can sample a really good Lao sausage. Now with two locations in Southern California, Kra-Z-Kai's Laotian Barbeque seemingly has the monopoly on it. The newest branch opened last fall in Stanton's Rodeo 39, and like the original outpost of Kra-Z-Kai's in Corona, its food court kitchen produces the best Lao sausage in the region.

The tangy tropical fragrance of lemongrass features prominently in the thick pork link, but even if you're a stranger to Laotian food, your tongue detects that other Asian herbs and spices are definitely in play. It's unknown how long owner

Musky Bilavarn took to hone his recipe, but one thing is for sure: This is as close as you can get to tasting the glistening sausage coils that roast over coals at open-air night markets in Laos itself.

In fact, the whole point of Kra-Z-Kai is to transport you to that Laotian street BBQ experience. Start your journey with that snappy-skinned sausage. Chase it with a balled-up morsel of glutinous sticky rice that functions like a side dish and utensil. Use the tips of your fingers to carry the rice and the sausage to your face. Then move on to the beef jerky, chicken, beef short ribs and pork spare ribs, which are marinated in a secret blend of oyster sauce and other seasonings. It turns what's typically sticky and sugary in American BBQ to something that's ultra-

savory and addictive.

Dribble the bracing lime-and-chili spiked fish sauce that comes with the lean pieces of sliced beef called "beef dip" on everything — it's electricity in liquid form.

For a side dish, pay the upgrade fee that substitutes the obligatory green salad for the shredded papaya salad. Dressed with funky-but-good dressing that surely involves one or more fermented sea creatures, this papaya salad could be eaten with rice and still be called a meal. But when paired with the Laotian BBQ meats, it is a refreshing palate cleanser much like dill pickles are to a pulled pork sandwich.

BUNDOO KHAN - THE ORIGINAL BBQ

2736 Nutwood Ave. Suite A, Fullerton

bundookhanusa.com/

The pieces of char-roasted beef called "bahari boti" from Bundoo Khan pack a wallop. They're so generously caked in spice paste marinade, it's almost a batter. And when you eat them,

you feel the slow burn overtake your mouth while your brow dampens and your pulse quickens.

Like anything that stimulates the rush of endorphins, you immediately want more. And so you do, eating one piece after another.

And as the spices smolder on your tongue with the half-life of something radioactive, it's natural to try to figure out what exactly is in that addictive seasoning blend. Forget about it. It's impossible to decipher.

There's certainly cumin, coriander, ginger, garlic and chilies, but you're better off just chalking up the rest to alchemy and magic.

You could eat the beef bahari boti, the ground meat stogies called seekh kabob or the crimson-tinted pieces of chicken tikka straight up.

But most customers pick them apart and wrap the pieces inside an oil-blistered paratha bread or a fluffy naan before adding thinly sliced red onion, tomato and cucumber to balance the punch. Raita (a tart-and-spicy

yogurt drizzle) and tamarind chutney are self-served from the spigots of a repurposed juice circulator, but all the barbecued meats — which are threaded through metal rods and roasted over an open flame by an army of cooks in a smoky room — are so flavorful it needs no assistance from any sauce.

To Pakistanis, the original Bundoo Khan, which opened in 1948 in Karachi, is legendary. And its founder, Al-Haaj Bundoo Khan, is an icon akin to Harlan Sanders and Julia Child wrapped into one.

It is for this reason that this first American outpost is already bustling on weekends despite being open less than two months.

Families from all over converge to this normally quiet strip mall across from Cal State Fullerton in a pilgrimage to taste the BBQ of their homeland. You should too. Just bring a terry cloth towel for your sweat.

EDWIN GOEI is a contributor to Times Community News.

TICKETS START AT \$25

REMEMBER WHEN
ROCK WAS YOUNG
THE ELTON JOHN TRIBUTE

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Elton John Tribute

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