

Will 'Fenders' replace 'Indians' at O.C. school?

New mascot suggestion for Fullerton Union High follows state law that bans 'derogatory' Native American nicknames.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

For decades, Fullerton Union High School's "Indians" nickname has prompted protests from activists who claim it is offensive to Native Americans.

One of the oldest campuses in Orange County, Fullerton Union High School has since retired "Willie Ugh," a student mascot clad in Native American garb, and introduced a buffalo mascot, but it remains the "Home of the Indians" with a mural of a Native American man in a headdress.

Most recently, an online petition demanding a new nickname for the high school circulated in 2020 and gathered more than 7,000 signatures, to no avail.

With Gov. Gavin Newsom approving the California Racial Mascots Act in September, public schools will be banned from using an expanded list of "derogatory" Native American terms including "Indians," by July 2026.

Fullerton Union High School's nickname may be on borrowed time.

Taking a proactive approach, former Assemblyman Chris Norby wrote the Fullerton Joint Unified High School District Board of Trustees and Fullerton Union High School administra-

See *Indians*, page A2

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Courtesy of Unveil Gallery

ARTISTS ARE NURTURED AT UNVEIL GALLERY'S EXHIBITION, 'A CLOVER AND ONE BEE' PAGE A3

THE HILBERT MUSEUM MAPS OUT THE TRAVELS OF PAINTER TIMOTHY J. CLARK PAGE A7



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

MEMBERS OF the Fountain Valley High Royal Regiment band, including Rosxel Ludovice, the trumpet section leader, in the school's band room on Wednesday. The marching band won the Division 3A title for the California State Band Championships Southern California field tournament.

Coronation for Fountain Valley's Royal Regiment

BY ANDREW TURNER

Rosxel Ludovice picked up a trumpet for the first time in the sixth grade at Masuda Middle School.

For as long as he could remember, the draw to band and to the performing arts had been about the music itself.

Playing music is an artistic expression of oneself. Take Ludovice, for example, who still finds time to play "Star Wars" sheet music during his side sessions.

What Ludovice, 17 — now a senior and a section leader at Fountain Valley High — did not realize was how much being part of the school band would come to be defined by the collective experience.

"It's the connection you have with everyone in the band," Ludovice said. "That is what you remember."

The class of 2026 is the first to experience four full seasons of marching band since the coronavirus pandemic. The Royal Regiment, as the band is called at Fountain Valley High, has been a top performer.

Fountain Valley had its crowning moment when it won a 27-team competition for the Division 3A title in the California State Band Championships Southern California Division on Nov. 16 at Capistrano Valley High in Mission Viejo.

"At first, it was a feeling of disbelief because for all of high

See *Royal*, page A3



COLOR GUARD members Chloe Vu, Vera Zachary and Ava Ly, from left, of the Fountain Valley Royal Regiment enjoy a laugh.

'Highest level of integrity': Grand jury report affirms credibility of O.C. elections

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

A comprehensive review of the 2024 general election in Orange County found no evidence of fraud or interference, according to a new Orange County Grand Jury report.

Released this month, the 25-

page report further concluded that O.C.'s voting system, which services the seventh largest voting district in the nation with a population greater than 21 states, displayed the "highest level of integrity."

Registrar of Voters Bob Page thanked the grand jury for their

work.

"We are dedicated to continuing our tradition of excellence for each and every election we conduct so that we may inspire confidence and trust in the democratic process," he added in a prepared statement.

The report was prompted by

letters received from residents who questioned the integrity of the county's voting system over allegations of forged ballot signatures, noncitizen voting and duplicate ballots, among other claims popularized by podcasts,

See *Affirms*, page A4



James Carbone

MEMBERS OF the media tour the game room and lounge of the Olive Crest Bellflower Drop-in Center on Tuesday. The drop-in centers, which offer basic needs but also vital services, are part of a cross-county effort sparked by a \$10-million grant from the state of California to help underage victims of sex trafficking.

Olive Crest launches drop-in centers to support young sex trafficking survivors

BY MATT SZABO

Olive Crest Chief Executive Officer Donald Verleur knows that building a relationship with underage sex trafficking survivors can be tenuous at best.

They have been lied to in the past, after all.

"Even inviting one of these children to go to lunch is complicated," Verleur said. "They're thinking, 'OK, why do you want to take me to lunch? Do you want something back from me, a transaction?'"

Building a relationship is important. Youth who visit one of Olive Crest's new drop-in centers will receive a place for basic needs, such as meals and clothing, but also access to other vital

services.

The nonprofit, which is headquartered in Santa Ana, held a press conference Tuesday morning in Bellflower, where one of the drop-in centers is located.

Olive Crest is also opening drop-in centers in Anaheim and San Diego, as part of a cross-county effort to provide services and safety for minors in crisis. The nonprofit plans to launch another drop-in center in Los Angeles County, two more in the Inland Empire and one in Las Vegas.

Children and teens can access the centers on their own or be referred by law enforcement agencies, human trafficking task

See *Centers*, page A7

Anti-hate groups critical of O.C. hate crime report

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

At first glance, Orange County appeared to have reversed a years-long trend of rising hate crimes, according to a new annual report.

Despite the early tensions of the Israel-Gaza war and a polarizing election season around the corner, the 2023 Orange County Hate Crime Report found that hate crimes in O.C. against African Americans, Jewish Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders all declined.

Attacks against Arab Americans, Muslims and LGBTQ+ people remained the same, as hate crimes declined overall for the first time since 2016.

By contrast, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations' recent "No More Silence" hate crimes report for 2023 charted a dramatic 45% increase, including the largest number of bias-motivated attacks against African Americans, Latinos, Jewish and LGBTQ+ people ever recorded.

Instead of finding the O.C. report encouraging, local civil rights groups and community organizations that collaborated on previous hate crime reports for the county are criticizing its revised methodology.

"When we see this report include only police data without collaboration with local organizations, we know already that it's going to be data that is incomplete or undercounted," said Nikki Oei, manager for Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance's "Stop the Hate" program. "The biggest challenge is historical mistrust within communities, not just with law enforcement but all government agencies."

In a departure from past years, Groundswell, a nonprofit that the Orange County Board of Supervisors declined to contract with again in June, did not assist the commission in compiling hate-related statistics.

Groundswell collaborated on past reports with groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Los Angeles, the Anti-Defamation League, Stop AAPI Hate and the LGBTQ Center O.C., all of which collect reports of hate crimes and incidents from their respective communities on their own.

Absent that, no statistics on "hate incidents," which can include yelling racial epithets or distributing hate leaflets on cars or at homes that are otherwise not prosecutable, were included in the report, which relied on law enforcement data on reported hate crimes only.

"This is consistent with hate crime only reporting from other counties such as Los Angeles County," said Molly Nichelson, a county spokesperson. "Due to the limitations of hate incidents, such as potential underreporting [or] overreporting, differences in tracking incidents, inability to determine duplication of incident reporting, it was

determined to not include them in this report."

Anti-Asian hate crimes in O.C. showed a 50% decrease, which is an outlier from other county hate reports.

"Without hate incident data, we have a very incomplete picture of how Asian American and Pacific Islander communities experience hate, especially for our youth and older adults," Oei said.

The report also noted 14 anti-Jewish hate crimes in 2023, down from 19 the year before. The downtrend contrasts with the ADL's data for 2023, which showed an uptick of 88 hate-motivated crimes and incidents in O.C. and Long Beach.

"Given the changes in how the data appears to be formulated, we need to be a little thoughtful about how we engage with the current statistics for 2023," said Matt Friedman, regional director for the ADL in Orange County and Long Beach. "Orange County does not seem to be reflective of statistics we're seeing in other places, whether nationally, in the state or other Southern California counties."

Friedman said that hate activity, overall, is underreported and hopes that the county will return to collaborating with organizations like his own for future hate-tracking efforts.

The possibility of a "slight underreporting" of hate crimes was acknowledged in the report, which pointed to partial data submitted by Costa Mesa, Garden Grove, Westminster and Orange police departments on account of records management issues.

One finding that remained consistent with past reports is that African Americans, who comprise just 2.3% of the county's population, are the most targeted group for reported hate crime attacks.

For other anti-hate organizations, an incomplete picture of O.C.'s hate climate goes beyond partial reporting by some law enforcement agencies.

"We know that in 2023, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Arab hate were at an all-time high," said Amr Shabaik, CAIR-CA's legal director. "The exclusion of community-based organizations and the sole reliance on incomplete numbers of hate crimes reported to law enforcement does not capture this reality."

Shabaik added that CAIR's national organization received the most biased-based complaints in its 30-year history in 2023, with the local Anaheim-based office reporting 600 complaints alone.

Like community organizations, O.C. school districts also did not contribute any hate-related data, even as the previous report noted schools as the most likely location for hate incidents to occur.

Aside from the accuracy of the statistics, another criticism of the report is its lack of any prevention strategies outside of the O.C.



Eric Licas

SUPERVISOR DON WAGNER addressed the commission in support of Rabbi Rick Steinberg during a meeting last year.

district attorney's own community outreach efforts.

"Because community organizations are not a part of developing this report, there are [fewer opportunities to provide] recommendations for how to move forward," Oei said.

"There's no communication on our end to be able to support the county's efforts for hate prevention, which we are always willing to do."

"The county can now take this report, expand it to be more comprehensive by including community

and victim self-reports of hate as well as work closely with community organizations and resources to develop a prevention plan and strategies on addressing hate together."

The county's report arrived amid a reshuffling of the O.C. Human Relations Commission.

In addition to declining to renew Groundswell's contract, supervisors are also set to vote on Jan. 14 on a number of changes to the commission's bylaws set to strengthen the county's control over it, including a ban on statements or press releases issued by the commission on its own behalf.

Shabaik called the proposed revamps an attempt to "silence and weaken" the commission.

"We are also concerned that the efforts to leave out community-based organizations and to muzzle the

speech of the commission are part of efforts to shut down voices and discussions of the rise in hate against Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims and how that rise in hate is directly related to the ongoing genocide being committed against Palestinians by Israel," Shabaik added.

After the onset of the Israel-Gaza war in late 2023, commissioners published separate statements on antisemitism and Islamophobia that soon became embroiled in controversy amid the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Pro-Palestinian activists turned out to commission meetings last year and called for the resignation or removal of Commissioner Rabbi Rick Steinberg over his vote against the Islamophobia statement, which he

See **Report**, page A3

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INDIANS

Continued from page A1

tors with an idea for a new nickname for his old alma mater: the Fenders.

"Some may wonder why this ex-politician guy cares about mascots?" Norby said. "Well, I care because I'm an alumni and because I like individual mascots."

He's candid about not favoring the law but sees an opportunity to get ahead of it with a true Fullerton tribute.

The proposed Fenders nickname would be an homage to Leo Fender, a former Fullerton High School graduate who famously invented the Stratocaster electric guitar in 1954.

Fender and his invention are the subject of a permanent exhibit at the Fullerton Museum Center down the street from the high school. He was posthumously inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1992 and was inducted into the Orange



Gabriel San Román

FULLERTON UNION High School's longtime nickname may change due to a new state law largely banning Native American terms for mascots at public schools.

County Hall of Fame last year.

Liking the alliterative

sound of the "Fullerton Fenders," Norby had an artist friend draw up some

sample cartoons for a new mascot, which he shared with the school board and

campus administrators.

So far, his pitch for a new nickname has been met with curiosity. Norby interviewed with the editorial board of the *Tribe Tribune*, Fullerton High School's student newspaper. Students liked the Fenders, but also had an idea for the "Flyers," since Fullerton is home to Orange County's only city airport.

"The law is so new that I don't think the district, or a lot of districts, are sure how to respond to it," Norby said. "I did get a call directly from the superintendent and we had a very positive discussion."

He has also spoken with school board members, including board president Vicki Calhoun.

Orange County has tackled thorny mascot, nicknames and building names before.

The Fullerton Joint Union High School District Board of Trustees voted in 2020 to drop "Louis E. Plummer" from Fullerton's High School's auditorium

on account of Plummer having been a past member of the Ku Klux Klan in Orange County.

In 2021, Anaheim High School students voted to keep their "Colonists" nickname but supported dropping its pilgrim-styled mascot. Four years before that vote, Anaheim Union High School District trustees voted to rebrand Savanna High School's "Rebels" mascot away from its Confederate origins, after a student poll showed support for the move.

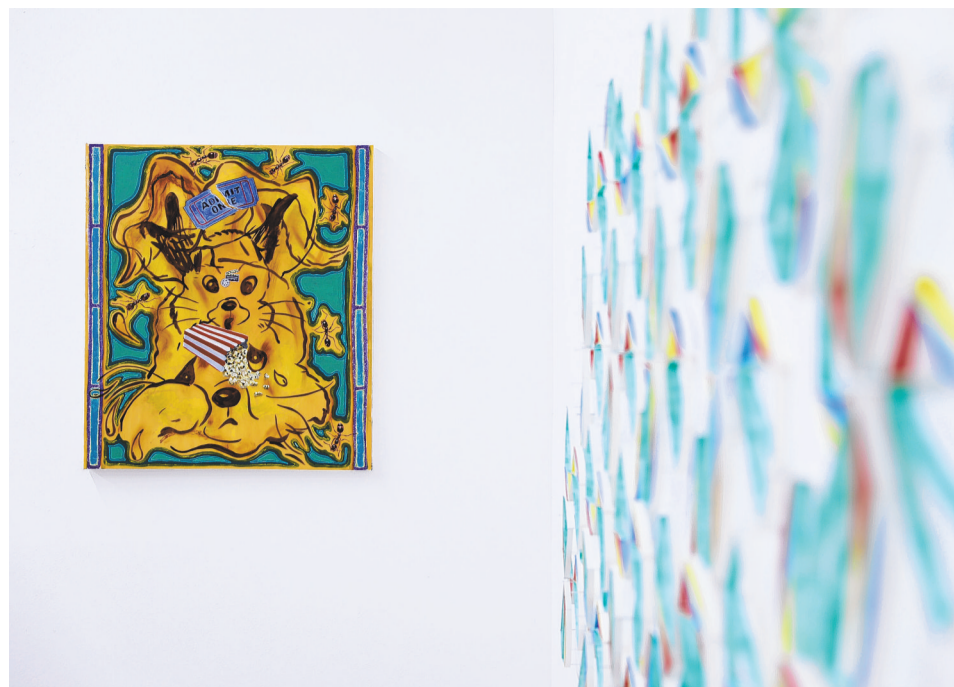
Norby thinks Fullerton Union High School will have to follow Anaheim's footsteps, in some way.

"Ultimately, there needs to be a process where nominations are made from the community, alumni and students," Norby said. "You really need student involvement, but that's something the administration would have to set up."

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Artists nurtured at Unveil Gallery's latest exhibition

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA



"RAGING FUNNY Bunny, (That's Entertainment)" by Greg Eberhardt is on display at Unveil Gallery. The group exhibition, "A Clover and One Bee" opened yesterday.

Emily Dickinson's succinct poem "To make a prairie" begins with the line "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee."

In a few words, the 19th-century poet pinpoints the multifaceted relationship between the creator and what they create, said Lorraine Han, the director at Unveil Gallery in Irvine.

"I was really touched by this phrase," she said. "Bees, they pollinate clovers, and our artists really nurture their creations."

Han borrowed the phrase for the Gallery's latest group exhibition, "A Clover and One Bee" opened Saturday. The dynamic showcase includes the work of six artists: Alex Paik, Lauren Goldenberg Longoria, Mimi Ding, Greg Eberhardt, Jiang Xiaohan and Sebastian Loo, all of

IF YOU GO

"A Clover and One Bee" opened at Unveil Gallery on Jan. 11 at 200 Technology Drive, Suite F in Irvine and will remain on view until Feb. 1.

whom have spent time attending to their craft.

Chicago-based painter and poet Xiaohan, for example, draws on recollections of her childhood in Northern China, and her oil painting on burlap ("Untitled," 2024) is an interpretation of nature that glows like a warm memory.

At the center of the exhibition, artist, community builder, curator and writer Alex Paik presents a site-responsive installation that at first glance appears to be a stained-glass floral design but it is, in fact, gouache and paper.

"Alex is really fascinated with the adaptability and the interdependence of form, color and structure," said Han.

Each time his piece, "Partial Octagon (Emerald Green)," 2024, is installed, the dimensions vary in consideration of the gallery space.

"It is different each time depending on the space that has been curated," said Han. "Alex was here the other day, doing the installation, and he spent about two hours by himself, navigating through the space and thinking about what kind of shapes, what kind of narrative he wanted to focus on here."

The geometrically structured paper forms call back to the exhibition's title, positioned as four-leaf clovers. Each piece is hand-painted with water-medium paint known as gouache and reflects light to cast a faint glow of green against the white wall where it is hung. Depending on the way the light enters the room, the installation becomes more saturated and vibrant in its color.

Greg Eberhardt's two works in the show use color too, and also humor.

"For Greg, his work is about reflecting the shifting state of being," said Han.

"Sleepy Guy, Traveler," 2023, features a cartoonish character in a nightgown and nightcap, holding a candle aloft, layered in different states of consciousness. For "Raging Funny Bunny, (That's Entertain-

ment)," 2024, a cute but emotional animal is juxtaposed against symbols of inexpensive entertainment.

Since opening in 2023, Unveil Gallery has worked to showcase not only international artists but local ones. Lauren Goldenberg Longoria, a recent graduate of UC Irvine's master of fine arts program is featured in the exhibition with two powerful pieces made using handmade paper. Longoria sifts through ephemera and, working with the recycled material during her paper-making process, creates space for deep meditation on the previous life of the objects.

"Paper, to Lauren, is a very important material because it has a long history," said Han.

A vast yellow sculpture ("Untitled," 2024) on a gallery wall fashioned from handmade paper is very light but appears to be as heavy as concrete. In spite of using material considered disposable, Longoria has found a way to give paper some significant weight.

Han emphasizes she hasn't seen anything like Longoria's work before, and she feels honored to support her.

"As a gallery in Irvine, we want to support more artists that are closely related to the community and to our local art scene," said Han.

The show's title not only underscores the relationship between the bee and the clover, between the artists and the art, but it points out the how the work of a creature thought to be small and insignificant can lead to something as vast as a prairie. In some respects, Han said she sees Unveil Gallery as the bee.

"Our artists are the clovers, and we are probably the bee, hopefully the queen bee," Han laughs. "But our mission at Unveil is to be able to spread the word of these artists, to pollinate the clovers."

Essentially, Han hopes Unveil Gallery can make a prairie.

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



ROYAL

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school, we've come short, second place two years in a row to being division champions," Ludovice said. "After my upperclassmen graduated, when I came into a position of leadership, all I wanted to do was make it up for them and win a division championship before I graduated."

The Royal Regiment then placed second to Delano Cesar E. Chavez in the Division 1-3 combined state finals the following week at Bolsa Grande High in Garden Grove.

Among the 16-team field for bands with 70 members or less, half the competing schools were from Orange County — Aliso Niguel, Capistrano Valley, Laguna Hills, Rancho Alamitos, La Quinta, Bolsa Grande and Westminster.

State champion Woodbridge headed another five county teams in the Division 4-6 finals, a group that also included El Toro, La

Habra, Sunny Hills and Marina.

Haruka Koyama and Thomas Hartman are the current drum majors for the Royal Regiment. The field show was "Appassionata," and last year's was "Radiance," both of which Jackson Lai, the school's instrumental music director, has played a big part in writing.

Sophomore Avé Acosta, 16, had two older sisters in color guard who helped shape her path. She recalls pretending to make her own shows in her room, using brooms to replicate flags.

"Appassionata" was a four-movement show, but Acosta especially felt an element of empowerment when performing with the instrumental music used in one of singer Adele's songs playing behind her.

"We were told that it was supposed to be like painting," Acosta said. "We were painting, and we used orange silks, and color guard was supposed to represent the fire. During

our ballad, we used the big, blue swing flags to Adele's 'Set Fire to the Rain.' ... When the trumpets went blaring behind us, we're like, 'Oh yeah. Yeah, we know what we're doing.'"

The coronavirus pandemic brought its own set of challenges for marching bands. Competition division requirements were reduced concerning the number of members.

Lai has relied on a culture of encouragement and recognition to bring about enthusiasm within the program. A state divisional title should help reverse a trend of declining numbers.

"Hopefully, more and more people join, now that the program is gaining more traction again," Ludovice said.

"We have to be positive and motivate them and encourage them to be able to do it," Lai added. "One thing I found that has been a challenge is that attention spans have been just a hair shorter [since the pandemic]. ... It does seem a



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

PLAQUES AND awards from the 2024 field season for the Fountain Valley Royal Regiment on display in the school's band room.

little frivolous that we have to encourage the students to do something that they should come in wanting to do, but I think it's still an art form that needs to be

nurtured and developed.

"As teachers, we have to sort of propel that a lot more. I think COVID definitely didn't help with the online learning, where if a

student checks out, they just turn off their camera and go take a nap. It's slowly trickling away, but I

See **Royal**, page A6

Orange County seeks members for its Grand Jury

BY ERIC LICAS

Civic-minded members of the community interested in holding their leaders and institutions accountable have until Friday, Jan. 17, to apply for a seat on the Superior Court of Orange County's Grand Jury.

The 19 members of the watchdog panel are tasked with investigating misconduct by public officials or issues touching on practically any aspect of county and city government. Reports they've conducted over the past year have examined the integrity of the 2024 election, local law enforcement's handling of calls involving people with mental health conditions

and the use of artificial intelligence in schools.

Grand jurors serve for one fiscal year, from July 1 through June 30. The position is a full-time commitment, with members meeting five days a week at the Central Justice Center, 700 W. Civic Center Drive, Santa Ana, and occasionally outside of regular business hours. Their duties may also send them into the field to tour public facilities like animal shelters, schools, homeless shelters, jails and critical infrastructure sites.

The position offers \$1,000 monthly, so applicants typically don't sign up for all that work for the money. But their efforts have the potential to im-

prove the lives of Orange County's 3.1 million residents by shining a light on some of the most important issues they face.

"Any person can be considered an excellent candidate," Orange County Superior Court spokesman Kostas Kalaitzidis said. "The Grand Jury should have a wide variety of people representing different life experiences."

Applicants must be U.S. citizens who are at least 18 years old and need to have lived in Orange County for at least a year. They must also submit to a background check and have their signature verified by a notary.

Other qualities of strong candidates listed on the

Superior Court's website include:

- A general knowledge of the functions, authorities and responsibilities of the county and city governments and other civil entities;
- Research abilities, including complex reading capabilities, background in accessing/analyzing facts and report writing;
- Substantial background in group/committee work;
- Respect and objectivity concerning the positions and views of others.

During the selection process, up to 90 potential jurors are selected for interview by a committee of sitting judges presiding over Orange County's

courtrooms. They narrow the field down to 30 names. Those get written down and placed in a box. The 19 that are randomly drawn become the members of the new Grand Jury, while the others may be called upon to serve as alternates. Applicants who apply by the deadline are invited to an orientation session on Feb. 7 beginning at 10 a.m. at the courthouse in Santa Ana. Interviews with judges from the selection committee run from March 24 through April 11.

Shortlisted candidates will be notified May 8, and the drawing to select the grand jury's 19 members happens May 16. They're formally sworn in on July 1,

if everything goes according to schedule.

"Serving on the Grand Jury has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life," a member of the 2024-25 Grand Jury member told Superior Court officials in a statement.

Those interested can apply online at ocsuperior.court.atlassian.net/service-desk/customer/portal/501/group/249/create/989.

People can also print out a physical application and submit it to the court's executive officer, David H. Yamasaki, at 700 Civic Center Drive West, P. O. Box 1970, Santa Ana 92701.

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AFFIRMS

Continued from page A1

social media and websites.

Election denial remains a constant theme at public comments during Orange County Board of Supervisor meetings. Last month, the Republican Party of Orange County issued a statement against "false claims of voter fraud" related to allegedly nefarious "ballot discrepancies" that went viral amid the 2024 election.

To address concerns, grand jurors interviewed officials and staff with Orange County Registrar of Voters.

Members also made scheduled and unscheduled visits to the Registrar of Voters facility in Santa Ana, official ballot drop boxes and voting centers throughout O.C. on Election Day and afterward to observe how ballots were cast, collected and counted.

The report outlined in granular detail the mechanics of the county's voting system, including procedures for official ballot drop boxes and mail-in ballots, which have been

the subject of conspiracy theories.

Grand jurors found that drop boxes are locked with a unique key specific to each one. They observed how election workers retrieved ballots from drop boxes every day and had their movements tracked by GPS.

"At no time do the [Registrar of Voters] employees touch the ballots," the report stated.

Once mail-in and provisional ballots are collected, staffers verified all signatures in accordance with FBI standards and training.

The Registrar of Voters also conducted risk limiting audits, which are not required by state law, to further ensure the accuracy of election results and subjected machines to rigorous testing.

Given the grand jury's conclusion that O.C. elections are "fair, secure and transparent," will the report change any minds about election integrity?

"We know that when people have unfounded anxieties, it's not often the case that a factual report will alleviate them," said Jon Gould, dean of UC Irvine's School of Social

Ecology. "It's more about what the basis for the anxiety is in the first place."

A poll conducted last year by the UC Irvine School of Social Ecology found that 26% of Orange County adults didn't believe President Joe Biden legitimately won the 2020 election.

More than half of Republicans surveyed disputed the 2020 presidential election as free and fair.

"We can't ignore the fact that one of the major candidates for president over the last eight years has been sowing distrust in the election system," Gould said. "The grand jury report should put to bed any of those concerns because it's thorough in showing just how professionally run the election system is in Orange County."

Gould added that election denial, which tends to sway more right-wing, could persuade potential voters not to participate in elections, a concern that the Republican Party of Orange County shared in response to election fraud claims that spread after Democrats edged Republicans in key local congres-



ORANGE COUNTY Elections workers swap out one empty bin with another at the ballot drop box in Huntington Beach. The Orange County Grand Jury issued a report on O.C.'s voting system and found no evidence of fraud or interference with regard to the 2024 election.

File Photo

sional races.

In December, the party's election attorney reached out to Page.

A statement that followed from the O.C. GOP offered factual explanations in response to fraud claims, including why the Registrar of Voters issued more ballots than there are registered voters, as voters who did not bring their mailed ballot while voting in-person were issued a duplicate ballot.

"Any voice that voters find to be credible that reassures them about the factual integrity of the voting systems is important,"

Gould said.

In the statement, the O.C. GOP made known its continued support for electoral reforms such as Voter ID and an end to universal vote-by-mail.

As part of its undertaking, the grand jury report also examined why O.C. election results take a long time to count, particularly with mail-in ballots.

Grand jurors noted that signature verification practices are "time intensive but essential for election integrity."

State law also doesn't require election results be finalized until Dec. 5.

"Among the claims made by those who challenge the trustworthiness of the voting process is that the vote count was manipulated during the period between the end of voting and December 5, 2024," the report read. "We found this claim to be without merit."

In a final vote of confidence, the report had no recommendations for the Registrar of Voters on issues to address or ways to improve O.C.'s voting system.

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By Stella Zawistowski

ACROSS

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DOWN

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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.

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

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

- 2 Like some symmetry
- 3 Around
- 4 Juice suffix
- 5 Part of LNG
- 6 End in __
- 7 Freaks (out)
- 8 Forever and ever
- 9 First name in landscape
- photography
- 10 Prof helpers
- 11 Miranda of "Homeland"
- 12 Final battles
- 13 Where the walls have ears?
- 14 "That's a big __"
- 21 Colorful wraps
- 24 Bread, e.g.
- 25 Wretched

- 27 Air out?
- 29 Media for PC games, once
- 31 Plot lines?
- 32 Gemma of "Crazy Rich Asians"
- 33 Safe job
- 35 Released inconspicuously
- 36 Multipocketed garment
- 37 Sp. miss
- 38 Upright part
- 39 Location with masks
- 44 "Impressive!"
- 46 InDesign company
- 47 Meat grinder?
- 48 Gulps
- 50 Boba tea option
- 52 Pluviometer measure
- 53 Jimmy V Award for Perseverance, for one
- 54 Abundance in Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni
- 56 "Be on the lookout" msg.
- 57 Crèche figure
- 59 Tree hugger?
- 60 __ factor

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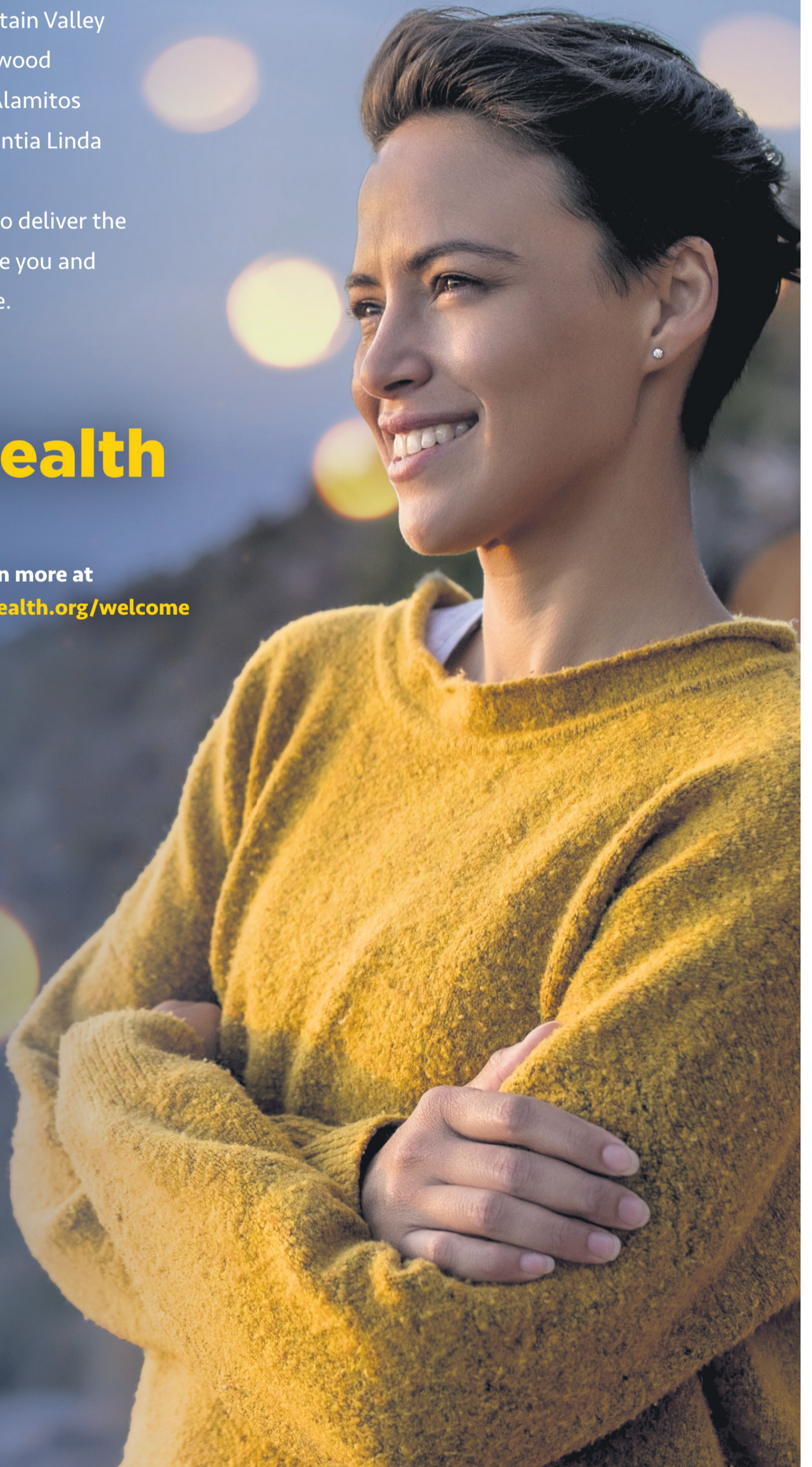
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MAILBAG

Library petitions head to H.B. council

Dedicated Huntington Beach residents worked for months to obtain much more than the minimum signatures required on two ballot initiatives for the protection of our beloved library. The Orange County Registrar of Voters has confirmed the petitions have enough signatures at the request of the previous city clerk. One petition seeks to overturn the formation of an appointed book review committee, the second aims to stop the privatization of the library system.

The next step is for the City Clerk to confirm the validity of the petitions. Should the initiatives come before the City Council, members could adopt the initiatives outright, order a report to be presented to them within 30 days or place the initiatives in a special election or the next general election in November 2026. But time is running out! Hopefully, the council members will show they represent not just a faction of MAGA supporters but all H.B. residents. Can we trust these council members to respect the rights of H.B. citizens, or will they once again try to stall and delay the voters? Time and again, this council has used the term "char-

ter city" as a blanket excuse to sidestep transparency and common sense.

Consider the H.B. Airshow settlement — a 40-year financial disaster that saddles taxpayers with \$1 million in costs each year. Citizens had to resort to litigation just to obtain a copy of this baffling agreement. This lack of transparency and accountability is a slap in the face to H.B. taxpayers. It's time for the council to stop stonewalling and start respecting the voices and rights of the community.

Kathleen Bunge
Huntington Beach

Supporters of Huntington Beach Public Library reached a major milestone last month when the O.C. Registrar of Voters provided signature verification services on a citizen-led ballot initiative seeking to overturn the controversial children's library book review board. Over 17,000 Huntington Beach residents signed the petition to prevent political appointees from being the primary decision-makers in determining what books are available for youths 17 and under.

Despite the strong community support for this measure, City Atty. Michael



James Carbone

NANCY CURTIS, right, speaks during a March 2024 Huntington Beach City Council meeting where members weighed privatizing public library operations.

Gates publicly declared last year that he will sue the state over the new law, "California Freedom to Read Act," to ensure that the book-banning review board can go forward in Huntington Beach. Last fall, in an interview with radio host John Kobylt, Gates stated that books in the children's section of our library are "obscene ... some call them pornographic, lewd, sexually explicit ... A lot of uh, you know, homosexual ... sex content."

I wish our city attorney would provide a list of the books he described in the interview. As a longtime library volunteer and supporter, I have never seen these books in the children's section. In fact, the only books that have been relocated from the children's section to the adult section, based on a directive from the city attorney, are potty training and puberty books. Where is the pornography? If our city attorney and City Council members are so

concerned, why don't they show us?

Carol Daus
Huntington Beach

THOUGHTS ON THE MAILBAG

One of my good friends from another city in Orange County was teasing me recently about my many letters in the Daily Pilot. We had worked together almost two decades ago on a political issue in another area of Orange County where I worked. This friend had worked

harder on a local political issue than anyone I have known even though she personally received little direct profit from all of her work. The changes that were brought about by her actions however, improved the lives of many people, not to mention the reputation of her community.

That type of strong leadership can bring change to local government, but it is not easy and it takes much time and effort. The Daily Pilot, by providing an outlet to several communities in Orange County, can play an important role in bringing about positive change. Local issues often can be just as important to the health of a democracy as national ones, and they can affect residents' lives almost as profoundly.

For that reason, I can appreciate all the letters from Huntington Beach residents each week. Having the opportunity to vent their feelings in the Daily Pilot provides them with an outlet for expression and may inspire others to try to bring about change.

Freedom of speech is the first component of democracy. Yet it usually has to be followed by some type of action to be effective. In

See *Mailbag*, page A8

ROYAL

Continued from page A3

do feel like the remnants of it have been quite everlasting these past few years."

Band class has been making an early impression on its newcomers. Percussion captain Ema Terada, 17, a junior marimba player who is in charge of the front ensemble, said a core memory came in her freshman year.

"I never did band in

middle school, nor did I do a sport, so I didn't know what it felt like to be with so many people and have something that we all work for," Terada said. "I remember after we performed our final show, we have a tradition called 'senior circle,' where we group up and light a candle, and all the seniors light all the underclassmen's candles."

Enzo Oviedo, 17, a junior percussionist who plays bass drum, said it is a moment that has moved him

to tears. "They basically say, 'This is my spark. I pass it on to you,'" Oviedo said. "It's really emotional. That is probably my favorite memory."

Freshman Taylor Lam, 15, had her interest captured by color guard just before high school, and that summer, she found herself marching with the Barons in their annual appearance at the Fourth of July parade in Huntington Beach.

"It was actually when I was transitioning from eighth grade into high school," Lam said of her introduction. "They had this assembly for students to go to [and] check out different sports. Color guard was there to put on a performance, and when I sat down and I watched them, that was when I truly realized that color guard is something that I want to be a part of."

"I just saw the way the flags spun around, the different colors of the silks, how the rifles would spin around in the air, and how the catches were so clean. I thought that's something I would like to put effort into."

The Royal Regiment also played in the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade on Dec. 7, and Lai intends to take the band to Washington, D.C. next year to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States in the nation's capital.

"It helps students really connect the dots as to why



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

A UNIQUE participation tiki trophy given to the Fountain Valley Royal Regiment from a Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade.

we perform music and the importance of music in history," Lai said. "With all of the experiences that we're giving the students, I think that they're able to connect the dots. They're able to go to Pearl Harbor and understand all the sacrifices that were made, so that they can have this

experience. "In a way, they can give back through their music performance, to honor those that have come before us, those that have sacrificed their lives for us all to be here."

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Good morning. It's Wednesday, Oct. 25. I'm Carol Cormaci, bringing you this week's **TimesOC newsletter** with a look at the latest local news and events.

Watch where you're stepping on O.C.'s famed sands, because you may encounter a rare specimen of marine life. One, in fact, that has very sharp teeth.

That's what happened on a recent afternoon to lifeguard Sierra Fockler, who found a spookily-looking black angler fish, specifically a Pacific football fish, while she was walking near the lifeguard headquarters building on Moro Beach, located within Crystal Cove State Park.



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CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

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Mapping out the travels of a painter

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Modernmaster painter Timothy J. Clark finds inspiration at home and abroad. A gas station on a rainy night. A proud Mariachi musician holding up his bass guitar. A plate of red snappers with lemon. The architecture of a church in Spain.

Clark's work spans a variety of subjects. His current solo exhibition at the Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University in Orange includes urban landscapes, portraits, still lifes and interiors.

"The focus of this exhibition has been my travels but also the inspiration of my hometown of Santa Ana in Orange County," said Clark.

"Timothy J. Clark: Going Places," on display in the south wing galleries now through March 8, was curated by Marcus Burke and Mary Platt and features nearly 40 of the artist's watercolors.

Born in Santa Ana in 1951, Clark grew up riding his bike through his Spanish-speaking neighborhoods, which helped him learn the language and is perhaps why bicycles are one of his favored subjects.

"In bikes we find something very elusive that reminds us of our youth and early freedom," Clark said.

"Mexican Bicycle" (2018-20) depicts a bike leaning against a wall in Mexico City next to a broom. "Bicycles, Pier and Surfers, Newport Beach" (2010-24) features two bicycles with the Newport Pier and dory fishing boats in the dreamy distance, while "57th Street Bicycle" (2013) is distinctively more urban. Although the concepts are similar, each work is differentiated by its sense of place.

Clark made his first trip out of the country in 1970. He visited Guaymas, Mexico, at the age of 18 with his

drawing mentor, Jess Rubio. There he found inspiration of a different sort, when the pair, who were riding rented motorcycles, were arrested and put in jail.

"We drew every guard in the jail, and they let us out," said Clark. "I learned a lot about how to truly concentrate, because if I had messed up those drawings, I would still be in that jail."

Today, Clark's work is found in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and the Library of Congress, and he has served as an art educator, author and even television host on the 13-part PBS series, "Focus on Watercolor" in 1989.

He has made a career of painting what he sees during his travels, advising young artists that while it is important to make a living, it is much more important to make a life. "Going Places" features depictions of places far and wide: griffins in Portugal, churches in Spain, a concert in Prague and the Taj Mahal in India.

On Thursday, art historian Tom Freudenheim lectured on Clark's work at the Hilbert Museum for an audience of about 120. The former assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution remarked on Clark's keen ability to capture the true feeling of a place in his work, particularly in his painting "Taj Mahal" (2007).

"We are using our eyes all the time to see what things look like, but an artist can help us get an idea of what things actually feel like — and that is one of the reasons to look at art," said Freudenheim. "I have been to the Taj Mahal, and I can't believe how many photographs I took when I was there, but if I put one of them against this painting it wouldn't match up. But that's not really what matters. What matters is that it evokes, for me, what



Photos by Sarah Mosqueda

MODERN-MASTER figurative painter Timothy J. Clark's solo museum exhibition, "Going Places," is at the Hilbert Museum of California Art at Chapman University in Orange.



THE WORK of Timothy J. Clark spans a variety of subjects.

it was like when I was there."

While Clark's globetrotting has influenced his work, traces of his Orange County heritage are also found in the exhibition.

In one corner, still-life paintings of lemons and a plate of fresh fish flank a portrait of Pascal Olhats, the renowned French chef who has cooked for over three decades at his three Orange County restaurants: Tradition, Café Jardin Restaurant & Pascal's Tea Garden Creperie and Pascal's Café. "Table for Pascal" (2024) shows a table for two, set with wine glasses and linens ready for dining. Olhats, who now runs a catering business in

O.C. and is a good friend of Clark's, also enjoys painting when he isn't in the kitchen.

"He makes fun of me; he said I am an artist who likes to cook, and he is a chef who likes to paint," Clark said.

Clark's subject for "Pines Park Nocturne" (2023) is the Dana Point park after dark, a moody scene illuminated by a single street lamp. The intensity of the painting led Freudenheim to imagine the work to be much larger.

"I was surprised when I came here yesterday and saw that it was actually small; but it is so beautiful," said Freudenheim. "It also has that surreal, mys-

IF YOU GO

"Timothy J. Clark: Going Places" is on view at the Hilbert Museum of California Art at 167 N. Atchison St. in Orange through March 8. For more information visit hilbertmuseum.org.

terious kind of quality that I think is part of Tim's work ... there is something really spiritual about this painting that I find extraordinarily appealing."

Clark is never without a small drawing book and at least two pens. He pulls the book from his back pocket and flips through some ideas he is working out. A woman pulling a shawl around her shoulder as she leaves a church, for instance. There are also some sketches of Clark's own hand, curled in a fist.

"I'll draw my hand when there is nothing to draw," he said.

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CENTERS

Continued from page A1

forces or partner nonprofits. The centers are supported by private and public funding, as well as a \$10-million grant from the state of California over a three-year period.

"It's a safe environment, no strings attached at the drop-in center," Verleur said. "They can say, 'You know what? I want to go back.' We'll be here whenever you need some food or to do your laundry. We also have opportunities for other types of living, if you choose, but this is a safe place for you."

Michelle Heater is the victim assistance program director for Irvine-based Waymakers and works with the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force, a program operated by Waymakers and the Anaheim Police Department.

She said that the work of the drop-in centers across Southern California counties, unveiled during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, is significant. The region overall is seen as a hub for youth sex trafficking, with attractions like Hollywood and Disneyland; Heater refers to Orange County as "the land of the mouse."

"Many of the youth that we encounter through our task force work are not from Orange County," Heater said. "Some are, for sure, but not all. When we are helping connect them to resources back in their county of origin, it can be a struggle, even though we have pretty good relationships with service providers. This Olive Crest initiative, where Olive Crest can really help to connect to their own offices in other counties, it really helps to improve how effective and efficient we are in ensuring these young victims are engaged and stay engaged with the trauma-informed service providers and services."

Each drop-in center will

See **Centers**, page A8



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Laguna Hills' Mint debuts after delayed refresh

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

In 2022, a small and short-lived fire at Mint Desi Craft Cuisine in Laguna Hills forced the Indian-Pakistani restaurant to postpone its grand reopening. Now after nearly three years, the halal eatery welcomed diners back to its remodeled dining room for a grand reopening on Wednesday with a complimentary glass of nonalcoholic champagne.

Located at 25381 Alicia Pkwy, Unit C in Laguna Hills, Mint is a sister concept to Michelin-recognized Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen in Fullerton and SHOR Bazaar in Hawaiian Gardens, led by head chef Jamil Hosseini, under the direction of chef Imran Ali Mookhi.

"The family started Mint in 2016, and it was just a small mom and pop restaurant until we took over the space next door," said Mookhi. "So we expanded it. Then in 2020 we opened Khan Saab, and we were blessed that Khan Saab became so successful.



Courtesy of Mint Desi Craft Cuisine

A COLLECTION OF halal Indian and Pakistani dishes is on the menu at Mint Desi Craft Cuisine in Laguna Hills.

We decided to remodel Mint and bring it to that level as well."

The dining room was remodeled, but just a couple weeks ahead of the reopening, firefighters responded to reports of smoke on the early morning of May 5 coming from an electrical fire that had broken out in Mint's kitchen.

"It was sad because the

whole family was attached to the restaurant because that was the first one. We also never had to deal with anything like this in the past," said Mookhi.

The team placed staff at their sister concepts and focused on rebuilding Mint.

"The whole process took about three years to get it done with the city, with the fire inspection and the

insurance and all that," said Mookhi.

Mint has been soft-open since the holidays, allowing the staff to get back into the swing of dinner service.

The menu features halal Indian and Pakistani dishes, all intended for family-style dining. Classics like masala rub French-cut lamb chops and traditional curries like chicken tikka masala are popular. Creative appetizers include bandar buns, popover-like buns baked in a cast-iron pot and served with a sweet and spicy mango chutney.

The restaurant group has also become known for its biryani, a mixed rice dish that can be made with chicken, goat, lamb or beef. Mint also uses charred market vegetables and Thai chilies to make a vegetable biryani. Goat karahi is also a favorite, with the braised meat served in a traditional karahi wok bubbling in spiced tomato sauce and fried chilies when it arrives at the table.

"It's incredibly gratifying

to reopen Mint finally," Hosseini said in statement. "These past few years have certainly brought a few setbacks, but the community's excitement and encouragement have made all the hard work worthwhile."

The original design has been redone with jewel tones, wood accents and velour seating. Leather directors' chairs face a rustic brick wall where black-and-white Bollywood movies are projected.

Also in keeping with the halal tradition, Mint has an alcohol-free bar program led by mixologist Ahmad Hosseini. Diners can order imported 0.0% craft brews and nonalcoholic mimosas in flavors like lychee, mango and blood orange.

Hosseini has developed a craft cocktail menu with thoughtful beverages like a "Falsa-tini" made with Grewia asiatica pulp or a "Honey Dew Me" with honeydew melon, Seedlip Garden 108, basil and lime that drinks like a midori sour.

"The nonalcoholic bar

was such a hit for us at Khan Saab we decided to extend that to Shor and Mint," said Mookhi.

On the evening of the grand reopening, 10% of the proceeds benefited NAMI Orange County, a local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

"We're eager to welcome former regulars and new guests back into our space," Hosseini said.

Mookhi is eager as well, since the reopening of Mint means he can focus on the restaurant group's next opening: Kabana in Huntington Beach.

"The concept at Kabana is a little different than what we have done at the other three restaurants. It is more of comfort Pakistani food," Mookhi said.

Kabana, slated to open later this year, will be a quick-serve-style eatery with a nonalcoholic bar, a chai tasting experience and hookah.

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CENTERS

Continued from page A7

operate from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily and also provide services including mental health support, education resources, vocational training and medical aid. Rapid response teams will also be at the ready — operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week — to provide support for both youth and caregivers.

Tuesday's news conference also featured thoughts from Anaheim Police Chief Rick Armendariz, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna and Los Angeles County Dist. Atty. Nathan Hochman, among others. The Sheriff's Department is the lead law enforcement

agency for the LA Regional Human Trafficking Task Force.

"These are girls and boys for the most part, and they're mostly girls," Hochman said. "We need to have places like this. I am so impressed by what Olive Crest has come up with, drop-in centers that provide safety and stability. People that don't have that in their lives can come here and begin the process to recognize their own self-esteem, to break from the traffickers who so exploited them and gave them the notion that only the traffickers can provide that safety to them. Now they're going to get reintegrated, and it starts with places like Olive Crest."

Since its creation in 2004,

the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force has assisted more than 1,000 victims from 43 countries, including the U.S. But Heater knows the number of victims out there is likely much higher.

"The reality is that for all of the task forces and all of the victim service providers, yes in Southern California but throughout the state, we're really just beginning to scratch the surface of how many victims there really are out there," Heater said. "We believe that there are so many more victims that are needing assistance and support than we are able to identify at the current time, especially children and teens."

Alia Azariah, who also spoke at Tuesday's press



ALIA AZARIAH, a human trafficking survivor, talks at the opening of the Olive Crest Bellflower Drop-in Center.

James Carbone

teenager's face said it all.

"I utilized drop-in centers when I was a minor," Azariah said. "We didn't talk about trafficking at that time. But I came in, I used the phone, got a bowl of cereal and I sat with someone who cared about me. Those were the most positive experiences in the time that I was being exploited."

"I was told the lie and belief that no one cared, that the people outside of my trafficking experience saw me as worthless. When we do things like invest in our communities, open drop-in centers, form task forces, we show that this is important to us."

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MAILBAG

Continued from page A6

the case of Huntington Beach, it would mean

actively backing candidates for City Council. Unfortunately that is not always as easy as it sounds, as we have discovered in Newport Beach. There must

also be control over campaign rules including candidates' resources and campaign materials.

Lynn Lorenz
Newport Beach

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HOPE FOR A MORE GRACEFUL POLITICS

Surgeon Gen. Dr. Vivek Murthy's "Parting Prescription for America" begins with a clear-eyed diagnosis of our disease of "pain, disconnection and division." Drawing on his experiences during his stint as our country's top doctor, he challenges Americans to recognize the danger and inadequacy of our preoccupation with success defined by wealth, fame and power. In its place he prescribes specific action-steps proven to build a healthy community: meaningful relationships, acts of service and discovering one's individual purpose, all united by love and kindness towards one another.

That seems relevant to parts of Orange County, where politics have become bruising and divisive. Though it would have a better chance of being widely read if it were a bit briefer, at 27 pages the outgoing surgeon general's prescription is educational and inspiring. His light sprinkling of scientific references is matched by references to well-known humanitarians like Martin Luther King, Jr. and kernels of wisdom from the major religious traditions of the world.

I only wish his discussion pointed out the urgent need to restore respect in how we and our local elected officials talk about those with whom we disagree. Healing our fractured society and reducing the polarization that exists cannot occur so long as we fail to follow the "Golden Rule" in how we address one another.

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