

# Daily Pilot & Times OC

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Photos by James Carbone

**MIKE NESS**, singer and guitarist for the legendary punk rock band Social Distortion, holds up the key to the city of Fullerton.

## Punk who made good gets the key to his hometown

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Social Distortion fans descended by the hundreds to Downtown Fullerton Plaza on Wednesday in celebration of Mike Ness, the band's longtime front man and their hometown hero.

In a special afternoon ceremony, Fullerton officials declared April 3 as Mike Ness Day and handed the punk rock icon a key to the city on his birthday.

"Beyond our love for music is our love for our community," said Fullerton Mayor Nick Dunlap. "That's what brings us here today because we are able to celebrate a living legend who is among our greatest exports to the world, right there with the Fender Stratocaster."

Ness, wearing a tucked-in retro yellow polka dot shirt and a pair of black sunglasses to shade his eyes from the sunny day, joined the stage soon after.

Cellphones sprouted from the crowd to capture the moment.

Dunlap recited some lyrics from "Story of My Life," one of Social Distortion's biggest hits, before presenting Ness with the key to the city.

The singer, songwriter and guitarist lifted the plaque with the key triumphantly into the air as his fans broke out in an impromptu "Happy Birthday" serenade. With a recent diagnosis of Stage 1 tonsil cancer and past addiction battles behind him, the musician celebrated



**HUNDREDS OF** fans came out to celebrate the declaration of April 3 as Mike Ness Day in Fullerton. It was the musician's 62nd birthday.

See **Punk**, page A4

## Union checks in as Hilton wins OK

Unite Here Local 11 is backing a ballot measure effort to raise hotel worker wages in Buena Park to \$22 an hour.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Buena Park officials moved closer to fully developing the city's "Entertainment Zone," a 1-mile stretch of Beach Boulevard dotted with tourist traps, restaurants and lodging by Knott's Berry Farm.

During its March 26 meeting, the Buena Park City Council approved plans for a new six-story, 140-room Hilton hotel to be built atop a roughly 1.5-acre plot that has sat undeveloped for years.

"A hotel is consistent with the vision of the entertainment corridor," said Buena Park Mayor Susan Sonne. "I believe that it's the right thing to do for the city."

But with Beach Boulevard's re-

See **Hilton**, page A4

## Spotlight on young artists in Laguna

LCAD Gallery's 'Color It Orange' exhibition celebrates high school artists from O.C. and runs through April 21.

BY ANDREW TURNER

A little recognition can go a long way in determining the path chosen by youth, especially when it comes to academic and career pursuits.

Hundreds of Orange County high school students submitted their artwork, and dozens had their creations juried into the "Color It Orange" exhibition at the LCAD Gallery in downtown Laguna Beach.

The art show was started 49 years ago by Designing Women, a

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## Mobile market delivers fresh food to O.C. seniors



James Carbone

**SENIORS CHOOSE** food from the Second Harvest Food Bank's mobile Granny's Market at Villa Anaheim Senior Apartments in Anaheim on Tuesday.

BY MATT SZABO

Gilda Miranda enjoys her life at Villa Anaheim Senior Apartments, where she's lived for about a decade.

The 77-year-old has a vibrant personality and calls others around the complex simply "Mama" or "Papa."

She sees many of her friends on Tuesday mornings. That's a time for Villa Anaheim residents to gather, head to the parking lot and visit Granny's Market, a "park-it market" provided by Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County that delivers free, fresh food to more than 60 seniors who live there.

This is a real benefit for Miranda, who still works a retail job. But she wrecked her car a few weeks ago after the brakes gave out, she said, so having the food come to her is certainly nice.

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### ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Eric Licas

**NEWPORT BEACH MUSICIAN ENCOURAGES PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM ADDICTION** PAGE A2

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SERVICES

# Newport Beach musician encourages fans who are recovering from addiction

BY LILLY NGUYEN

Jilan Ji had no idea when she dropped a TikTok video in 2021 of a song she wrote about working in healthcare in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that it would resonate with many who saw it and lead her to pivot careers.

Ji, who goes by the stage name Kitty Noir, said she's always used music as an outlet for her emotions, whether or not it was heard by others. And until she posted just a few seconds of her song "Never Go Back," her only experience in front of an audience was garage shows she put on as a kid with her next-door neighbor in Pasadena. They called their group the Ocean Band.

In 2020, Ji recounted, she was a traveling nurse, taking on temporary contracts with hospitals for 12- to 13-week stints.

"I'd help understaffed nursing units. I saw a lot of death, a lot of sad things during the pandemic," she recalled. "I've never seen more of it in my life. It happened everywhere I went. I wrote 'Never Go Back' after I finished my latest nursing job. The lyrics [reflect how] I was obsessed with watching the pain and of feeling sad. I was addicted to the pain, but I was also addicted to substances at the time."

"I wrote that song and it ended up going viral on TikTok. Thousands of people commented, shared it and, to this day, people still make videos to the song."

The video, posted on Sept. 27 of that year, was commented on by other healthcare workers. One viewer said she had just started a career in healthcare and lost one of their patients. Another said they left a job working in an intensive care unit because of the fallout of the pandemic. They could relate to the song, which has over 22,000 plays on Spotify.

Ji said the lyrics, which

touch on unit understaffing, overwork and how enduring that fundamentally changed her, seemed to resonate with her peers.

"It's when I realized that my focus shouldn't be in [nursing]. My focus should be on music. That's when I found music as my true outlet, true calling," Ji said. Ji, who lives in Newport Beach, said she now splits her time between studying for an emergency medical technician program at Orange Coast College and performing. In 2023 she released an album called "Metaphorical Arsonist," which touches on her struggles with opiates, alcohol and other drugs.

Ji, who was adopted from China, says she is 23, but her actual birth date is unknown. She was found abandoned on a street in her home country — she doesn't know whether she was a baby or a toddler at the time.

She said she first became a drug user when she was 11. She recently decided to quit, after feeling alone in the world. She has been sober for a year.

"All my friends told me that they didn't want to be around me," Ji said. "Nobody wanted to be around me. My parents didn't even want to be with me. I'd make friends, and then they'd leave [either] because I was being used [for the] drugs I had on me or just certain situations. I just lost everybody and I had to look myself in the mirror and decide, 'I'm done.'"

She said her favorite track on her album is titled "Are You Ever Gonna Change?"

"It's about that moment and how I found faith and gratitude. How I learned everything would be OK if I had a higher power, a god in my life."

Ji said she is performing on stages in Los Angeles and Orange counties. She will next have a show at the Viper Room in West Holly-

wood, and she hopes to get more tour bookings in the Southland.

"A lot of my fans in recovery say that, 'You're super inspiring.' They feel like they can really connect with me on a deeper level since we're both in recovery and kind of get it," Ji said. "I have my regular normal fans and then my recovery fan base, but my recovery fan base — I feel a genuine connection with them. I've never experienced fan support in my life compared to how they support me. It's incredible."

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Photos by Eric Licas

**NEWPORT BEACH** musician Kitty Noir (Jilan Ji) takes a seat at Russell Surfboards. After the former traveling nurse's music gained popularity from one of her songs on TikTok, her album, "Metaphorical Arsonist," came out in 2023.

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**KITTY NOIR** smiles outside of the Blue Beet. Noir, whose real name is Jilan Ji, moved to Newport Beach after the pandemic but grew up in Pasadena.

## ARTISTS

Continued from page A1

founding support group of Laguna College of Art and Design. The program inspires students by recognizing their work, and in so doing, it honors the teachers who have helped their pupils discover their talents.

LCAD Gallery manager Bryan Heggie called "Color It Orange" one of the space's "most heartfelt shows" because of the celebratory nature for the families involved.

"It puts it on that pedestal to see it in that new light, that maybe it's not on their desk," Heggie said of displaying the students' art. "... They can celebrate that with their parents and realize they've accomplished something."

A partnership has also been formed between LCAD's "Color It Orange," the Orange County Department of Education's OCArts4All showcase and the Festival of Arts.

"My goal here is for the high visibility, high quality and relevance, all three pieces to be in place," said Scott Fitzpatrick, arts coordinator at the Orange County Department of Education. "We have students in high school whose work has been juried by Laguna College of Art and Design for this particular display — "Color It Orange" — in April. They're looking at pieces and giving us a great view, as they transition out of high school into college, what's going to be preparing them for the jobs of tomorrow."

LCAD president Steven Brittan, who had a background in architecture and urban design before coming to the college, is excited about the opportunity to show students the different doors available to them through their artistic abilities.

Leading up to the reception at the gallery on Thursday evening, Brittan expounded on the message

See **Artists**, page A3



Eric Licas

**SARA KONG** and her father, Tim Kong, examine a sculpture on display at the "Color It Orange" exhibit Thursday at the Laguna College of Art and Design Gallery.

**MARKET**

*Continued from page A1*

She smiled on Tuesday, her dyed red hair matching her shirt and a brown cross around her neck, as she described the benefits.

“The food is good because sometimes we don’t have money to buy our own groceries,” Miranda said. “I get food stamps, but this helps a lot because sometimes I can’t get out.”

Second Harvest introduced its first park-it market in 2018. There are two newer Granny’s Market vehicles now that incorporate additional senior-specific design elements, like low shelves and double-sided access.

The mobile market was named in honor of Mary Ann “Granny” Schoellerman, the mother whose family foundation’s generous contribution helped launch the program.

Second Harvest chief executive Claudia Bonilla



*James Carbone*

**CLAUDIA BONILLA KELLER**, the chief executive of Second Harvest Food Bank, stands in front of the mobile market parked outside Villa Anaheim Senior Apartments last week.

Keller said the nonprofit learned a lot about senior hunger during the coronavirus pandemic. More

seniors needed help with food than they realized. Some were shut in, and many had health needs,

like low salt or low sugar requirements.

“Then, a lot of seniors, especially here in Orange

County, are on a fixed income,” Keller said. “If you have two or three of these factors in your life, getting to the grocery store to buy food is almost an impossibility. We like to bring the store to them. A lot of the items on here — fresh milk, fresh eggs, fresh vegetables — are really the backbone for a healthy diet.”

At Villa Anaheim, a drawing occurs each week to determine a senior’s place in line. There are also other foods like oatmeal, apples, chicken, carrots and cauliflower that seniors can choose to pick up.

Lisa Gibson, a registered dietitian who’s on the Second Harvest nutrition advisory council, said she appreciates the fact that the foods offered include protein-rich options, fruits and vegetables.

“As we age, we need fewer calories, but we need more or equally nutritious food,” Gibson said. “We really need to emphasize the nutrient-dense foods ... The challenge in Orange County is that most people think of Orange County as not having any food insecurity, being a wealthy community. But we find that about 20% of our senior population is facing food insecurity.”

After serving seniors at Villa Anaheim, Granny’s Market was headed to another facility down the street, where dozens more seniors would be served using the other side of the

park-it market. Overall, the program gets fresh food to about 2,500 local seniors each month.

It’s a growing demographic. According to the 2023 Report on Aging in Orange County, the county currently has about 495,000 residents age 65 or older, about 15.7% of the total population. By 2050, the county’s 65-and-up population is expected to nearly double, to 926,000, or 28% of the total.

This creates a so-called “silver tsunami” of aging residents who are deeply vulnerable to poverty due to fixed incomes and who might make sacrifices in their food budget for bigger needs like housing and medication.

Keller said Second Harvest is looking for ways to expand Granny’s Market to other demographics in the future. But for now, seniors certainly are worthy recipients.

“People want choice, people want fresh, but not every facility is able to have a community room,” she said. “There’s something about just having it roll up. It’s an event, and people want to come to it because they know they’re going to get good food.”

Anyone in need of food anywhere in Orange County can be connected with a distribution site near them by visiting Second Harvest’s site at [feedoc.org/need-food](http://feedoc.org/need-food), or by calling 211.

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**Dr. Stefan O. Ciurea is an internationally recognized hematologist and director of the Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy Program.**



**NATALY CARICH**, right, the program coordinator for Villa Anaheim, helps a senior choose food from the Second Harvest Food Bank Granny’s Market on Tuesday.

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**ARTISTS**

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he wished to impart to the students in attendance.

“The power of being an artist and a creative in this world today ... the traditional perception of an artist as a struggling artist, those days are gone. The time has come for creative minds to be able to engage in a world to help problem solve, to help the agents of change through their creative abilities,” Brittan said. “As artists, they have this tremendous, innate talent that they can leverage to be able to bring about positive change through their art.”

The “Color It Orange” art show will be on exhibit at the LCAD Gallery through April 21. The room has wall-to-wall coverage of artwork from across a variety of media, including ceramics, drawing, painting and photography.

An appetizing artful island groups creations that include a birthday picnic shared by two cats, and



*Photos by Eric Licas*

**SANTIAGO HIGH** junior Aracely Santana stands next to her drawing, “Mettle.”

separately, a tray of sushi. Beckman senior Grace Lin, one of five scholarship recipients for summer programming at LCAD through the “Color It Or-

ange” show, produced the work influenced by a childhood passion for anime, manga and video games.

“You have to consider the school you’re applying

to,” Lin said of building out a portfolio for the college application process. “You have to consider the major that you’re applying to. My major, in particular, was



**ORANGE COUNTY** Department of Education arts director Scott Fitzpatrick shares his thoughts with Caitlynn Hsu at the LCAD Gallery on Thursday.

entertainment design, so it was centered around creating a story world and doing character designs, environmental designs, vehicles, props, all of that, and it was really just creating a world from the ground up.”

Chloe Kong, a freshman at Pacifica, illustrated skillful use of different shades of gray in a pencil drawing of an everyday task, depicting a spray bottle being held up to clean a mirror.

“I was trying to practice the tiniest details because before this piece, I had trouble getting the wrinkles [of the hand] down, or the shininess of the spray bottle,” Kong said. “I was having difficulty capturing the life in the picture, so I was trying to [implement] that in a daily life scenario.”

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# Bringing the burrito back from the borderlands

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

When Omar De la Vega first moved to California, he remembers ordering a burrito at a restaurant and being surprised by the colossus of calories that came out of the kitchen.

"They gave me this huge brick," said De la Vega, an immigrant from Juarez, Mexico. "It felt like a diaper because it was so big. I thought to myself, 'What is this?'"

With Chipotle exporting its version of San Francisco's hefty Mission burritos across the United States and with San Diego's famed California burritos stuffing French fries into the fray, burritos have built a reputation as behemoths on this side of the border.

But with Los de Juarez Burritos, a new restaurant in Anaheim, De la Vega and Juan Del Rio, his business partner, are hoping to slim the burrito down in returning the meal back to its borderland beginnings.

"That's where the burrito originated," said De la Vega. "There's tons of burrito places everywhere in Juarez, just like you would see taquerías anywhere else in Mexico."

There are several origin stories staking their claim to the burrito.

One tale holds that miners in the Mexican state of Sonora invented the meal, which traveled down the mouths of mines by donkey, or "burro" in Spanish.

Los de Juarez Burritos presents the Mexican state of Chihuahua's version.

As a decal painted inside the restaurant relays, a vendor by the name Juan Mendez wrapped his guisados, or "stews," in flour tortillas to keep them smoldering for customers. Mendez is said to have sold his food in Juarez during the Mexican Revolution by donkey, hence the name "burritos," that followed.

At Los de Juarez Burritos, the menu remains faithful to Chihuahua's claim.

"It's a variety of guisados that



Photos by James Carbone

OMAR DE LA VEGA, left, and Juan Del Rio in front of their new Los de Juarez Burritos restaurant in Anaheim.

we make with just a little slap of beans," said De la Vega. "Roll it up and that's it. It's nice-sized burrito!"

The restaurant offers eight different types of burritos to choose from for single orders, combos and family packs.

De la Vega counts the shredded beef, known as deshebrada, and chile colorado burritos as the two that taste the most like home to him. But customers can also order rajas, pollo en chipotle, chicharron and birria burritos to slay their appetites.

The rajas burrito is delightfully creamy in texture and slightly sweet with slices of pasilla chile meshed with white rice, corn and cream cheese. A smoky flavor accentuates the pollo en chipotle burrito while the chile colorado burrito is delectably spicy.

Even the bean and cheese burrito, the cheapest on the menu, pleases in its scrumptious



FROM LEFT to right: deshebrada, a chile colorado burrito and a rajas burrito with pasilla chile at Los de Juarez Burritos in Anaheim.

simplicity.

Though long and slim, the restaurant's burritos are decep-

tively filling. Without being stuffed with fillers, scarfing down two will leave the belly's tank on

full for more than a few hours.

But the common denominator between them all is the flour tortilla.

The tortillas outstretch the individual trays the burritos are served in and are toasted on each side. They are sturdy but pliable with a homemade taste proving that you could judge a burrito by its wrapping at the restaurant — and get away with it.

In readying what De la Vega called a "passion project," he returned to Juarez in 2022 for the first time in decades to do some burrito scouting. Del Rio accompanied him on the research trip.

Both felt that opening a restaurant dedicated to Juarez-style burritos could do well after a chance encounter with a woman selling burritos out of a cooler on an earlier research trip to Tijuana for another restaurant.

Once in Juarez, they ate their way through mainstays like Burritos Crisostomo but found true inspiration in veteran restaurants like Burritos El Compa.

"We tried every single burrito on the menu," De la Vega recalled of Burritos El Compa. "There was such a simplicity to the burritos. The flavor, the tortillas' texture — everything was there! I didn't want to leave."

De la Vega is hoping that patrons at Los de Juarez Burritos, which had a soft opening on March 28, will feel the same way.

He's been surprised by how many Mexicans from Chihuahua are in Southern California and have already walked through the doors looking for a taste of home.

For the uninitiated who try to order a carne asada burrito at the restaurant, De la Vega patiently shares the Mendez story and explains the concept behind Los de Juarez Burritos.

"It's been very positive, so far," he said. "Our main goal is for the burritos to speak for themselves."

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## PUNK

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turning 62 with the key as a unique birthday gift.

"Forty years ago, they might have wanted to lock me up and throw away the key," Ness quipped. "But things change, and now I've got a key."

Ness grew up in Fullerton when his parents moved to Orange County in the early 1960s. He counted himself as one of a handful of punks at Troy High School alongside Dennis Danell, a fellow classmate and close friend who was later recruited by him to play guitar in Social Distortion, which was founded in 1979.

Kicked out of his family home as a teenager, Ness eventually rented a one-bedroom apartment in Fullerton on East Wilshire Avenue.

Immortalized as the "Black Hole" in song by legendary Fullerton punk band the Adolescents, whose members lived in the apartment at one time, it served as an incubator



James Carbone

AARON CANTERO, of Fullerton, holds his daughter Olivia, 5 months, both wearing Social Distortion band shirts at an event celebrating the band's front man, Mike Ness.

for O.C.'s emerging punk scene in the late 1970s.

In his speech to the crowd, Ness recounted fond memories of his Fullerton upbringing.

"Dennis and I would

walk down the railroad tracks from his house to Harbor Boulevard and Commonwealth [Avenue]," he said. "There was a little studio where a band called the Mechanics

used to practice every night. That was like a hub of this early punk scene. They were the older guys and we looked up to them."

Ness said the Mechanics

influenced him musically just as much as the Ramones and the Rolling Stones.

After playing local Fullerton haunts like the Galaxy and Ichabods, Social Distortion released their debut album "Mommy's Little Monster" in 1983 but found mainstream success on Epic Records seven years later with an eponymous album that featured hits like "Ball and Chain," "Story of My Life" and a cover of Johnny Cash's "Ring of Fire."

It's part of the city's indelible musical history that the Fullerton Museum Center is looking to honor with a punk rock exhibit in April 2025.

Before that, musical performances by Greg Antista and the Lonely Streets and Kid Ramos helped round out Mike Ness Day, which also featured various vendor booths and a beer bar.

Luis Zuñiga, a Santa Ana resident, attended the event to honor the punk legend. He pointed to Social Distortion's influence on him as a musician

as well as "Another State of Mind," a 1984 documentary that followed the band on its first international tour.

"That's where I saw punk rock legends talk about the music that gave me inspiration to create music of my own and to join a band," Zuñiga said. "The feeling that this was in our backyards, and that gave us hope to create and do things for our community, as well."

Mike Ness Day in Fullerton brought a community of punks, young and old, together again in a sea of black Social Distortion band shirts.

With the key to Fullerton in hand, Ness looked forward to heading out on a national tour with Social Distortion starting this weekend.

"What a ride it's been," said Ness in his closing remarks. "I'm 62 today but I'm living to 102, so we've got 40 more years of Social D!"

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## HILTON

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vitalization in full swing, will Buena Park voters be soon asked to weigh in on the hotel and broader hotel worker wages in the city?

At last month's council meeting, hotel workers represented by Unite Here Local 11 focused their criticisms of the proposed Hilton by arguing that the plot would be better served by affordable housing.

"In Orange County, rent is too expensive," said Teresa Garcia, an Anaheim Sheraton Park Hotel worker. "I worry about where my children and grandchildren will live."

Buena Park also received more than 100 emails in opposition to the development.

Unite Here Local 11 had opposed past plans for a Stanford Hotel at the location, which previously housed Best Inn and Suites, a motel that the city demolished in 2010. Buena Park originally sold the plot off to Stanford's developers in 2015, but the boutique hotel project stalled for six years.

After significant delays, city officials declared the project to be in default and bought the land back in 2021.

"Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past," Juan Muñoz, a political coordinator for Unite Here Local 11, urged council members. "Keep public lands in public hands and let's have housing, not another hotel."

After the city reacquired the lot, it became subject to the Surplus Land Act, a state law that prioritizes affordable housing development.

Buena Park gave developers a 60-day notice of the plot's availability, under the law, but found no takers last year.

"We tried housing here," said Councilman Connor Traut. "That got zero interest. Our city has done more for housing than pretty much every city in this county. We are a pro-housing council."

A majority of Buena Park council members voted to sell the land to Kingsbarn Real Estate Capital for roughly \$2.3 million. The future Hilton Home2 Suites on Beach Boulevard is slated to be an extended-

stay lodge.

With a transient occupancy tax rate of 12%, the city anticipates that the hotel will bring between \$600,000 and \$750,000 in bed tax revenue every year.

But just days before the vote, three Buena Park residents filed paperwork with the city on March 22 to begin gathering signatures for a ballot initiative aimed at hotel worker protection and pay.

In documents, the residents noted Unite Here Local 11 as their representative in the effort.

A draft of the proposed law outlines panic buttons to protect hotel workers from sexual harassment, violent and threatening behavior by guests, limits on workloads, workforce retention rights in the event of a hotel sale and a \$22-an-hour minimum wage, which would increase to \$27 an hour by July 2026.

"We need our members and workers in the hospitality industry to be able to afford the high cost of living," said Ada Briceño, co-president of Unite Here Local 11. "We are also collecting signatures to put the Hilton project to a referendum. We need land to

be kept in the community's hands, instead of being sold off."

The proposed hotel worker pay and protection law also features a waiver from its provisions if hotels have a union contract with its workers where the opt-out is clearly articulated and agreed to by both parties.

Keith Grossman, an attorney who has previously served as a spokesperson for hotelier groups, believes that the waiver goes beyond being a leverage point for Unite Here Local 11 to unionize more hotels.

"That goal is not the union's sole goal," he said. "The central flaw is how Unite Here Local 11 has weaponized the waiver provisions to fundamentally alter the National Labor Relations Board's balance of bargaining power, providing an impermissible cudgel that the union has used routinely to extract material concessions from unionized hotels."

Most recently, Unite Here Local 11 pushed a similar-styled initiative in Anaheim, where Measure A called for hotel and event center workers to receive a \$25-an-hour minimum



Genaro Molina | Los Angeles Times

UNITE HERE Local 11 hotel workers stage a picket line in Santa Monica last summer.

wage in addition to added job protections.

Anaheim voters soundly defeated the measure during an October special election.

Unite Here Local 11 has campaigned for similar ballot initiatives in other cities like Rancho Palos Verdes and Long Beach.

In 2022, the Los Angeles City Council opted to bypass sending the question of hotel worker overtime pay and protections to voters and adopted the union-backed law, instead.

It's an outcome Unite Here Local 11 is hoping to

replicate in Buena Park, a city with a progressive-leaning, all-Democrat council.

"We're going to do the work of talking to residents across Buena Park about the need for higher wages so people can afford to live where they work," Briceño said. "We're going to demonstrate to the council that this matters to the residents, and we are going to urge them to vote for it outright."

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**forum**

**COMMENTARY | JAMIE-LEE JOSSELYN**

# Remembering Blaze Bernstein

Here is a scene: ABBA the Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, June 2017. On the museum's hologram-stage, the '70s pop group's singers are joined by a fifth member, Blaze Bernstein. They stand side by side, shuffling back and forth to the beat of "Mamma Mia." The theater is dim, the stage backlit by pink and blue spotlights. The four original band members, clad in white bodysuits, are each at least a head taller than Blaze, who wears a red long-sleeved shirt, dark pants and white sneakers. Blaze does his best to keep time with the faded figures, but he shuffles right when his counterparts shuffle left. He rushes to sync up, a half beat behind.

This performance, immortalized on Blaze's Instagram and reposted on his sister's soon after his death by homicide in January 2018, is classic Blaze. The criminal trial, now scheduled to begin

this week was originally expected to open April 27, 2022. A painful coincidence, April 27 would also have been Blaze's 24th birthday.

As the trial against Blaze's accused murderer, Sam Woodward, a former Orange County School of the Arts classmate unfolds, news coverage will focus on the awful details of his death. But there is so much to remember about who Blaze was beyond what happened to him in Foothill Ranch that horrible night. In death, we cannot forget life.

Back to the ABBA performance: Was he joking or was he serious? Well, both. Blaze took his jokes seriously. As his college advisor, there were times when I missed his deadpan completely, and I pride myself on my sense of humor. His comedy took many forms. He stole the show at a Halloween party dressed as Penn's

See **Blaze**, page A8



Courtesy of Jeanne Pepper and Gideon Bernstein

**BLAZE BERNSTEIN** poses for Penn Appetit's Whisk cookbook in 2017.

**MAILBAG**

# Review board takes a page from McCarthy's playbook

I was born into a Jewish family 17 years after the Holocaust. My early life was in full knowledge of these obscenities. I still do not understand how an entire country could allow this to happen.

As a teenager, I was fascinated by McCarthyism. How could our country allow such a man to singularly destroy patriots? Why is this relevant? Well, history repeats itself.

We need look no farther than the dais of the Huntington Beach City Council and the not-so-fab four of Gracie Van Der Mark, Tony Strickland, Pat Burns and Casey McKeon as well as their cronies City Atty. Michael Gates and Interim City Manager Eric Parra. Even in light of overwhelming opposition to their degradation of our libraries, they care not what their citizens think because as a de facto dictatorship you don't have to.

At the April 2 City Council meeting, library supporters knew that the agenda item banning books was a forgone conclusion. Public comments that are ignored do not allow moderate people to engage in a debate of the issue or presentation of facts. We must choose sides. I choose the library. I choose freedom of speech.

Wrapping yourself in a flag does not make you a patriot; taking away flags, books and cultural celebrations does make you an

extremist. They are wrong. They are un-American. Extremism wins, for now.

But, like fascism and McCarthyism, extremism doesn't last. In truth, they are the futile four — what they do will be undone, and they will be no more than a forgotten footnote in the history of Huntington Beach.

To our City Council: You have lost, even if you don't know it yet. When you're gone, no one will be praising you in the council chamber. Parks will not be built in your honor. Your despicable actions will disappear. You will simply become the forgotten four.

**Larry Hersh**  
Huntington Beach

Regarding the Huntington Beach parent-guardian review board committee for children's library materials, what is next? All must meet community standards. What are these standards and who gets to decide what they are? Apparently not the accredited review sources such as School Library Journal, Book List or Library Journal. Nor are the judgment calls made by the certified librarians looking at what subjects fill a need in the community.

I guess the only standards must be those held the mayor herself, her fellow conservative council members and her ultra conservative church mem-

See **Mailbag**, page A6

**COLUMN | PATRICE APODACA**

# Misinformation about vaccines appears to be contagious

Anti-vaccine ideology is at or near the top of the list of subjects that I wish I didn't feel compelled to write about. I wish that this dangerous trend would simply go away, as it should.

But it hasn't. Quite the opposite. It continues to grow, thanks in large measure to the misguided panic over COVID-19 vaccines that super-

charged suspicions about all vaccines and public health measures generally.

And now, tragically, we have further evidence that widespread misinformation and the resulting distrust about vaccines are leading to real-world consequences.

Last month, both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and



the American Medical Assn. issued similar pleas — they were practically begging, folks — to those who remain unvaccinated for the measles virus to get the shot.

Why did they feel the need to make such strong statements about a disease that was once considered eliminated in the U.S.? Because more peo-

ple are shunning vaccines, not just for themselves but for their children. The share of kindergartners who have received the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine — a closely tracked data point — has declined nationwide, from the 95% rate that protects against community spread, to 93%.

That might not seem

See **Apodaca**, page A8

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### ENTRÉE SELECTIONS

select one

<b>Filet Mignon</b> 8 oz. filet mignon, red skin mashed potatoes, fried shallots	<b>Bone-In Rib Eye</b> 16 oz. prime bone-in rib eye, red skin mashed potatoes, fried onion strings <b>(Twenty-Five Dollar Supplement)</b>
<b>Lobster Pot Pie</b> Ten ounce sautéed Maine lobster, carrots, celery, potatoes, sherry lobster cream sauce.	<b>Pan-Roasted Icelandic Cod</b> Butternut squash succotash, lemon aioli
<b>Miso-Marinated Chilean Sea Bass</b> Soy glaze, coconut rice, stir-fried vegetables, mushrooms, lemongrass ginger beurre blanc	<b>Peppered Veal Chop</b> Melted goat cheese, red skin mashed potatoes, grilled asparagus, pomegranate demi glace

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MAILBAG

Continued from page A5

bers. However, I am a member of the community. I have lived in Huntington Beach for 51 years — much longer than Gracey Van Der Mark. Apparently, my voice and standards do not count or matter. Neither do the standards of anyone else who does not agree with her moralistic, homophobic outlook.

Isn't this the way fascism starts? First they came after the libraries and started judging/condemning all the books "wrong for children and the community." Instead of burning the books like the Nazis did, our city will just privatize the library to make sure only the books the City Council deems appropriate are allowed. This is what happens when people don't come out and vote. Less than 30% of voters came out for the election when Mayor Van der Mark and her ilk took their council seats, and look what has happened to our city.

Barbara Richardson Huntington Beach

Shame! Shame on our extremist majority four Huntington Beach City Council members. For months, they have ignored the vast majority of residents pleading for the preservation of our award-winning public library. They have denigrated our librarians, banned books



Eric Licas

ORGANIZER CATHEY RYDER addresses over 100 people protesting proposed changes at Huntington Beach libraries.

that don't suit them and now support the privatization of the library to turn a profit for a former mayor and an East Coast hedge fund. As a 30-year-plus resident of the city, it is repugnant to me to be represented by council people who are the antithesis of education and family values. Our public library offers the ultimate freedoms: freedom to read, to explore new ideas, to think broadly and critically, to learn and to simply enjoy a good story. Librarians are dedicated to fostering just that! Save the

soul of our city, our public library.

Nora Pedersen Huntington Beach

With the same 4-3 vote the conservative H.B. City Council marches forward with their book-banning plan while falling behind in common sense. Calling for a 21-member citizen review board of untrained political appointees is a setback for the community, especially when there is no appeals process and each of the members can individually call for a book ban. This same self-serving

legislation will continue until enough constituents object and remove them from public office. In the meantime the entire community will suffer the consequences of mediocrity.

Richard C. Armendariz Huntington Beach

It's not just that I oppose the H.B. City Council majority's policies, but I resent their poor drafting of them and their reckless pursuit of ideological idiocy that will sink Surf City like a stone. The so-called "parent/guardian children's book review board" is a perfect example. The council majority refused to even consider correcting the obvious flaws in the now adopted ordinance, guaranteeing a long and protracted fight with possible legal consequences. This rogue majority has consistently ignored even rationally routine corrections to its proposed legislation. Maybe they fear everything will unravel if they "get real" about what they are doing. It is sad to see my hometown so misgoverned.

Tim Geddes Huntington Beach

The mailbag has been saturated with letters to the editor about Huntington Beach's political faux pas. There are other issues besides monitoring our wonderful library that should be examined, including homelessness, infrastructure, air and noise pollution, and last but not least servicing H.B. residents and their animals with a no-kill shelter rather than contracting with O.C. Animal Care in Tustin, which contributes to the deaths of innocent animals. Incidentally, I don't know anyone other than the four majority council members who want to farm out our library to a "for profit" library service. It's no coincidence that H.B.'s former Republican mayor, Mike Posey, represents this service.

Lynn Copeland Huntington Beach

Recall in H.B. may be the answer

The residents of Huntington Beach could learn a lesson from the Orange Unified School District. On two occasions the school district has run successful recalls against members of the school board, in 2001 and in the 2024 primary election. In 2001, three trustees were recalled, and just last month two of seven were recalled. Both

Lynn Lorenz Newport Beach

Fixed fees would harm consumers

Once again, the California Public Utilities Commission demonstrates that it is not really the public's agency but rather in the pockets of the investor-owned electric utilities. The latest version of their fixed fee proposal still plans a fixed fee that is more than double the national average. Those who consume less electricity, whether because of a small home, apartment or

condo, or because they've taken energy conservation steps like double-pane windows, energy-efficient appliances and LED lights, will still see major bill increases. Those who consume large amounts of electricity will see their bills decrease. To make matters worse, the fixed fee is still totally uncapped, so it can continue to go up and up. Californians already pay among the highest electricity rates in the entire country, and this proposal will only make it worse. Legislators need to pass AB 1999 to stop these fixed fees.

David Rynerson Huntington Beach

Politics at play over housing in Costa Mesa

At the April 2 Costa Mesa City Council meeting, the subject was an inclusionary/affordable housing ordinance (IHO). When it was introduced, the information was positive; from the staff reports, survey results, statistics, with staff and council members — all women — relaying that developers had acknowledged to them that these stronger requirements were acceptable. The enthusiasm was enhanced by the full council chambers. Residents and advocates gave testimonials on the dire need for affordable housing, with some working two or more jobs and others having to rely on charities to eat after they pay their rent. Then Councilwoman Andrea Marr made a motion, saying she couldn't live with herself if she didn't fulfill her campaign promises. Her proposal required 15% low or 10% very low income units in builds over 60 units per acre, ensuring the IHO would actually require inclusionary affordable housing. Councilman Arlis Reynolds seconded the motion. Whereupon Councilman Jeff Harlan got up on his hind legs, dismissed the facts espoused by the women and appointed himself the man really in charge of the facts. He then proceeded to raise the specter of terror, which he and Councilman Loren Gamos have been stoking, especially with Mayor John Stephens and Councilman Manuel Chavez. Harlan's final pronouncement hung in the air as if it came from on high: No development will occur in Costa Mesa as long as affordable units are required.

Yet another council meeting begins with its focus on the residents and ends by proselytizing about the hardships developers endure. Reynolds said the idea is laughable that billionaires won't build in Costa Mesa, when they're building in Santa Ana, which has a more restrictive IHO. She and others put forth revised motions leaving a confusing tangle. In an effort to make some progress, Marr and Reynolds finally voted with the majority 7-0 for 10% low and 5% very low income affordable units in projects over 50 units per acre. Sadly, the council's idea of playing hardball with developers is to give them everything straight off — allowing them to keep coming back to the city trough for more. Hopefully, November's election will bring new council members with some backbone to the dais. Until then, the men on the council will make a spectacle of themselves playing hardball with their Pickleball paddles.

Priscilla Rocco Costa Mesa

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

Crossword puzzle grid with answers filled in.

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers filled in.

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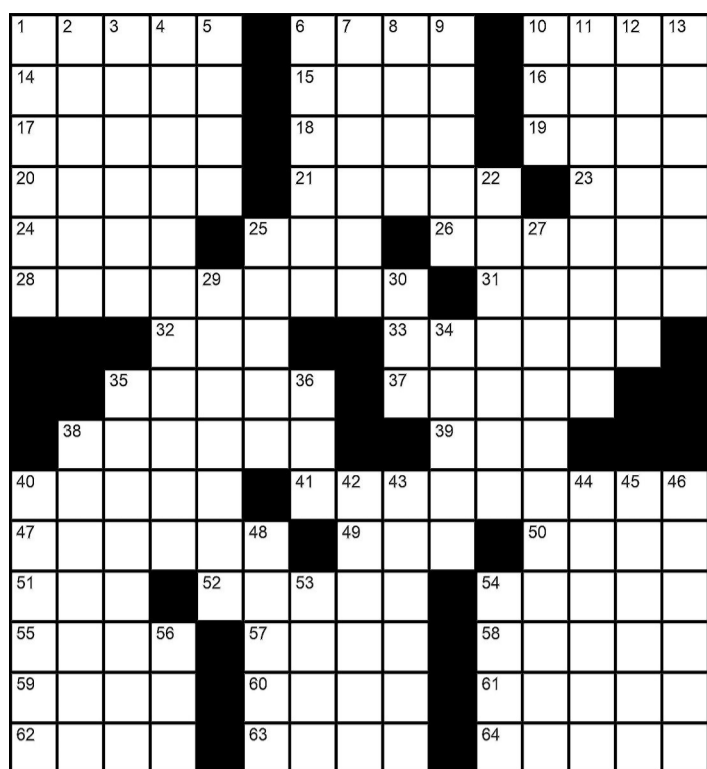
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**THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE**

By Jacqueline E. Mathews



- ACROSS**  
 1 Spaghetti, for example  
 6 Cries loudly  
 10 \_\_ Parker ("South Park" co-creator)  
 14 Stage performer  
 15 Cedar or cypress  
 16 Make do  
 17 Walk proudly  
 18 Enjoy a book  
 19 Catholic church service  
 20 Wedding cake layers  
 21 Wedding location  
 23 Turn down, as lights  
 24 All tied up  
 25 Nickname for a sibling  
 26 Snuggle  
 28 Garments like shirts and pants  
 31 "Rocketman" star Egerton  
 32 Kitten's sound  
 33 \_\_ "Magic" Johnson  
 35 Break the rules  
 37 Move like a snake  
 38 Ricky Martin's group, once  
 39 Ingest  
 40 Sail supports  
 41 Race with three components  
 47 Colored eye parts  
 49 Promotional spots  
 50 German article  
 51 City map lines: Abbr.  
 52 Ancient prophethood  
 54 "Set Fire to the Rain" singer  
 55 Location  
 57 Valentine's Day flower  
 58 Legally sound  
 59 Cabinet dept. since 1977  
 60 Lyft alternative  
 61 Take \_\_ day at a time: 2 wds.

**SUDOKU**

By the Mephram Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit [sudoku.org.uk](http://sudoku.org.uk).

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

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

- 62 Team in a game  
 63 Knee protectors  
 64 Used needle and thread

- DOWN**  
 1 Glues  
 2 Physically

- energetic  
 3 Oscar winner Meryl  
 4 Contests with brackets  
 5 Creative pursuits  
 6 Narrow waterway  
 7 Words that end

- a threat: 2 wds.  
 8 Thrash  
 9 Camry, e.g.  
 10 Film buff's channel  
 11 Vacation with driving: 2 wds.  
 12 Greek E  
 13 Guys who suck up: 2 wds.  
 22 Fall back in battle  
 25 Cut, as wood  
 27 Mailer before a wedding invitation: 3 wds.  
 29 Picture puzzles  
 30 "Wait one \_\_!"  
 34 Locales  
 35 Opposed  
 36 Tract for building  
 38 "Dirty" cocktail  
 40 Longs for  
 42 Bred  
 43 Do-nothing types  
 44 Hide: 2 wds.  
 45 Connected to the Internet  
 46 Had to have  
 48 Pancake topping  
 53 \_\_ tea  
 54 Rental car brand  
 56 Before, in poems

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## APODACA

Continued from page A5

like much, but it's enough of a decrease in protection to allow a worrying bump up in the number cases of this highly contagious virus to develop just as the spring travel season was getting underway, adding to the risk. And it doesn't even account for children who are too young for school, many of whom have not received the full schedule of recommended vaccines.

At least 60 measles cases nationwide were identified in the first three months of the year, with that tally already surpassing the total number for all of 2023. Nearly all the cases were linked to unvaccinated U.S. residents who had traveled abroad and brought the virus home with them, thus introducing it into local communities where other unvaccinated people are highly vulnerable, raising the odds that more localized outbreaks will soon occur.

AMA President Jesse Ehrenfeld, in a statement urging people to be current on vaccinations, stressed that "when individuals are

not immunized as a matter of personal preference or misinformation they put themselves and others at risk of disease — including children too young to be vaccinated, cancer patients, and other immune compromised people."

California has not been exempt from this troubling trend, even though our vaccination rate among kindergartners remains higher than the national rate. As of March 20, five confirmed cases were reported in California, according to the state Department of Public Health.

About nine years ago, you may recall, at least 131 California residents were infected in a measles outbreak that was centered around Disneyland. Some residents of other states who visited the theme park at the same time were also infected. And in 2019, there were a spate of outbreaks throughout the state, with many of the cases also linked to international travel.

Following the Disneyland outbreak, California tightened its requirements regarding vaccinations for public school students by eliminating exemptions

based on personal or religious beliefs and allowing them only for medical reasons. As a result, the overall vaccination rate for kindergartners increased.

But there remain pockets throughout the state where vaccination rates are frighteningly low. The California Department of Public Health is auditing several hundred schools that have failed to meet the recommended level of fully vaccinated students, including 50 in Orange County.

For anyone who feels tempted to believe the misinformation that proliferates on the internet, on social media, and through word of mouth, let's be clear about the facts: Vaccines are the greatest public health success story of modern times. They have greatly reduced the prevalence, or in some cases entirely eliminated, terrible diseases, thus saving millions of lives.

The measles vaccine in particular is safe and highly effective. The CDC recommends that the first dose of MMR be given when a baby is about 1 year old, and a second dose at 4 to 6 years of age. The virus the vaccine



## A REGISTERED NURSE

administers a vaccination to a distressed child. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says measles immunization dropped significantly after the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Paul Vernon  
Associated Press

protects against is one of the most contagious known to humankind. The disease it causes should not be underestimated.

Droplets of the measles virus can linger in airspace for up to two hours, and up to 90% of unvaccinated people who are exposed will contract it. One-fifth of them will be hospitalized. One in 20 infected children will develop pneumonia. Encephalitis, a brain-swelling condition, can also occur, as can hearing loss, intellectual disabilities

and immune-system disorders that can last for many years. A few children will die from the disease.

A disease, I remind you, that is entirely preventable.

That's why every time I read about an outbreak or hear about parents who have bought into discredited theories and decided to forgo or delay the recommended vaccines for their children, I feel the need to plead once again.

Facebook and Instagram are lousy places to get medical advice. An anecdote about a friend's cousin's former roommate doesn't negate decades of data about vaccine safety and efficacy. Conspiracy mongers thrive on fear, not facts.

Shut out the noise and embrace the simple truth. Vaccines work.

**PATRICE APODACA** is a former Los Angeles Times staff writer and is coauthor of "A Boy Named Courage: A Surgeon's Memoir of Apartheid." She lives in Newport Beach.

## BLAZE

Continued from page A5

president Amy Gutmann. He once published a poem under the pen name Kirk Gingle. His love of LaCroix seltzer was widely known, so deep that he'd mused about tattooing an image of a can on his thigh. (When we memorialized Blaze on campus the month after his death, his friends asked me to get LaCroix temporary tattoos to distribute. Unfortunately, due to an Etsy snafu, they never arrived.)

Blaze was also known for sincerity: He didn't shy away from critique when he believed it was warranted, even if it meant calling out a classmate, a roommate or an administrator. His fellow literary magazine staffers prepared

for debates with him over submissions and knew that in arguing with Blaze, they'd learn something. I remember one student saying that Blaze taught him how to read a poem. Blaze couldn't stand that his freshman hallmates would take over the common room all day on Sundays to watch football. He hated the "Will & Grace" reboot. He spoke up when one of his people was wronged. In my office, we discussed what the sciences could take from the pedagogy of the humanities and what the humanities could take from the pedagogy of the sciences, and where academia fell short overall.

His praise was as deeply felt as his criticism. Blaze thanked people regularly, his friends for their pres-

ence in his life, and me as he navigated through a rigorous course load and the uncertainty that comes with being skilled across disciplines. It was hard for him to narrow his options because he was genuinely interested in — and good at — so many things: psychology, medicine, chemistry, writing. He worked with younger writers with care. He helped his teachers get the discussion going in class. When there were no seats left at a meeting, he left his own chair and joined his friend on the floor so she wouldn't sit alone. He went on boba dates with his little sister. He developed close friendships with several guys he first met through a dating app.

And the food. Blaze was known at home and at

school for cooking late into the night, for the Frank Sinatra soundtrack that would accompany him in the kitchen. He obsessed over sourdough starter with a friend. His kombucha scoby is alive and well in Philadelphia today. He made cranberry upside-down cake and pineapple upside-down cake, turkey Bolognese and vegan, gluten-free mac & cheese. What he cooked depended on who he was cooking for. He fine-tuned his own recipes, including one for chocolate chip banana bread that was published in the campus food magazine's cookbook. On the last night of his life, just after New Year's, he made a complex Thanksgiving dinner-caliber meal for his family. His mother still keeps some of the leftovers

in the back of the freezer.

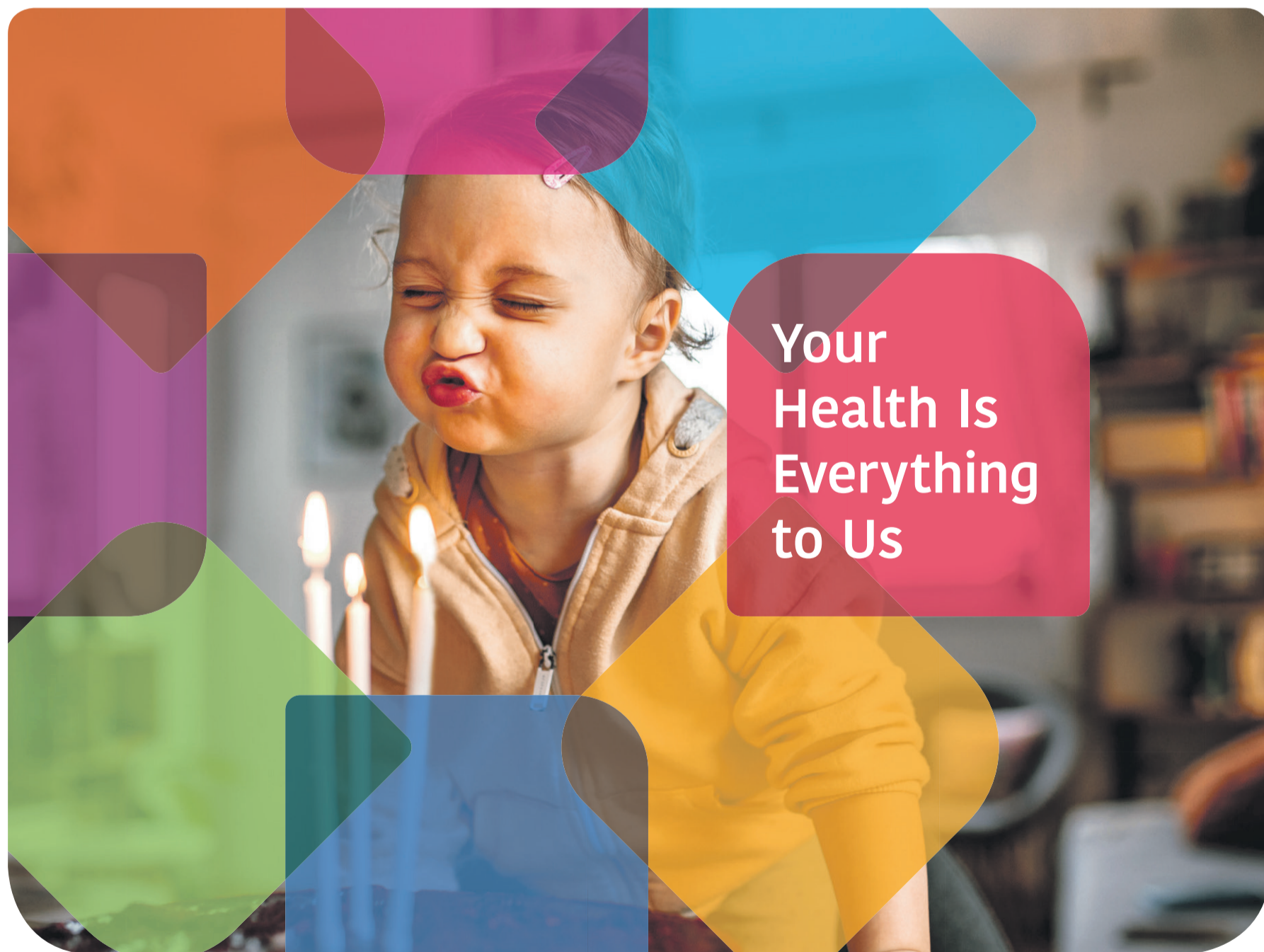
When we grieve, it is easy to get caught up in the particulars of death: in how it happened and how we reacted, in what we know and what we don't, and in cases like Blaze's, in whether justice will be served or if justice exists. This is all understandable and allowed. But none of us should be remembered only for the worst thing that happened to us.

"May his memory be a blessing" is the common condolence in Jewish culture. This felt unreachable, unbearable in those early weeks of mourning Blaze. While the pain of this loss will always remain, for me Blaze's memory now mingles with the joy of a good meal, the enlightenment of a brilliant poem, and the hilarity of singing along to

a '70s Europop classic. In the Instagram video from ABBA the Museum, just when it seemed like Blaze was helplessly off, it came together. At the chorus, he snaps into sync with the Swedish stars, planting his feet shoulder-width apart and facing the audience. He points forward with confidence. Blaze's family's laughter swells, his mother's the loudest. Then, he turns to his right to face the guitarist and they sing:

"Mamma mia, does it show again? My, my, just how much I've missed you?"

**JAMIE-LEE JOSSELYN** is the associate director for recruitment at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing.



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