



A wildlife corridor funded, designed and constructed by Great Park developer FivePoint Holdings, working alongside the environmental group Laguna Greenbelt, is taking shape.



Corridor in progress

BY BEN BRAZIL

During the Laguna Beach fire of 1993, many animals had difficulty retreating from the massive blaze due to a lack of open space.

The fire caused devastating damage, burning 16,000 acres and hundreds of homes. About one in five of the endangered gnatcatchers that lived in Orange County were killed.

In the wake of the fire, animals from the surrounding habitat could not travel to coastal areas to replenish the populations.

A wildlife corridor became necessary for animals to access the areas that had been

ravaged by the fire.

Now, nearly three decades later, much of that corridor is being funded, designed and constructed by Great Park developer FivePoint Holdings. The company is working alongside the environmental group Laguna Greenbelt, which fought for the corridor since the 1990s.

FivePoint has been working on restoring 2.5 miles of the 6-mile corridor since it broke ground in early 2018. When the project is finished, it will connect the Cleveland National Forest with Orange County wild coastal terrains. The grounds were formerly used for agriculture and as the Marine Corps Air Station El Toro golf course.

"Significant progress has been made toward connecting two of the largest open spaces in Orange County, which are vital to the well-being of wildlife that live and move throughout the area," said FivePoint Chief Operating Officer Lynn Jochim.

"We are grateful for our partnership with Laguna Greenbelt and the industry experts we have worked closely with to complete the connection between 20,000 acres of coastal chaparral and the Santa Ana Mountains. We remain dedicated to continued stewardship of the land and collaboration with our partners to finish this critical envi-

See *Corridor*, page R5

Above: **AN AREA OF LAND** near the Orange County Great Park in Irvine is being restored to its natural state to allow for animals to traverse the Orange County coastal terrains and Santa Ana mountain ranges. Top left, a before photo from 2018, bottom as it looks today.

Photos courtesy of Tsutsumida Pictures and FivePoint Holdings

Cases thrown out over lack of trials

An Orange County judge believes the pandemic should have no effect on court proceedings.

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF

On what would be the first of three occasions in three days, U.S. District Judge Cormac Carney looked into his computer screen one recent January morning and apologized to a criminal defendant for the courthouse's pandemic-related prohibition on in-person hearings.

Then he repeated a move that had already drawn sharp objection from federal prosecutors: He announced the dismissal of all charges, part of a constitutional stance he said has left him feeling isolated and frustrated.

"I feel like I'm out on an island here; it's me against all my colleagues," Carney told robbery suspect Justin Henning. "I just have such a problem with what they're doing."

The Los Angeles-based Central District of California, which includes Orange County, hasn't held a trial since March, with both jury and bench trials prohibited under COVID-19-related restrictions approved by a majority of judges.

Carney is among a minority who believe trials should continue, as is happening in other courts, including Orange County Superior Court, and since September he's been trying to summon jury pools for trials only to be rejected by the Central District's chief judge, Philip Gutierrez.

As a result, Carney has granted dismissal requests from defense attorneys alleging speedy trial violations in four cases, including Henning's robbery case, two gun possession cases against convicted felons and a 35-count indictment against a Newport Beach doctor accused of illegally supplying addicted patients with drugs.

Like Henning, physician Jeffrey Olsen was already out of jail on

See *Cases*, page R2

Dana Point is named first Whale Heritage Site in U.S.

BY MARY FORGIONE

Two women who operate rival whale-watching tours in Dana Point came together to work on having their beloved slice of the coast named one of the whaliest places in the world. Their efforts paid off.

Dana Point on Wednesday became the first Whale Heritage Site in the U.S., a distinction it shares with Hervey Bay in Australia, the Bluff in South Africa and newly named Tenerife-La Gomera Marine Area in Spain. The designation acknowledges areas known for having cultural ties and respectful interactions with whales and dolphins.

"It really is something that will solidify Dana Point as the whale watching and dolphin capital of the world," said Donna Kalez, co-

president of Dana Wharf Sportfishing & Whale Watching. "It's been a longtime dream."

Her father, Don Hansen, started whale-watching tours off Southern California in the 1960s and pioneered the first whale festival half a century ago — historical ties that put the Orange County coastal town in the running.

Gisele Anderson, vice president at Captain Dave's, said the designation will attract visitors who want to see five species of whale and five species of dolphin that thrive in waters off the point. "We have more wild dolphin per square mile than anywhere else in the world," Anderson said, noting that 450,000 common dolphin live between Southern California and Baja, Mexico.

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Mike Meyers | Dana Wharf Whale Watching

WHALES FLOCK to Dana Point, which was just named the first Whale Heritage Site in the United States.

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ORANGE COUNTY

Sheriff Sandra Hutchens, died earlier this month. Orange County supervisors have voted to rename a Sheriff's Department training facility after her.



File Photo

Training facility to be named after former sheriff Hutchens

Supervisors unanimously vote on the change to honor the former department leader who died this month.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Orange County supervisors on Tuesday unanimously voted to rename a Sheriff's Department training facility after controversial former Sheriff Sandra Hutchens, who died of breast cancer earlier this month.

The Katella Training Facility in Orange will now be known as the "Sandra Hutchens Regional Law Enforcement Training Center."

Supervisors approved the item after each praised Hutchens for her decade-long term as sheriff.

"She came into the department at a very difficult time," said Supervisor Don Wagner. "She restored honor, not to the badge, not to the department, because the men and women of the department had never lost it under prior leadership, but she did restore it to leadership."

Hutchens was hired in 2008 as a "change agent" to replace former Sheriff Mike Carona, who was convicted for attempting to obstruct a grand jury investigation and was accused of accepting secret cash payments and providing badges and concealed weapons licenses to campaign contributors.

But Hutchens' department was plagued by several scandals, including a jailhouse informant scandal that led to Scott Dekraai, who was re-

sponsible for the worst mass shooting in Orange County history, to be spared the death penalty. Other convictions were also tossed out.

Hutchens also oversaw the department during an evidence mishandling scandal, where several deputies failed to file evidence or filed it late, and a scandal where deputies were accused of improperly listening in on phone calls that jail inmates made to their attorneys.

She announced her retirement in 2017 after the American Civil Liberties Union released a report on inhumane conditions in Orange County jails.

Paul Wilson, whose wife was one of the eight people killed by Dekraai, spoke out against the renaming of the facility at Tuesday's board meeting after the board had already approved the item.

"I can understand the idea of wanting to commemorate in the name of someone who has passed," Wilson said.

"It's nice to see Don Barnes expressed that sympathy, but it's not the right place. Sheriff Hutchens left her post well-involved in three major scandals that clearly began during her tenure — the snitch scandal, the phone scandal and the evidence-booking scandal.

"All of these are major failures of training, these failures are as great as those that have occurred in any law enforcement agency in the entire United States."

Wilson referenced the illegal jailhouse informant scandal and how it impacted the Seal Beach massacre

case.

"I sat for months and months of testimony in which the Sheriff's Department personnel testified that they were not trained in how to correctly follow the law regarding the use of jailhouse informants," Wilson said. "Others were so concerned about their violations of the laws that they refused to testify altogether."

"The evidence scandal is about the failure of personnel to follow policy and law regarding the handling of evidence. It makes no sense to attach Sheriff Sandra Hutchens' name to a training facility if the message moving forward in this county is that we want our law enforcement members to always follow the rules and laws of this county and of the nation.

"Please choose something else to honor her. A training facility is not the appropriate action of recognizing her service. Please, I beg you, please do not further disgrace the death of my wife, and eight other victims from that day."

Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes, who also spoke at the meeting, tweeted his support for the board's decision after the meeting.

"Thank you to the Board of Supervisors for naming the OC Sheriff training facility the 'Sandra Hutchens Regional Law Enforcement Training Center,'" Barnes said. "As deputies learn the best practices of our profession it is fitting they do so at a place named for one of our profession's best."

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Courtesy of Irvine Community Land Trust

THE IRVINE Community Land Trust recently broke ground on the Sage Park affordable home ownership project.

Ground broken on affordable home project in Irvine

BY BEN BRAZIL

As Orange County's home prices and sales surge amid a pandemic housing boom, the Irvine Community Land Trust recently broke ground on an affordable home ownership community in Irvine.

The Sage Park development, which will be located north of Irvine Boulevard, will have 68 units available for moderate-income families.

The development — which is estimated to be completed in January 2022 — will provide an affordable alternative for people looking to buy their first home in a county that's seen the median price of a home rise to nearly \$800,000.

"For homeownership, it's becoming harder and harder for first time families to go in and buy a home," said Mark Asturias, executive director of the Irvine Community Land Trust. "Our homes are probably close to 50% of the cost of a similar market-rate home in Irvine."

Sage Park will be the fifth affordable housing development for the Irvine Community Land Trust. The nonprofit also rents out a few scattered condominiums.

The trust's Salerno development attracted more

than 6,800 applicants, indicating a need for more units in Orange County as more people are struggling financially due to the pandemic economy.

Residents have started to move into Salerno, which is located at Nightmist and Sand Canyon Avenue, a few blocks from the Great Park and 5 Freeway.

The initial residents of Sage Park will be decided by a lottery system in July.

Applicants for the Sage Park development will have to meet household income requirements to qualify for affordable housing. They will also need to attain a fixed-rate mortgage because the trust does not issue mortgage loans.

Sage Park will include 16 two-bedroom, 36 three-bedroom and 16 four-bedroom homes. They will resemble townhomes.

Asturias said that due to a restricted formula, the Sage Park homes will always stay affordable even to subsequent buyers.

"You have to be able to serve everybody that wants to work in this community and would like to live in this community," Asturias said.

For more information about Sage Park, visit irvineclt.org.

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Irvine Unified receives \$2 million contribution for arts and science

BY TIMESOC STAFF

Declining budgets and the coronavirus pandemic have generated problems for public schools but Irvine Co.'s ongoing financial support aims to provide some consistent arts and science education for the Irvine Unified School District.

The company donated \$2 million to Irvine Unified as part of a 20-year \$45-million commitment through the Excellence in Education Enrichment program. The program started in 2006, and the funding goes toward technology, supplies and

teachers that advance arts and science education.

"This commitment is essential in helping IUSD address the challenges brought on by the pandemic and helps maintain our specialized programming in the arts, music and science," district Supt. Terry Walker said. "The support and partnership of Irvine Company really is a symbol of what makes our community great."

Instruction includes two one-hour science lessons per week, two 40-minute music lessons per week and six art lessons per year taught by a specialized instructor to every

fourth- through sixth-grader in the district.

Without the funding, classes would only be available to secondary students. "Education has always been at the core of our planning efforts in Irvine, and today's contribution continues our company's decades-long partnership with IUSD, students and families," Jeff Davis, Irvine Co. vice president, said.

According to the website, Irvine Co. has been one of California's largest landowners since 1864, which evolved from a ranching and farming operation to a real estate in-



EVERY FOURTH- through sixth-grader in Irvine Unified takes two 40-minute music lessons per week. The Irvine Co. has donated \$2 million to Irvine Unified.

Courtesy of Irvine Unified

vestment company.

Some of its past philanthropic contributions to education include donating 1,000 acres to create the UC Irvine campus, en-

dowing more than 60 permanent professor chairs at the University of California and California Institute of Technology and founding one of the na-

tion's first graduate level environmental schools at UC Santa Barbara.

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CASES

Continued from page R1

bond, as was one of the gun suspects, Steven Nicholson.

But the other felon accused of gun possession, Ronald Bernard Ware, was in custody when Carney dismissed his case Jan. 21, and Carney denied prosecutors' request to impose a bond while they appeal his decision to the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The judge's dismissals are done with prejudice instead of without, which means prosecutors can't pursue the charges again. They're also an unprecedented rebuke of pandemic restrictions in the country's largest federal court district, and they come amid a mixed approach to jury trials nationally that's largely favored some form of in-person trial procedure as opposed to the Central District's indefinite ban. According to differing opinions, they're either a brave stance against an unconstitutional policy or a legally unsound move in an administrative fight between Carney and his fellow jurists. In their appeal of Olsen's dismissal, federal prosecutors said Carney "weaponized this case to combat his colleagues" and pointed to his statement that not allowing prosecutors to refile charges "is



Gary Coronado
Los Angeles Times

U.S. DISTRICT Judge Cormac J. Carney, pictured in 2018.

the only sanction with enough teeth to create any hope of deterring additional delay in the resumption of jury trials and avoiding further dismissals of indictments."

"Punishing the government and letting [the] defendant escape the consequences of his wrongdoing are not [a] permissible means to prevent the suspension of jury trials by the court itself," prosecutors wrote. They want Carney's dismissal fully overturned, or at the least they want to be allowed to seek another indictment.

The 9th Circuit granted the U.S. attorney's office's request to expedite the appeal, and oral argument is scheduled March 18. Prose-

cutors had not yet formally appealed Carney's three January dismissals as of Wednesday, but they indicated they would at each hearing.

Prosecutors cited in their brief the judge's comparisons of Olsen's lack of an immediate trial to civil rights struggles of African Americans and the U.S. Supreme Court's *Korematsu vs. United States* decision allowing the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. They implied his analogies were outlandish, but in his three recent dismissals, Carney continued to push the issue of jury trials as one of the utmost urgency.

"Given the constitutional importance of a jury trial to our democracy, a court cannot deny an accused his right to a jury trial even if conducting one is difficult," Carney wrote in each of the three dismissal orders.

Gutierrez did not respond to interview requests. One of Carney's colleagues in Orange County, U.S. District Judge David Carter, appears to share Carney's concerns, telling TimesOC he's "deeply concerned about the lack of access to justice for the poor and underprivileged by the indefinite closure of my court."

"The Constitution has never and should never take an indefinite break,"

Carter said.

Carney has repeatedly cited Orange County Superior Court's ongoing coronavirus trial procedures while lamenting the Central District's indefinite ban. In each dismissal hearing this month, he said video hearings compromise "the constitutional and legal rights of the litigants and sends a terrible message to the public that what we do in federal court is really not essential, and that their lives, liberties and rights are not important enough to have a hearing during the pandemic."

Orange County Superior Court resumed jury trials in June after halting them in mid-March. As of Jan. 22, judges had conducted 145 in-person trials, including 52 felony, 73 misdemeanor and 20 civil, said court spokesman Kostas Kalaitzidis. Trials were suspended for most of December but resumed Jan. 11, with prohibitions currently in place that limit the number of total jurors at a time to twice-a-day groups of 160 at the Central Justice Center in Santa Ana, 40 at the Harbor Justice Center in Newport Beach and 40 at the West Justice Center in Westminster.

Carney also has cited the fact that grand juries met and returned 65 new indictments between June and December, though he

noted the Central District halted those proceedings Dec. 9 and won't resume them until Jan. 29.

In the Jan. 19 Zoom hearing, Henning's lawyer, Jeff Tedford, said the U.S. Attorney's Office "has been complicit in not trying to implement any, any protocols that can be put in place to have jury trials."

Tedford said he's appeared in court all over the state and has a trial soon in Santa Clara County Superior Court in San Jose, "where they are experiencing just as large a surge as we are in L.A. and Orange County."

Henning, watching from home, thanked Carney for "being a fair judge and upholding the Constitution" and "allowing me a chance to move on forward with my life."

Carney thanked him for his encouraging words and said he needed them "especially at this point in my career."

"It's kind of the twilight of my career," the judge said.

Henning was among 12 men charged in an alleged robbery ring that prosecutors said targeted high-end watch dealers. A jury convicted him of gun and robbery charges in 2017, but Carney acquitted him and ordered a new trial.

The 9th overturned the acquittal but, in a twist, affirmed the order for a new trial, which sent the case

back to Carney. The judge refused a single trial continuance before Henning filed the dismissal motion.

Carney continued trial once in June for Nicholson, who had been sentenced to five years in prison by a now-retired judge before the 9th Circuit overturned his jury conviction for felon in possession of a firearm. But Carney refused prosecutors' next request in December, setting up the Jan. 20 hearing in which Nicholson's indictment was dropped and his \$50,000 bond was exonerated.

In the last case dismissed Jan. 21, the defendant, Ware, is a four-time convicted felon arrested in August on a charge of felon in possession of a firearm. Carney continued trial once in September, then refused prosecutors' second request this month and granted a dismissal request by Ware's public defender. Before the Zoom hearing ended, Carney warned Ware his release from jail "is going to take, I would imagine, a few hours."

"So I just hope that you can be patient," the judge said.

Ware thanked everyone. "I hope that all you guys stay safe out there and stay blessed," Ware said.

MEGHANN M. CUNIFF is a contributor to Los Angeles Times Community News.



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We've witnessed your courage. We've witnessed your unwavering strength. For nearly a year, you have put the needs of the community above your own. Thank you for showing up day in and day out to make a difference in the lives of others that need you now more than ever. Thanks to you and your families for your bravery and your sacrifice. Thank you for choosing to be our heroes.

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'Santa Ana, a Year in Poetry' project to spotlight 52 poets, one a week through 2021

BY VERA CASTANEDA

The Santa Ana Literary Assn. is highlighting one local poet every week throughout 2021 in a project called "Santa Ana, a Year in Poetry."

The first featured piece, "Communion," written by activist and comedian Sandra De Anda, deals with the idea of home.

"Someone recently asked me where home was," the poem reads, "and all I could say / it is that time when we weren't afraid."

"A Breath," by David Lopez, is the latest poem presented, and begins with the words, "Sunsets, / They do not take respite — / Like the hummingbird outside Nina's rosal / Resting her cradled wings."

Readers can also expect poetry from Josh Wood and Marcus Omari.

Poets who live, work or have a connection to Santa Ana can submit a short biography and their work for consideration through booksaremedicine@gmail.com. S.A.L.A. is accepting submissions on a rolling basis.

J. Martin Strangeweather, one of the group's founders, said the project is open to people from all walks of life, from well-established to unpublished poets.

Selected poems are highlighted through S.A.L.A. and Santa Ana Public Library's social media pages.

The group intends to publish a collection of poetry at the end of the year with all proceeds going toward a local charity. "We're doing all of this without any funding whatsoever," Strangeweather said. "We're not going to let a lack of funding keep us from making our community a better place in our own humble way."

The group is applying for grants that could allow them to pay all the poets involved in the project and to commission an artist to create cover artwork for the book.

Cheryl Eberly, a librarian focused on young adult and volunteer services at the Santa Ana Public Library, said S.A.L.A.'s yearlong project was the right fit for the library to share online.

"Santa Ana has so many tal-



Courtesy of J. Martin Strangeweather

J. MARTIN Strangeweather and Brennan Roach are two out of five people who created the Santa Ana Literary Assn. in 2020.

ented writers and poets. I'm glad they have this venue to share their poetry," Eberly said. S.A.L.A. started in summer 2020 to provide a platform that showcases the literary presence of Santa Ana, Strangeweather said.

"We felt that our local writers and poets and playwrights were not getting enough attention," Strangeweather said. "We founded this literary association to set a standard for integrity, inclusivity and equality in our oftentimes factionalized community."

The association's Facebook page promotes local authors, poets and playwrights with the goal of becoming the go-to site for information on Santa Ana's literary scene.

In addition to the yearlong poetry project, S.A.L.A. is working on a short story anthology titled "American Daydream" that would include pieces from Strangeweather and Southern California residents Tagert Ellis, J. G. McClure, Martina Hutchins, L. Joyce Morel, Justin Lee, Brennan Roach and Lance Boyle.

The book is set to be released in March with all profits going towards the Santa Ana Public Library.

The group also plans to host readings and other literary events when restrictions in place due to the coronavirus pandemic are lifted, and officials say it is safe to gather in person.

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A FAN READS the names of Los Angeles Lakers legend Kobe Bryant, his daughter, Gianna, and the seven other victims that died in a helicopter crash last year on a mural painted on the side of El Toro Bravo market in Costa Mesa.

Kevin Chang
Staff Photographer

O.C. reflects on the death of Kobe Bryant, others in crash

BY ANDREW TURNER,
MATT SZABO

Orange Coast College women's basketball coach Samantha Doucette said Monday night she reckoned she would not spend much time on social media the following day.

The one-year anniversary of the helicopter crash that took the lives of Kobe Bryant, his daughter, Gianna, and seven others arrived on Tuesday.

Bryant, a Los Angeles Lakers great and a Newport Beach resident, has been celebrated in numerous ways — from murals and memorabilia collections to Orange County declaring Aug. 24 to be "Kobe Bryant Day" in recognition of the Nos. 8 and 24 he wore during his playing career.

Doucette has coped with the tragedy by remembering those who were lost on her own terms, when she chooses to as opposed to when a reminder comes up unexpectedly.

"I guess you could say I'm a Kobe fanatic, even more now than I was before," said Doucette, who was a three-time NAIA All-American while playing for the Vanguard University women's basketball team. "I'm buying all of his books, any magazine that [his face is] on. That's how I feel close to that short time in my life, when I was able to learn from him and be a part of his life."

Also lost in the fatal accident were Orange Coast College baseball coach John Altobelli, his wife, Keri,

and daughter, Alyssa; Sarah and Payton Chester, a mother and daughter from Newport Beach; Huntington Beach resident and Mamba Academy basketball coach Christina Mauser, and Ara Zobayan, the pilot for the ill-fated trip that was headed for a basketball tournament at the Mamba Sports Academy in Thousand Oaks.

Kobe Bryant murals were a popular destination for those wishing to celebrate the life of the Southern California sports icon on Tuesday. At the mural of Kobe and Gianna located on the wall of El Toro Bravo market in Costa Mesa, more than a dozen candles were lit in their memory.

Allie Ramirez, 30, of Santa Ana, said watching Kobe and the Lakers was a communal experience that brought people together. After leaving flowers at the site, she recalled being with fellow fans outside Staples Center for Bryant's last game.

"It was like a bunch of Lakers fans, and we actually went to a restaurant right next door," Ramirez reminisced. "We were all watching the game there, and it was like we were inside the Staples Center. It was so amazing. It was one of the coolest experiences I have ever had."

Tyson Pruong, 32, of Santa Ana, came with Ramirez, who also wore a shirt with the Nos. 24, 8 and 2, the last being the jersey number worn by Gianna.

"He was an amazing player on the court, amazing person off the court," Pruong said. "I'm not even a Lakers fan, but I idolized his game

so much growing up."

John Altobelli, who won four California Community College Athletic Assn. state championships in his 27 years at the helm, was honored as Orange Coast College shared a virtual memorial video on YouTube.

The 40-minute video featured remarks from Pirates close to Altobelli, including his brother, sports information director Tony Altobelli, as well as head baseball coach Nate Johnson. OCC Athletic Director Jason Kehler, President Angelica Lora Suarez and Dean of Kinesiology and Athletics Michael Sutliff also gave remarks.

Johnson was named head coach last July, shedding the interim title he was given after John Altobelli's death.

"I could tell stories all day long," Johnson said. "I definitely miss those three [John, Keri and Alyssa Altobelli]. It's never easy to talk about. I thank all of you guys for the support that you showed myself and this team through last year ... Remember those that were on the helicopter today."

"Make today count. That was 'Alto's' favorite saying, 'Make today the best day,' and I know he lived that way. He instilled it in our players. He talked constantly about that you never what's going to happen ... [but] make today a great day, and make every day a great day. Appreciate what you have, love your family, but more important, make today a great day."

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