Times

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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

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 Five-Point 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 proj ect 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 pan-demic-related prohibition on inperson 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 Dis-trict's chief judge, Philip Gutier-

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, copresident of Dana Wharf Sport-fishing & 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.



Mike Meyers | Dana Wharf Whale Watching

See Whales, page R5 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.

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

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 evidencebooking 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

"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 placed named for one of our profession's

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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 Irvine."

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

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 threebedroom 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, irvineclt.org.

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sixth-grader in

Irvine Unified

40-minute music

lessons per week.

The Irvine Co. has

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 fourth- through sixthand science education.

"This commitment 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

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-



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-

Irvine Unified tion's first graduate level environmental schools at

dailypilot@latimes.com Twitter: @TheDailyPilot

UC Santa Barbara.

CASES

Continued from page R1

bond, as was one of the gun suspects, Steven Nicholson. But the other felon ac-

cused 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 inperson 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 prose-

cutors 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

"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 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

though

December,

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 highend 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

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.

To Our Healthcare Heroes

A Heartfelt Thank You from All of Us

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.

We encourage the community to continue doing your part by practicing physical distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands frequently and getting vaccinated once the vaccine becomes available to you.

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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

"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 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 high-lighted 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 wav.'

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-



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. 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. Iovce 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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the names of Los Angeles Lakers

A FAN READS

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

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 women's basketball University 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

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 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

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

"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 Loera 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

"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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Residents get a say in Fullerton library's arts programming

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Over the next three to four months, the design for the restoration of Fullerton's historic Hunt Library will take shape, and those involved are asking the community to participate in the planning.

The mid-century modern building designed by architect William Pereira has been at the center of discussion among the city, developers and preservationists over the last couple of years. The Norton Simon Foundation and Hunt Foods donated the building, located at 201 S Basque Ave., to Fullerton in 1962.

Although Norton Simon had intended to use the building as an art museum, the city used it as a public library until its closure in 2013 due to lack of funding. For several years, Grace Ministries International Church leased the

In 2018, Fullerton City Council voted to designated the Hunt as a historical landmark, and a year later state Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva helped secure a

THE HUNT Library in Fullerton is set to undergo a \$2.5-million

renovation.

Kevin Chang Staff Photographer



\$2.5-million California State Library grant to renovate it. In 2020, council members agreed to a proposal by two arts nonprofits, Arts Orange County and Heritage Fu-

Now, construction is set to start in the fall for the restoration to be completed by spring 2022, but city staff is also investigating alternative ways to accelerate the tentative schedule, according to City Manager Ken Domer.

ture, to reuse the building as an

art and cultural center.

Through email, Domer said the city anticipates bringing the Hunt up to building code will cost more than the amount of the grant.

The first effort to gather information is a 15-minute online survey that will be available for the next two to three weeks in English, Spanish and Korean.

Richard Stein, Arts O.C. president and CEO, said the organization has received 600 responses to the survey in the first 10 days.

The group is also conducting interviews with stakeholders including other arts organizations, businesses, public school and higher education staff, elected officials and groups who have been concerned over the future of the building like Save the Hunt and Fullerton Heritage.

Lastly, they are scheduling virtual brainstorming sessions that will likely be open to the public in mid-February.

"What we're interested in getting to know is what kinds of activities the community would like to see there," Stein said.

"There are many people in the adjacent neighborhoods as well as the local schools who used to go to it when it was a library and loved the place." Although Fullerton consolidated its library services at 353 W Commonwealth Ave., Stein said there is a desire to have some library services offered

The grant funding is exclusively meant for the renovation of the building and the programming will have to be self-sustaining financially.

at the Hunt.

There is a proposal to install a café that could be a source of revenue. The property may be used as rental space for community meetings or special events such as weddings. Some activities like performances could also merit an admission fee while others could be offered at no cost.

Stein said there is interest in restoring after-school activities for students that used to take place when the Hunt was a functioning public library. However, staff would need to find grants or revenue to provide those activities for

Lectures by historian Charles Phoenix about 1950s and 1960s Southern California culture, exhibits of artwork by artist Shag (who lives in O.C.) or fun events like tongue-in-cheek Tupperware parties are some of the ideas put forth for the arts program that would be in keeping with a midcentury modern theme.

"Whatever we do there, we hope will not only be attractive to local residents but will draw visitors as well to the community," Stein said.

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CORRIDOR

Continued from page R1

ronmental link for Irvine, the region and generations to come."

The corridor will encourage biological diversity in the animals that dwell in the more than 20,000 acres of coastal chaparral surrounding Laguna Beach, officials

Species such as the gray fox, bobcat, coyote and various native birds will be able to travel between Orange County coastal habitat and the Santa Ana Mountains.

"It's crucial, particularly to the coastal wilderness area around Laguna Beach — if we're cutting that off and essentially making an island from the rest of the region ... the animals that live in the wild along the coast are really going to suffer because they need genetic diversity," said Gabriela Worrel, outreach coordinator with Laguna Greenbelt.

Diversity is crucial in an animal population because it safeguards against singular catastrophic events. If

animals are mating with their family members and reintroducing the same traits into the collective genome, a single disease could wash through the population and wreak hav-

Worrel said genetic testing has revealed that some of the animals living in the wilderness parks along the coast are already showing signs of genetic degrada-

More open space means more potential mates to encourage biodiversity.

"Additionally, consider climate change and what's happening with wildfires and how that's going to increase," Worrel said. "The best thing for nature is to have these escape routes that animals can use to go to another area when there's a fire. And then it allows them to come back into the area as well when that disaster is over. So, those things are all crucial for maintaining our habitat on the coast.'

Laguna Greenbelt has contributed to a number of environmental triumphs in

the county, including establishing the 22,000-acre greenbelt around Laguna Beach, Crystal Cove State Park and the 38,000-acre Nature Reserve of Orange County.

The city, which owns the land, is monitoring the progress and has reviewed the planning and construction documents for the project.

In the last year and a half, FivePoint planted 98% of the vegetation, which includes more than 15,000 shrubs and plants, 24,000 cactuses and 4,500 trees. All of the irrigation lines have been installed. The supplemental watering will be necessary in the first few years as the infant vegetation grows.

FivePoint has sprayed 3.5 million square feet of hydro seed, which staves off erosion and encourages grass growth.

About 60% of the fencing has been installed to keep people out of the area. The project has not been

immune from COVID-related setbacks.

A FivePoint spokesman

said the pandemic slowed the pace of the project due to a shortage of resources. It was particularly difficult to get shipments of fencing at certain times over the last year. Crew availability was also another obstacle since the beginning of the pandemic.

spokeswoman Irvine Kristina Perrigoue said next steps for the project are "dependent on multiple variables and are still being evaluated."

Perrigoue said there is no estimate for the completion of the corridor because plans have not yet been approved for surrounding areas in the southern end.

"This thing is moving at the pace that everybody expected in the sense that there are a number of players involved including wildlife agencies and others that need to check off on things as it progresses," the Five-Point spokesman said.

He said that more work needs to be done on a couple of "pinch points" where the corridor intersects with Barranca and Alton parkways. The area gets more



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

A CACTUS farm in the Upper Segment 2 of a wildlife corridor.

complex as it runs under the intersection.

The fencing also needs to be completed.

While the original estimate for the corridor's completion was mid-2019, Perrigoue said the development of the corridor is not moving slower than expected.

The FivePoint spokesman said the company is not estimating a deadline for the corridor's completion.

"These are complex proj-

ects that involve engineering, science and a lot of input from different people and the project is moving forward," the FivePoint spokesman said. "... We're, from our standpoint, very pleased with the progress that's been made and where we are now, and I think we can certainly see the light at the end of the tunnel on

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WHALES

Continued from page R1

Even so, that's not why Dana Point became a herit-

Ben Williamson, programs director of World Animal Protection U.S., explained that sites are selected for other reasons. "It's all about the heritage, the culture, the education and conservation sustainability," he said. His global nonprofit organization partners with the World Cetacean Alliance in hopes of creating "a world where cetaceans only live in the wild, where they live in harmony with people."

Both organizations oppose dolphins and whales being kept in captivity, where they are held in tanks much smaller than their natural habitat range and forced to perform tricks. The Whale Heritage Site program offers a chance for visitors to interact responsibly with animals and see them in the wild - and train future generations to seek authentic interactions too.

But back to the whales.

Dana Point visitors who take a tour as short as 21/2 hours may see gray whales on their round-trip migration between Alaska and the warm waters of Mexico (now through May). In the 2000s, blue, fin and minke whales began to appear as well, making the area a yearround whale-watching destination.

Kalez and Anderson got

the idea to raise the profile of Dana Point and its whale heritage when they traveled to other states and coun-Alaska, including Hawaii and Australia, to study their whale-watching operations. After comparing notes, the two realized Dana Point's small natural harbor had access to more robust wildlife viewing than just

about anywhere else. "In Boston, they travel four hours to go out and see a humpback whale, and then travel four hours back without seeing anything else," Kalez said. beauty of where we are is that we can travel seven miles to see a humpback whale and on the way back see four kinds of dolphins."

The two women admit they were once fierce rivals. competing for tourist dollars and the best whalewatching spots off the coast. They set aside their differences a few years ago to capitalize on the common pride they have in their community and the mammals that have made Dana Point famous. Two years ago they worked together to trademark Dana Point as "The Dolphin & Whale Watching Capital of the World" from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

"It was started by my dad and his love for the gray whales, and the fact they came by Dana Point harbor every year like the swallows coming back to San Juan Capistrano," Kalez said.

Anderson quoted her husband, Capt. Dave, who compared Dana Point to the

wild plains of the Serengeti. "Who goes to Africa and then goes to a zoo to see animals in captivity?" Anderson said. "But people come here and drive right by the Serengeti of the ocean to go see them in captivity."

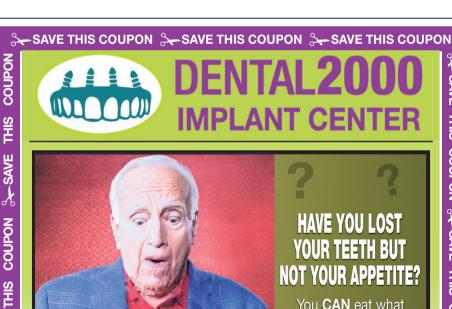
WHALE-WATCHING TOURS IN DANA POINT

Capt. Dave's takes visitors on six vessels, including a high-speed catamaran sailboat called the Manute'a for 21/2-hour whale and dolphin tours every day. Tickets cost \$65 for adults (13 and older) and \$45 for children. Capacity aboard the 49-person boat is limited, and masks are required because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The company also offers tours in small Zodiac crafts. Info:

dolphinsafari.com. Dana Wharf Sportfishing & Whale Watching has several boats in its fleet and offers two-hour tours that cost \$56 for adults 13 and older and \$39 for children. The company also abides by COVID-19 protocols that include reduced capacity on boats and mask require-Info: danawharf ments. .com.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Dana Point Festival of Whales. The event, usually held over two weekends, will be limited to March 6 and 7 this year, partly because of the pandemic. It will feature virtual and in-person events. More info: festivalofwhales

MARY FORGIONE writes for the Los Angeles Times.





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