

Heirloom Potager helps clients veg out



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

CULINARY GARDENER Ashley Irene goes to work in her home garden Heirloom Potager in Santa Ana. "Our goal is to design a garden that you are actually going to love," Irene said.

Santa Ana garden expert Ashley Irene designs culinary kitchen gardens for home cooks and culinary professionals.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Well-manicured lawns are not unusual in Santa Ana's historic Floral Park neighborhood. Fully functioning culinary gardens, on the other hand, are not quite as common. That may change thanks to Ashley Irene, culinary garden designer and coach at Heirloom Potager.

Heirloom Potager is a full-service culinary garden design and coaching company that designs, installs and maintains year-round seasonal edible gardens for home cooks and culinary professionals in Orange County.

Irene's showcase kitchen garden, situated in front of the 1920s French Tudor home she shares with her husband, Nathan, and their dog, Charlie, has inspired many neighbors to reach out to Heirloom Potager about starting their own gardens.

"Our goal is to design a garden that you are actually going to love," Irene said. "There are a lot of ways to garden; we want to set you up with the absolute best way that we know how to garden."

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THE MUCKENTHALER'S NEW EXHIBIT 'SUNSET GARDEN' IS HEAVEN ON EARTH

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Marsha Judd strolled the grounds of the Muckenthaler Cultural Center in Fullerton months ago during the pandemic. An artist in residence, she was tasked with coming up with ideas on how to transform a barren patch of land near the west end into something people could safely enjoy.

Suddenly, an age-old inspiration arrested her attention as she gazed upward at a beautiful sunset.

Judd wasn't alone; families that gathered at the "Muck" did the same. Next, they all looked at each other. The moment struck her. Judd finally found a concept for a new garden, one that would imitate the stunning color palette of a sunset for the community.

"It was the idea of visually melding the two," Judd said. "What if we could bring heaven to Earth and Earth to heaven?"

Fortunately, the Muck counted Chris Barnhill, a horticulturalist who previously worked at Disneyland and the Fullerton Arboretum, as its board president. He opted for drought resistant grass varieties



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

VISITORS WALK through the new "Sunset Garden" at the Muckenthaler Cultural Center in Fullerton.

that would create a garden that's both water-responsible and faithful to its muse.

"This corner of the Muckenthaler had been long neglected

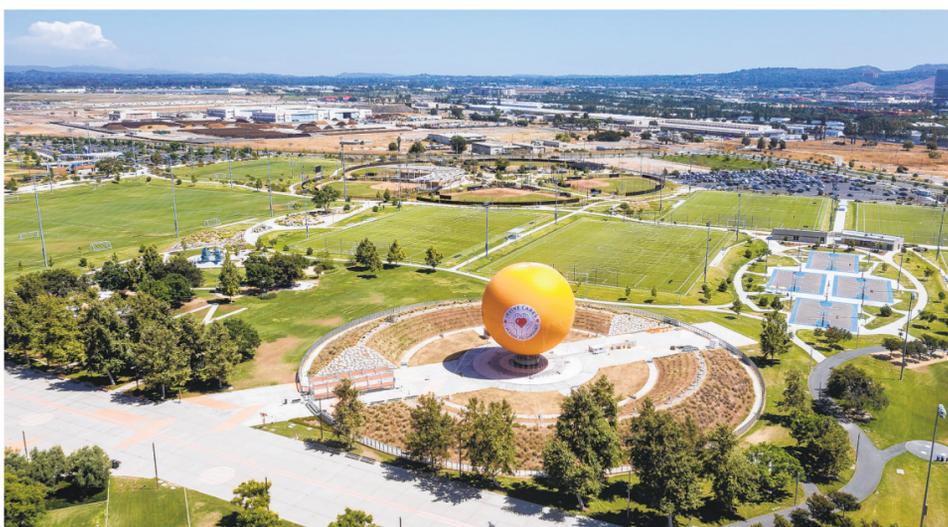
and part of the neglect is just not being able to afford the time to irrigate the space," Barnhill said. "Now, think of this garden as an impressionis-

tic look at a sunset."

To complete that aesthetic, the grounds of the future "Sun-

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Irvine reconsidering plan for controversial Great Park



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

AN AERIAL VIEW of the Great Park in Irvine in July. The city is considering an update of its master plan of the park.

BY BEN BRAZIL

In the beginning, the Great Park in Irvine was envisioned as the second-coming of New York's iconic Central Park.

Bogged down for years with accusations of cronyism and improper management, the park hasn't lived up to its original billing. Now, the city of Irvine is considering an update of its master plan of the park.

Located at the site of the former Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, the park today has a large sports complex, a soccer stadium, an amphitheater, a skating rink and a large orange balloon.

"Really, when we think about the Great Park, it's a big sports facility, which is great," Irvine Vice Mayor Tammy Kim said Tuesday during a City Council meeting. "I know that there's residents here and I know myself, really want to see the 'park,' in Great Park."

City staff will spend the next two months seeking the public's input on future plans for the park.

Joel Belding, deputy director of planning and development, said during a presentation to the council that staff intend to consider residents' comments and then devise a road map on how to move forward with the planning of the park in January, with a presentation to the council for consideration.

Outreach is expected to include in-person meetings at the Great Park, virtual meetings, meetings with homeowners' associations, recorded videos and interactive online tools for people to contribute to the design process of the park.

Staff will also look for public opinion on two major projects in the park, a long-awaited botanical garden and the future of the Five-

See *Park*, page R6

Many community college students go hungry, but this nonprofit is working to help in south O.C.

BY BEN BRAZIL

An Irvine-based homeless nonprofit is partnering with Irvine Valley and Saddleback community colleges to help students experiencing food and housing insecurity.

South County Outreach is taking over the schools' food pantries to provide students with much-needed sustenance as they work to get their degrees. Starting this fall semester, the nonprofit is also offering a program allowing Saddleback College students to apply for housing in South County Outreach's 17 condominiums. The pilot program is considered the first of its kind for the school.

LaVal Brewer, president and chief executive of South County Outreach, said the nonprofit is hoping to do its small part because it is very difficult for students to get into affordable housing.

"The number of youth who are going to community colleges who are hungry is staggering," Brewer said. "There's that old saying, 'Oh, I was a starving student.' But you still had a roof over your head, you probably had a little bit of food."

"There are some who don't have a roof over their head, don't have any food, and the ability for them to still make it through college and better themselves is much more difficult when those two issues arise."

While college students overall wrestle with housing and food insecurity, community college students are particularly at risk. According to a 2019 survey from the Health Services Assn. of Community Colleges of California, 70% of students



Photos by Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

VOLUNTEER CARRIE WULF separates the good eggs from the bad as she helps sort items in the food pantry at South County Outreach in Irvine.

who responded to the survey experienced food or housing insecurity in the last year. Also, 41% of students who responded to the survey reported that they skipped meals or ate smaller portions.

Brewer said this could be for a number of reasons, including that many adults attend community college, in addition to managing family and work lives.

"Most of these students are not just hungry, they're also trying to balance a school load and oftentimes a workload," Brewer said.

South County Outreach has been providing homeless services for more than 30 years since founder Ray Havert started it in his garage.

Traditionally, the focus on homelessness in Orange County centers on north Orange County cities like Santa Ana and Anaheim, where there are higher

numbers of homeless people, and the issue tends to be more visible. However, it's still a problem in the more affluent southern cities.

While most of Orange County's homeless are located in central and northern cities, the percentage of unsheltered people in south county was higher, as of the last countywide homeless count, than the other regions.

South Orange County includes Irvine, Dana Point, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Aliso Viejo, Laguna Beach, Mission Viejo, Lake Forest, Rancho Santa Margarita, Laguna Woods and Laguna Niguel.

According to the most recent Point in Time homeless count in 2019, there were 516 homeless people in south county cities. About 83% of the homeless people were unsheltered. Of the 90 people who were

sheltered, 84% were in Laguna Beach, which has the Friendship Shelter, the most substantial homeless shelter in south Orange County.

According to the Point in Time numbers, about 63% of homeless people in central Orange County were unsheltered, and about 70% of homeless people were unsheltered in north county.

"People who are living in south county needed support and help, but they didn't know where to turn, and they didn't have anyone to turn to," Brewer said. "... As far as homelessness services, there's a lack of providers in south county."

According to South County Outreach, requests for assistance from homeless people and families has increased by 23% in 2021. Requests for rental assistance specifically rose by 96% since 2020. The non-



STAFFERS CHELSEA MASCARENO, from left, Ruby Osorio and Megan Ryan stock food items in the food pantry.



STAFFERS IVY NGUYEN, left, and Megan Ryan arrange food items at South County Outreach's food pantry.

profit has approved \$2.9 million in rental assistance and \$95,000 in utility assistance so far this year.

Brewer said homelessness isn't always visible. Homeless people could be living in their cars, in a motel or, in the case of many college students, couch-surfing between friends' homes.

"You may not see them, but they still don't have a place to call their home," Brewer said.

The nonprofit provides a number of services, including running a food pantry in Irvine, rental assistance and support in finding

housing.

"We help renters stay in their homes because we know that when a renter in a young family falls out of their home through eviction, bad things happen from there," Brewer said.

"Children don't get to go to the schools that they traditionally go to ... They have to find new housing, and that's always hard. So we're really all about making sure people don't fall into homelessness by preventing that homelessness by supporting rental assistance."

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HEIRLOOM

Continued from page R1

Irene is a member of the Garden Coach Society and a certified garden designer, but her style is also inspired by her grandmother.

"My grandfather was a traditional farmer, but what my grandmother had was a beautiful kitchen garden," Irene said. "She gardened very intentionally. She was an organic gardener and she practiced companion planting."

Companion planting is the practice of growing certain plants together, which can make them more productive.

Irene realized that not everybody planted a garden with the same intention, and she wanted to share her knowledge and turn her passion into a business.

Just like her grandmother's garden, everything in Irene's garden is edible. The planter boxes overflow with wild vines and lush leaves attached to radishes, carrots, sugar snap peas, tomatoes and eggplants.

Besides homeowners, Irene's clients include local chefs.

Most recently she has worked with Anaheim Packing District's Poppy & Seed restaurant, creating a garden chef Michael Reed utilizes for creating dishes.

"Now Chef has more basil than he'll ever need to use in his life," Irene said. On a recent Wednesday morning Irene returned from Poppy & Seed to tend to her own garden before visiting two others she started at homes in her Floral Park neighborhood.

"I originally just wanted to design the gardens," she said.



Photos by Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

GREEN BEANS and Armenian cucumbers grown at the Heirloom Potager home garden in Santa Ana.

But it was important for the gardens to be built to Heirloom Potager's standards, she said, and so she and her team took over the installations.

"Then at one point, I was adamant we were not going to be able to do the maintenance of the gardens," Irene said.

But many of her clients enlisted her help in making sure their gardens survived.

"Almost every single client that we ever worked with has been like, 'You're going to come back, right? We want to make sure this lives!'"

Besides sharing her gardening skills, Irene studies the history of a home to en-

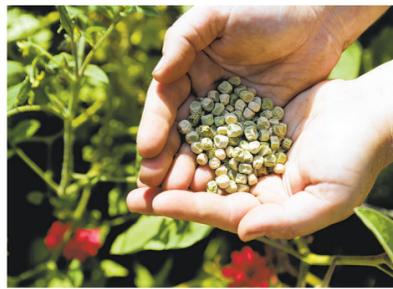
sure the garden fits the intended style.

"We work on a lot of research, and I won't come and do something that isn't true to the home's architecture."

Irene's own showcase garden compliments her home's French Normandy architecture with over 160 square feet of raised-bed garden space in a more classic potager style.

Irene says it is also important that the garden fit the gardener. She said her team looks at a client's lifestyle and goals to help recommend the right plans and plants.

A resident might be more interested in herbs, while a



SUGAR SNAP PEA seeds that will be planted at Heirloom Potager garden.

chef might care more about low maintenance produce.

"It really helps clients to feel comfortable to know that what we recommend, there is a reason and an understanding behind it," Irene said.

"We really encourage

people just to start and to try and do something, whether they hire us or not. We just want to be a good resource."

Irene is also invested in connecting the past to the future with heirloom vegetables.

She is involved with seed swaps, where gardeners meet to exchange heirloom varieties of seeds, and she also practices seed saving. During the pandemic Heirloom Potager arranged seeds swaps online and by mail.

"I think it's really cool to eat a tomato that my grandparents also enjoyed. That is a connection both backwards and a connection forward," said Irene. "This is an opportunity for us to say, here is something that we are going save for tomorrow, for our children and grandchildren."

Irene believes that a kitchen garden can also become a way to reconnect with our food.

"We all have that classic moment when we look in the fridge and say, 'Ugh! There is nothing to eat,'" said Irene. "But with a kitchen garden there is always something to eat because there is always something in the garden."

Recently Irene has begun hosting invitation-only Sunday Suppers, where she prepares a meal using the herbs and vegetables from her garden, demonstrating to clients how they can use their harvest.

She hopes to continue to connect people with where their food comes from.

"For me it is such an honor to be invited not only into chef's restaurants but into people's homes too," Irene said.

She sees it as a small way to leave the world a little better than she found it, creating productive gardens that can be enjoyed for years to come.

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ASSEMBLY-WOMAN

Sharon Quirk-Silva speaks during a dedication ceremony on Tuesday for the new "Sunset Garden" at the Muckenthaler Cultural Center in Fullerton.



Kevin Chang
Staff
Photographer

GARDEN

Continued from page R1

set Garden" were tended to four months ago as if a blank canvass. That's when Festuca, Leymus and Muhly grasses were planted over an area that's about a third of an acre. Now the garden shimmers with shades of blue, pink, purple, gold and white.

"As these all grow together, they will look like the bands of color that you see in the sunset itself," Judd said.

The Muck hosted a formal dedication ceremony for the Sunset Garden on

Tuesday morning and invited people to take inaugural strolls through its splendors afterward.

"It takes a village to raise a garden," said Farrell Hirsch, CEO of the Muck, at the dedication. "It takes that same sort of village to put anything artistic together."

Hirsch acknowledged the contributions of volunteers, numbering between 150 and 200, who pulled weeds and helped transform the dirt into a dusk-inspired trail. The Sunset Garden also features sculpture art by Trace Fukahara and a permanent mural by Carla Roque, a Fullerton artist.

Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva (D-Fullerton) attended the dedication and spoke briefly about her role in securing a \$25,000 state grant for the garden project.

"I just put in the request, but it's your taxpayer dollars that pay for these grants," Quirk-Silva told the crowd. "I can see people bringing takeout for a picnic, just sitting up here and enjoying that sunset."

Like the Muck's grounds, the Sunset Garden is free and open to the public.

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For Japanese Americans in Orange County,
Shohei Ohtani
 is already an MVP

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Angels superstar Shohei Ohtani put the finishing touches on a historic season for the ages during his team's final home game right where he fashioned its peerless prowess — on the mound and at the plate.

The two-way phenom notched 10 strikeouts against the Seattle Mariners on Sunday and lowered his ERA to 3.18 through 23 starts; as a batter, Ohtani added a single to complement an offensive campaign powered by 45 home runs.

Angel fans serenaded Ohtani with chants of "M-V-P" to cap off a season many will passionately argue as deserving of the American League's top honor.

For Japanese Americans in Orange County, Ohtani's transcendent talents, which have drawn comparisons to Babe Ruth, are more than just MVP-worthy; they're a point of pride.

"He's definitely a bright spot in our community," said Kihei Otani, president of the Orange County Japanese American Assn. "Japanese Americans here are all excited to see him playing. I can't imagine any Japanese American not rooting for him and not going to his games to support him."

The "Shotime" buzz brought Otani out to more Angel ballgames this season as fans returned to the stands.

He hasn't had the chance to meet the famous ballplayer of a similar last name, but the O.C. Japanese American Assn. did get involved in a pregame Japan Day celebration at Angel Stadium in 2019 where Ohtani made a special appearance.

One of Otani's friends also shared a story of recently



Courtesy of the Lawrence de Graff Center for Oral and Public History, Cal State Fullerton

BONSHICHI YOSHIMURA and Masami Fujino, two Japanese American players for the Orange Groves in the 1920s.

meeting the slugger (and ace) while he did some grocery shopping at a Japanese market in O.C.

"Oh hello," Ohtani said politely when approached. "I hope that he maintains his low-key, down-to-earth personality," Otani said.

Since first signing with the Angels in December 2017, the superstar athlete's arrival has resonated with Japanese immigrants in Southern California, like Otani.

But as an ethnic group,

Japanese Americans have established deep roots in O.C. for decades, especially as agricultural laborers and farmers in the early 20th century who participated in America's pastime.

"Baseball was one of the first organized sports among Japanese Americans in Orange County," said Mary Adams Urashima, an author and local historian of O.C.'s Japanese American heritage. "The first known Japanese American baseball team here was formed by



Paul Sancya | AP

LOS ANGELES ANGELS' Shohei Ohtani rounds third base on his way to score against the Detroit Tigers in the first inning in Detroit on Aug. 17. Brandon Marsh hit a single on the play.



Courtesy of Dennis Masuda

DENNIS MASUDA proudly sports his No. 17 Shohei Ohtani baseball cap.

the Smeltzer Athletic Club in north Huntington Beach around 1924, with Nisei players, most under age 17. The Orange Groves, or 'OGs,' practiced and played home games on a graded dirt lot in Wintersburg Village in north Huntington Beach."

Subjected to the prejudices of the day, the Orange Groves were excluded from the Huntington Beach district league and, as a result, played against ethnic teams from other cities.

During World War II, Japanese Americans carried a love of the game with them as they were forced into incarceration camps; playing baseball became a lifeline behind barbed wire.

"Baseball was one of the first organized sports among Japanese Americans in Orange County. The first known Japanese American baseball team here was formed by the Smeltzer Athletic Club in north Huntington Beach around 1924, with Nisei players, most under age 17."

— **Mary Adams Urashima**
 Author and local historian of O.C.'s Japanese American heritage

"The importance of baseball as a touchstone during that time still resonates in the Japanese American community today," Urashima added.

After World War II and incarceration camp policies ended, the OCO Club formed as part of a broader sports-safe haven for Japanese American youth who continued to be excluded from other leagues. It rechartered in 1988 and even though the Santa Ana-based nonprofit is more focused on basketball, its young athletes are crazy for Ohtani just the same.

"My own cousin's kids are always watching him play," said Lily Kozai, an OCO Club board member. "They have his jersey and want to go to Angel games. The same goes

for many other youth in our club as well as the community."

Ohtani's excellence on the baseball diamond is more than just a source of inspiration — it's an opportunity to teach life lessons. The Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra gave a dharma talk last week at the Orange County Buddhist Church in Anaheim called "Shohei Mandala: Repeated Practice Becomes a Good Habit."

Wondra, who was raised in a Shin Buddhist family in Japan, researched the ballplayer's life story and took interest in the dream matrix he developed when a teenager. Ohtani wanted to be the top draft pick in the Nippon Professional Base-

See **Ohtani**, page R6

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CHILEAN SINGER and songwriter Mon Laferte performs before a large crowd at the House of Blues in Anaheim on Wednesday as part of a two-month U.S. tour.



CHILEAN SINGER MON LAFERTE PERFORMS AT HOUSE OF BLUES

Chilean singer and songwriter Mon Laferte performed at the House of Blues in Anaheim on Wednesday. The enthusiastic crowd sang along with the versatile award-winning

artist as she performed many of her hits.

The two-month U.S. tour includes 26 dates to promote her new album "Seis."

— Photos and story by Raul Roa



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

ENCELIA BLOOMS in the Banning Ranch oil field.

Efforts to conserve Banning Ranch receive \$11 million boost from U.S. Fish and Wildlife

BY LILLY NGUYEN

A federal grant of \$11 million from the federal Fish and Wildlife Department announced by the Banning Ranch Conservancy on Tuesday puts conservationists with about \$83 million available for the acquisition of Banning Ranch, a 384-acre property at the mouth of the Santa Ana River and oil field, according to Banning Ranch Conservancy executive director Melanie Schlotterbeck.

The conservationists, which have long vied for the property in hopes of turning it into a public park, are now within \$14 million of the purchase price for the property.

In May, the Trust for Public Land announced that it secured an exclusive agreement with the property holders of Banning Ranch after Newport Beach philanthropists Frank and Joann Randall donated \$50 million to the Banning Ranch Conservancy in 2019.

That agreement gave conservationists 12 months to collect an ad-

ditional \$47 million to complete the \$97-million purchase by next April.

Upon that purchase, the land would then be conveyed to a public agency to be made and maintained as a public park. Since then, they've received about \$16 million from state grants and funds.

Another two remaining grants are to be considered in 2022 and a statement from the Banning Ranch Conservancy said the hope is they will be able to close escrow by June 2022.

"We are absolutely thrilled that the service awarded this grant—we are now only 15% away from reaching the acquisition price. The size of the award speaks volumes to the importance of the many sensitive plants and animals on the site," Schlotterbeck said in a statement.

"From the vernal pools with their San Diego fairy shrimp to the riparian areas with least Bell's vireo — the site is packed with important and diverse species," she added.

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Courtesy of South Coast Repertory

DAVID IVERS stars in the world premiere of "A Shot Rang Out" by Richard Greenberg, running through Nov. 6.

South Coast Repertory reopens with one-man show 'A Shot Rang Out'

BY SARA CARDINE

Live stage plays at Costa Mesa's South Coast Repertory returned on Saturday when a one-man production, "A Shot Rang Out," debuted in a preview with a message sure to resonate with audiences beginning to reemerge from their own pandemic isolation.

Written in 2020 by Tony Award-winning playwright Richard Greenberg exclusively for SCR and directed by Tony Taccone — whose works include "Angels in America" with Tony Kushner, Green Day's "American Idiot" and Carrie Fisher's "Wishful Drinking" — the play touches on love, loss, reckoning and rediscovery.

Veteran actor and South Coast Repertory artistic director David Ivers, tasked with memorizing the 9,500-word script for the performance penned with him in mind, portrays John, an actor returning to the stage after a long absence.

John draws inspiration from movies, the theater and 20th-century pop culture to share with the audience, in a manner both hilarious and heartbreaking, his personal loss and what he's learned about himself, relationships and the human condition.

While the play does not explicitly reference COVID-19 or the coronavirus pandemic, its themes are sure to hit home for anyone who's experienced loneliness or disconnectedness during the long-lasting crisis, according to Taccone.

"I think this play is talking about our experience as a country, as a species," he said in an interview Wednesday. "It's this really engaging, entertaining exploration of both what [John] lost and suffered through and his desire and ability to retake control of his own life."

The director's own debut at SCR, with the play "I Get Restless," was scheduled for April 2020 but got sidelined when the pandemic drew the curtain on all live performances.

To recognize those who served on the frontlines of the pandemic, 1,000 complimentary tickets to "A Shot Rang Out" are being made available to healthcare workers and up to three of their guests who register online through Oct. 24.

Taccone said it was fitting for the nonprofit South Coast Repertory to extend such an offer.

"This is a community event first and foremost, so



"A SHOT RANG OUT" playwright Richard Greenberg.

Mark Avery SCR

the fact the theater is making an offer to healthcare workers, I think it's not just super important, it's the right thing to do," he said.

SCR managing director Laura Tomei said the decision came out of talks among executive staff as one way to recognize one group of pandemic heroes, who went above and beyond the call of duty.

"This seemed like the time to try to give back and see if we couldn't offer something that gave people a little bit of an escape and something that might lift their spirit in this moment," she added.

Speaking in a promotional video created by SCR for "A Shot Rang Out," Ivers said he hopes John's story might bring about a catharsis for audience members about their own recent experience.

"There are a lot of things

about what we've been through in the last two years that are deeply emotional and powerful in hard and challenging ways. But I think everyone has a story about something that was a silver lining," he said.

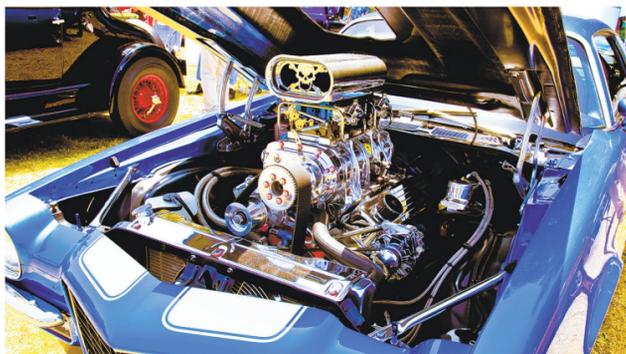
"I hope that this play, in a way, stokes the memory of that and keeps alive its possibility, even when we're not in a pandemic."

"A Shot Rang Out" runs through Nov. 6. Tickets range from \$26 to \$93 with discounts available for educators, seniors and theatergoers under 25.

Healthcare workers may visit [scr.org/forms/complimentary-tickets](https://www.scr.org/forms/complimentary-tickets) to request free admission for themselves and up to three guests through Oct. 24.

For more information, visit [scr.org](https://www.scr.org)

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A SPECIALIZED MOTOR at the annual Muckenthaler Motor Car Festival.

Muckenthaler Motor Car Festival is back and firing on all cylinders

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

The Muckenthaler Motor Car Festival is the oldest and longest running car show in north Orange County, and like most events, it's not the same on Zoom.

The festival switched to a virtual format in 2020 due to COVID-19, but this year returns as an in-person event on Sunday at the Muckenthaler Cultural Center in Fullerton.

"There's nothing else in this region that compares," said Muck chief executive officer Farrell Hirsch.

Rare and classic vehicles, like hot rods and customs, vintage motorcycles and vintage travel trailers will be on display on the center's 8-acre lawn from 9 a.m.

to 3 p.m.

Car owners apply to join the show, and judges look for vehicles that demonstrate originality and authenticity while valuing design.

Hot Rod classes include best paint, best engine, best interior, best open car, best closed car, best truck, best motorcycle, best chrome, most unusual vehicle, the Muck Award and best of show.

Concourse classes include vintage 1915-1924, American auto 1925-1948, European auto 1925-1948, American auto post-war 1949-1975, European auto post-war 1949-1975, European and Asian sports cars to 1975, American sports cars to 1975, special interest and travel trailers.

Besides the classic rides, the event will also feature specialty



Photos courtesy of the Muckenthaler Cultural Center

A SOUPED-UP Volkswagen van at the Muckenthaler Motor Car Festival, which returns for its 27th year on Sunday.

foods from Cary Farnsworth and his Vintage Ice Cream Bicycle and Heroes Bar & Grill.

Attendees will also find handcrafted artisan beer and live music from Janet Klein and the Parlor Boys to help set the retro mood.

First held in 1994, the Muckenthaler Motor Car Festival began as a charity fundraiser for the Muck Foundation, which provides arts and education programs for children.

Today, the city of Fullerton maintains ownership of the prop-

erty, and it is managed by the Muckenthaler Cultural Center Foundation and its elected board of directors.

Proceeds from the festival, the premier fundraiser of the year for the center and a community tradition, support children's arts programs at the Muckenthaler Cultural Center.

"This is the 27th year in an unbroken string of presenting the finest automobiles in both the Concourse and Hot Rod categories," Hirsch said. "I don't believe there's another annual car show

in the state that can say they haven't missed an event in that time. I imagine it's that spirit in the face of obstacles, that perseverance through municipal bankruptcies, disruptive weather events and cataclysmic plagues that has endeared us to the community."

General admission to the Muckenthaler Motor Car Festival is \$5. More information can be found at muckcarshow.org.

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Costa Mesa's Knife Pleat earns a Michelin star

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Michelin stars have long held a stature unmatched in the dining industry, and a restaurant that earns the distinction is held in the highest esteem. This week Orange County gained its third Michelin starred restaurant, as South Coast Plaza's Knife Pleat was awarded a one-star rating from the guide.

Helmed by Chef Tony Esnault and restaurateur Yassmin Sarmadi, Knife Pleat showcases modern, seasonal interpretations of classic French cuisine.

Sarmadi said the honor feels particularly special after the challenging year and a half restaurants have experienced.

"Everything, literally everything, this year was an unknown," Sarmadi said. "So you just did whatever you could, and the best with whatever you had ... that we would gain this sort of recognition during this time is very meaningful."

This is Esnault's third Michelin star during his decorated career. He earned previous stars as an executive chef in New York City in 2006 and 2007.

"Even though this is the third time he is receiving a star, his level excitement, to me, seems like it were the first," Sarmadi said.

Knife Pleat joins Orange County's other Michelin starred restaurants, Taco Maria and Hana Re. Each earned one Michelin star in 2019 when the guide expanded to include Orange and San Diego counties. All three restaurants are located in Costa Mesa.

Knife Pleat occupies a 5,000-square-foot space in the penthouse at South Coast Plaza and is open for lunch and dinner. It offers

See *Michelin*, page R6



Courtesy of Tucker + Hossler

CHEF TONY ESNAULT'S modern approach to classical French cuisine is seen in Knife Pleat's elegant menu, replete with dishes utilizing local, seasonal and organic produce from the farmer's market at the height of their season, as well as sustainable seafood and animal products sourced only from farms with 100% humane and organic practices.



Courtesy of Tom Bonner

KNIFE PLEAT is an elegant and approachable French restaurant helmed by Michelin-starred chef Tony Esnault and restaurateur Yassmin Sarmadi. The couple's chic restaurant showcases modern, seasonal interpretations of classic French cuisine by Esnault, one of California's best French chefs.



Courtesy of Mona Shah

THE MICHELIN GUIDE announced that Knife Pleat, helmed by chef Tony Esnault and restaurateur Yassmin Sarmadi, has earned a Michelin Star.

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PARK

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Point Amphitheatre, which is currently considered temporary.

The city posted on Twitter earlier this week that there have been a spike in noise complaints tied to two concerts at the amphitheater. The city said it's working to rectify the issue with the help of Live Nation, the operator of the venue.

During the meeting, the council began moving forward on a few projects in the Great Park, including the botanical garden.

"But I believe this council, all of us here, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create something beautiful and awe-inspiring that can be appreciated now and for future generations," Kim said.

"I want to use that opportunity to build a world-class garden where people from all over the world and all over this country will want to visit."

Following comments from community members in favor of the garden, the council provided direction for city staff to find a location for the project.

"I hope that today's meeting leads to a final site designation and path to construction of the long-promised and much-de-



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

THE GREAT PARK has a sports complex, a soccer stadium, an amphitheater, a skating rink and a large orange balloon.

sired, world-class botanical garden," said Teena Spindler, president of the nonprofit Great Park Garden Coalition. "As you know, the garden has been in the plan since the very beginning in the original master plan, and has been confirmed through public outreach surveys over the years."

Mayor Farrah Khan suggested that the garden could go in the park's planned Cultural Terrace, a 236-acre portion of the park. On Tuesday, the council approved a contract with the IBI Group, an architectural service company, to help with the development of the terrace.

Also at the meeting, the

council considered whether UCI Health could be a sponsor of the Great Park. Under the proposal, the organization would pay the city about \$5.7 million for a 10-year agreement. Ultimately, the council decided to reconsider the item at a later meeting after several members expressed concerns about the proposed sponsorship.

Councilman Anthony Kuo was concerned that the exclusivity part of the sponsorship would inhibit the city from entering into agreements with other healthcare groups. Kim agreed with Kuo and suggested that the deal didn't bring in enough money for

the city, considering it's in a big media market.

"We look at this and we think, 'Oh, it's a lot of money,' but it actually isn't compared to what they're getting," Kim said.

The public voted to turn the military base into the then-named Orange County Great Park in 2002. The city had big plans for the park, but they never came to fruition.

In 2013, Irvine hired Hagen, Streiff, Newton & Oshiro (HSNO) to conduct an investigation into why more than \$250 million was spent to develop 88 acres of the 1,300-acre Great Park.

For years, the Great Park was mired in controversy, with residents claiming it hadn't remotely met expectations as the so-called Central Park of the West.

Three grand jury reports were produced regarding the park in 2006, 2010 and 2015. The first investigation criticized city officials for a lack of transparency, while the second questioned the financial structure of the project. The third concluded that "from the outset, the project was poorly managed and did not follow conventional principles," and "there seemingly was no effective oversight over invoices, contract compliance or quality control."

HSNO conducted an ini-

tial audit for \$240,000, then withdrew it in 2015 and replaced it with a second audit. Costs climbed to \$1.7 million. HSNO's final report concluded that the project was embroiled in financial mismanagement, leading to the waste of tens of millions of dollars between 2005 and 2012.

Findings included that former Mayor Larry Agran, then chairman of the Great Park Corp., misled the public, beginning in 2006 with an understatement of the cost of the park. Agran currently sits on the City Council.

The saga continued in 2020, when HSNO surrendered its accounting license after a legal battle with a state oversight agency that claimed the firm "failed to comply with professional standards, engaged in numerous acts of negligence, and disseminated false and misleading information."

Most recently, homeowners in the Great Park neighborhoods have expressed disapproval of special-assessment taxes they have to pay toward the development of the Great Park.

In July, the City Council decided to drop "Orange County" from the original name of the park.

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MICHELIN

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a six-course chef's tasting menu on Friday evenings.

"South Coast Plaza has been very supportive of our efforts in every way, before the pandemic, throughout the pandemic," Sarmadi said. "We have a pretty extraordinary space, and there is great synergy that thrives here."

Knife Pleat also earned a Michelin plate award along with two other Orange County restaurants earlier this month along with Heritage Barbecue in San Juan Capistrano and Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen in Fullerton.

Six Orange County restaurants earned Michelin Bib Gourmand awards this year as well. Typically, the guide is updated once a year, but in 2020 the

her first venture in Orange County.

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Michelin Guide chose not to publish a California edition due to the pandemic. Instead, Michelin recognized 25 California restaurants as "inspector discoveries." Fable & Spirit in Newport Beach and Chaak Kitchen in Tustin were included on the list.

With this recognition, Orange County demonstrates it's a region that offers a culinary landscape with as much quality and diversity as its more metropolitan contemporaries, like Los Angeles and San Francisco.

While the Michelin Guide holds prestige today, the stars had humble beginnings.

Andre and Edouard Michelin founded Michelin Tyres in France in 1889,

when there were fewer than 3,000 cars on road in that country. The Michelin Guide was developed as a way to encourage motorists to take more trips, and consequently use more tires.

The original guide was a small red book that mapped out gas stations, places of interest and offered road tips like how to change a tire. A list of places to eat and places to stay was also included.

The guide started awarding stars in 1926, and as the influence of the guide's restaurant section grew, Michelin formed a team of secret diners known as restaurant inspectors to visit establishments anonymously and rate them. Over the next dec-

ade, a rubric of one, two and three stars was introduced. According to the guide, one star signifies "a very good restaurant," two stars are "excellent cooking that is worth a detour," and three stars mean "exceptional cuisine that is worth a special journey."

Esnault said in order to earn stars today, a restaurant needs to demonstrate the highest standards. "Everything needs to be perfect, everything needs to be cooked perfectly, plated perfectly ... using the best produce," Esnault said, "it needs to be *soigne*, as we say in French."

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OHTANI

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ball league, mapped out how to improve himself in mandala-like fashion and achieved the feat in 2012 when selected by the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters.

"I realized I could connect Shohei and a lesson on Buddhism in composing a dharma message," Wondra said. "If I share this mandala methodology with young people or even adults, that's fun."

The children in attendance for Wondra's dharma talk paid close attention, nodded when she made key points and pulled out their smartphones to do some on-the-spot research.

"Because of COVID, everything has been kind of depressing," Wondra said. "We cherish Ohtani and applaud him for being like a light switched in the darkness."

For Japanese Americans, Ohtani's once-in-a-century talents have provided such joyous moments on and off the field during the throes of an otherwise grim once-in-a-century pandemic.

Dennis Masuda, a long-time Angel fan and 17-year season ticket holder, attended 60 home games this year and watched Ohtani's historic feats with pride. "I don't get to see many Japanese players," he said. "The last time the Angels had one was Hideki Matsui 11 years ago. Having one on my hometown team as a pitcher and a hitter was quite thrilling."

The retired Marina High School teacher and coach marveled at the exit velocity of the slugger's home runs followed by his mastery on the mound. And he wasn't alone.

"It's really noticeable how many more Japanese [fans] are at the ballpark now," Masuda said. "Most of the signs out there promoting Shohei are all in Kanji. I laugh because if somebody opened a sushi stand at the stadium they'd be making a million dollars!"

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