

BY BEN BRAZIL

When most people think of a parking lot, they don't generally think "art gallery." But Ruben Salazar isn't most people.

He's spent the last five years transforming a parking lot on First Street in Santa Ana into an outdoor exhibition of murals from local artists.

The pieces are anchored by important social justice messages, as the Blue Lot seeks to amplify the voices and stories of the unseen communities of Santa Ana.

The Blue Lot will not let you forget. It bares naked realities to all those who pass by, forcing them to reckon with the unjust death of a young woman, the violence suffered by the LGBTQ members of the Black community and the cultures of Santa Ana



Photos by Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

TOP PHOTO: Ruben Salazar is the property manager and curator of the Blue Lot, a parking lot that has been converted into an art gallery in Santa Ana. **ABOVE:** This "All Black Lives Matter" mural is one of several murals at the Blue Lot.

that have been pushed to the shadows by gentrification.

"Because of the traffic that is on that corner on that street, they see these images

on the property," Salazar said.

"If we can spark the imagination and attention of our youth and of our community in general, and create change,

that's what we want to do." For decades, the Blue Lot was occupied by a Cadillac dealership and then became a magnet for graffiti artists.

It got its name because a group of artists got the idea more than a decade ago to paint the lot blue so satellites could see it in space. There are still some traces of the blue paint on the ground.

When Salazar took an interest in the property, he realized he wanted to bring it in another direction.

"But when I came along, I was like, 'OK, why don't we change this?' " Salazar said.

Salazar, a well-known reggae musician and art lover, was born and raised in Santa Ana and envisions the Blue Lot as a cultural hub in the city.

In addition to the art, he's

See *Blue Lot*, page R4

Background photo by Tim Meyer | Unsplash

Anaheim council fills open seat per charter

Gloria Ma'ae was chosen to replace Jordan Brandman following his resignation last month.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Following the resignation of Anaheim City Councilman Jordan Brandman last month, a vote on who would replace him took place during a Sept. 14 council meeting that at times proved contentious.

While serving a second term, Brandman stepped down in the wake of a scandal after derogatory comments he made in private text messages about his former council colleague Denise Barnes publicly surfaced on a local blog and were condemned as misogynistic.

"Like for most, there are periods in our lives when we are faced with competing career and personal priorities," Brandman wrote in a Aug. 5 resignation letter. "For that reason I have decided it is in the best interest of me and my family to focus on them at this time."

Anaheim's charter allowed for council members to appoint a replacement within 60 days before calling a special election to fill the vacancy. Ten candidates applied to represent District 2 on the city's west side by the Sept. 8 deadline and later addressed the council with their aspirations.

Gloria Ma'ae, a retired UPS employee and 42-year resident of the district in Anaheim, spoke about how growing up in Santa Ana with Mexican immigrant parents motivated her involvement in the community.

Ma'ae listed various board and commission posts held on her application, including being the current District 2 chair of Anaheim First, a citywide group founded by the Anaheim Chamber of Commerce, Visit Anaheim and the Anaheim Community Foundation; Ma'ae also listed having been an advisory board member of the Support Our Anaheim Resort (SOAR) nonprofit.

Prior to the pandemic, Anaheim First backed Mayor Harry Sidhu's pledge to invest \$250 million in the city's neighborhoods over 10 years. A council majority voted in 2019 to donate \$250,000 to the group for the purposes of helping carry out a community assessment study.

"I firmly believe my experiences over the last 20 years of my

See *Anaheim*, page R6

San Juan Capistrano's Ecology Center prepares Green Feast

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

The Ecology Center in San Juan Capistrano set the table for its 13th annual Green Feast on Saturday and will host a second event Sept. 25. Diners have a lot more room to spread out at the fundraiser than in years past.

"For about 10 years we were only about three-quarters of an acre," said Jonathan Zaidman, director of engagement at the Ecology Center. "But when the city offered up the opportunity to expand and take over the surrounding 28-acre farm, that was a no brainer for us."

Before the expansion, the Ecology Center mostly hosted educational activities like field trips, farm dinners and documentary nights. The center has taken what was once an organic commercial farm from an import/export model to hosting dozens of vegetables, fruit, berries, lettuce, flower and herb varieties, with everything the farm produces staying here in Orange County.

Green Feast is the center's cornerstone fundraiser, which Zaidman calls an immersive culinary and agricultural experience meant to foster a closer connection between people and the food system.

"Green Feast has been a partnership between the organization, our farm and interesting chefs that are trying to tell ecological stories," Zaidman said.

Beyond just the meal, the ticket includes interactive elements that showcase the value and importance of the center's work.

"One of those stations is demonstrating the apprenticeship program that we have here, teaching young people how to grow food," Zaidman said.

The Ecology Center employs eight farm apprentices who go through rotations on the farm learning not only how to grow food but also the culinary side. They learn how to prepare food so they can then take their skills and start their own small farms.

Another station during the feast focuses on the center's Nourishing Neighbors program.

"We donate 20% of what we grow on this farm," Zaidman said, "and we have a few partner organizations that we do that work with here speaking about the importance and value of accessibility to local, organic, regenerative, seasonal food."

The speakers stress how important it is that organic produce not only be accessible to those who come to the Ecology Center's farm



A YOUNGSTER shops with his mom at the Farm Stand at the Ecology Center.

Photos by Don Leach
Staff Photographer

stand but also to those who may not have the resources to afford the highest-value food.

The farm stand is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and a designated section of fruits and vegetables is always available free of charge in order to promote equity.

Before the groups are seated for dinner, a blessing of the meal and the land is offered from a local tribal elder.

"The tribe that lived on this land before we stewarded it is called Ajachemen ... so we have a few elders from that population

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JONATHAN ZAIDMAN, director of engagement, stacks homemade bricks at the Ecology Center Farm in San Juan Capistrano.

Jury deadlocks in federal civil rights trial against Orange County Sheriff's Department

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF

A federal jury deadlocked in a civil rights and conspiracy trial involving a homeless Marine veteran and seven Orange County sheriff's deputies after being presented with polar opposite takes on what happened over the course of an unexpectedly lengthy trial.

As Jeremy Holloway tells it, he was rousted from his tent at O'Neill Regional Park on Jan. 21, 2018, and searched without explanation. He complained to a neighbor and went to the rangers station to do the same, only to be visited again by the same deputies, this time angrier than before and with their guns drawn.

Holloway described on the witness stand being knocked unconscious, Tasered in the buttocks and kicked and hit repeatedly by a group his lawyer, Narine



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

ORANGE COUNTY Sheriff's Department Headquarters and O.C. jails are located at 550 N. Flower St. in Santa Ana.

Mkrtchyan, likened to a gang who targeted Holloway "because he's homeless. He can't enforce his rights. So they beat him up like that."

"I just have no patience for this type of stuff. Tomorrow they're going to shoot you if you don't get down on

the ground. That's what this case is all about. It's not about Jeremy Holloway," Mkrtchyan said in her closing argument. She referenced her upbringing in what was then the Soviet Union in Armenia and Russia, telling the jury: "I came from a country where you

are guilty until proven innocent ... This is your time to send a message. Are you going to tolerate this?"

In hours of testimony over the course of two weeks, the deputies — Joel Gonzalez, Mark Borba, Jameson Gotts, Chad Renegar, Kevin Pahel, Justin Gunderson and Brandon Billinger — described a completely different encounter. Deputies first contacted Holloway after reports of a woman being assaulted in a tent at the park, then returned after hearing that Holloway was irately threatening campers for reporting him to police and that one caller heard a little girl screaming.

The deputies said they had to forcibly handcuff him, but the accused lead instigator, Renegar, denied he struck Holloway in the face, which is a key claim of Holloway's excessive force lawsuit.

Instead, Renegar said Holloway struck his face on dirty gravel when officers took him to the ground after Holloway ignored repeated warnings to comply with their orders. He said he Tased Holloway twice "to allow us to place handcuffs on him and to have 'em stop kicking at us," according to a court reporter's transcript of the testimony.

But after a scheduled four-day trial stretched into 11 days over three weeks, the eight people who remained in the jury for deliberations struggled to agree. They took about six hours over two days before declaring themselves deadlocked, but U.S. District Judge David O. Carter read them an extra instruction that urged them to continue discussions. The jury returned the next day and deliberated for another day or so before announcing again that they couldn't agree.

The judge himself had expressed a similar sentiment. Outside the jury's presence, Carter told the lawyers he could see the case going either way.

The deadlock prompted Carter to declare a mistrial. Attorneys are to return to his courtroom next week to discuss the details.

Mkrtchyan told TimesOC she fully expects to retry the case "unless there is an offer to settle."

"To date, the county has not made an offer. From my conversations with the jury after the trial, there is some fine-tuning and highlighting of some issues I can do for the retrial. We were close to the verdict," Mkrtchyan said in an email on Wednesday.

S. Frank Harrell of Lynberg & Watkins, who represents the county, said the question of a settlement "is

See **Trial**, page R6

Judge recuses himself in Sunset Beach murder case

BY BEN BRAZIL

An Orange County Superior Court judge has recused himself from overseeing a murder trial because he endorsed the lead prosecutor who allegedly withheld important evidence in the case.

Judge Gregg L. Prickett is being replaced by Judge Michael Cassidy in the case of Paul Gentile Smith, who was granted a retrial after formerly being convicted in 2010 of stabbing a Sunset Beach man to death.

Prickett endorsed Ebrahim Baytieh, who is running for Superior Court judge. Assistant public defenders Scott Sanders and Sara Ross allege in a motion filed last week that Baytieh concealed evidence in Smith's case for a decade.

"At the center of this litigation are allegations of brazenly unlawful and un-

ethical actions demonstrating and unrelenting win-at-all-costs effort led by Baytieh that rivals any in this county's history," the motion reads. "Baytieh led a coordinated prosecution team effort to conceal evidence from Defendant, while deceiving his counsel, fact-finders, and courts through an ever-expanding output of misconduct."

Smith was sentenced to life in state prison for torture and murder after he stabbed his longtime high school friend Robert Haugen so many times that he almost decapitated him in his Sunset Beach apartment in 1988. He then set the apartment on fire.

Orange County Superior Court Judge Patrick Donahue granted Smith a retrial last month after sheriff's deputies declined to testify in court about their alleged misuse of illegal informants

to obtain incriminating information from accused defendants. Dist. Atty. Todd Spitzer's office requested the new trial amid a set of hearings that were requested by Sanders and Ross regarding whether Smith's constitutional rights were violated when he was allegedly targeted by informants. Some of the most damning evidence that led to Smith's conviction came from conversations he had with a jailhouse informant.

Smith's case is intertwined with a jailhouse snitch scandal Sanders uncovered during the trial of Scott Dekraai, who was responsible for the county's worst mass shooting, killing eight people inside of a Seal Beach salon in 2011. Sanders found that Orange County sheriff's deputies and prosecutors had targeted high-profile defendants with jailhouse inform-



EBRAHIM BAYTIEH has been accused of withholding evidence in a murder case.

Scott Smeltzer

Sanders has said that Baytieh intentionally withheld information on the informants from the defense. Baytieh was a high-ranking member of Rackauckas' administration and is now Spitzer's senior assistant district attorney. Baytieh regularly argued against the existence of the Rackauckas department's use of jailhouse informants as the scandal played out over the years.

Last week's motion says that Baytieh concealed a 2009 interview of Platt from the defense until 2019. In the interview, Platt said he and two other inmates were intentionally placed in Smith's dayroom in jail, where they questioned him until he made incriminating statements.

The motion says Baytieh then called Palacios to tes-

See **Judge**, page R6

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BLUE LOT

Continued from page R1

held events at the Blue Lot, like the Gente Night Market, which showcases local entrepreneurs, artists and small businesses owned by people of color.

“My vision of the property is the Blue Lot to be the pillar of Downtown Santa Ana,” Salazar said. “If you want to get a taste of the culture, the art of Santa Ana, you make your way to the Blue Lot.

“We want to be able to cater to the community and for it to be the home for our local artists and our local entrepreneurs.”

Most recently, Salazar hosted an unveiling of a mural of Victoria Barrios, an 18-year-old who was gunned down in a drive-by shooting two years ago in Santa Ana.

The mural is meant to encourage witnesses to come forward and to send a message about the city’s long history of gang violence.

City officials, including Mayor Vicente Sarmiento, and law enforcement were in attendance at the event.

Last year, as the country rose up against police violence following the killing of George Floyd, the LGBTQ Center of Orange County approached Salazar with an idea for a mural on the Blue Lot that would serve as a unifying symbol for all Black people.

Salazar was enthusiastic about the idea, and within a few days, a mural reading “All Black Lives Matter” was completed. The words are written in various colors signifying support for the LGBTQ members of the Black community.

Jackie Garcia, director of marketing and development at the LGBTQ Center, said the mural is a way for the LGBTQ community to feel seen and to raise awareness of the injustices they suffer.

She noted that the Black and Brown trans community is subjected to hate crimes, and it’s important to know that there is a support system in the community that recognizes their pain.

“Ruben immediately jumped up to support this cause,” Garcia said. “He didn’t even bat an eye, he just immediately was like, ‘Yeah, let’s do this’ ...

There’s just genuine support for the cause and for the community, and I think that’s what the Blue Lot is all about.

“Ruben has a big heart and he knows the power of art and community. So he’s using that very impact, that power that that holds in the community, and he’s using it there in the Blue Lot.”

Ivan Marquez, a representative of the long-standing DJ crew Funk Freaks, said the Blue Lot is the “true essence” of Santa Ana. The largest mural at



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

A LARGE MURAL depicting the roots of Santa Ana is one of several murals at the Blue Lot.

the Blue Lot was produced by the Funk Freaks.

“It’s touching on subjects and people that have been left out,” Marquez said of the art showcased at the Blue Lot. “... I really do feel like it’s a literal representation of the streets of Santa Ana compared to all the other art that’s out there, which looks really clean and whatnot, but it loses that essence to an extent.”

Marquez pointed out that the Blue Lot is just a

few steps from Downtown Santa Ana, what he calls a symbol of gentrification. In contrast, the Blue Lot’s artwork shows the cold, hard, rich reality of Santa Ana.

This is highlighted in the Funk Freaks’ mural, which pays homage to what it was like growing up in Santa Ana, a shared experience among the members of Funk Freaks, who were active gang members or graffiti members at some point in their lives.

The mural includes a *paletero*, who serves *pal-etras*, or popsicles. On the side of the *paletero*’s cart are the words “La Cuatro.”

“Back in the day it wasn’t known as Downtown Santa Ana, we knew it as La Cuatro,” Marquez said. “We specifically made sure to put that on the side of the cart to say La Cuatro so people understand that before it was Downtown Santa Ana, it was La Cuatro. It was mostly undocumented immigrants and just Chicano culture. Everybody would go there and do their shopping.

“Due to gentrification now, it’s a whole completely different place compared to 20 or 30 years ago.

We wanted to bring back that feel to it or at least drop knowledge on people that it was La Cuatro before it became known as Downtown Santa Ana.”

The mural also includes a woman selling flowers, pointing to the migrant mothers who work to support their families by any means necessary.

“At the end of the day we had to show respect to women and the mothers out here who are illegally here working to get by and give food to their children, making a living however they can,” Marquez said.

Considering the members of the Funk Freaks know all things funk, Marquez said they added a lowrider in the mural to show that Santa Ana is the capital of funk. He said you’re bound to hear somebody blasting funk out of their car if you’re outside in Santa Ana.

The mural also includes a Bristol Street sign and the iconic Santa Ana water tower.

“This is a well-known fact, people have always been cruising Bristol,” Marquez said.

“This is what really is Santa Ana, and this is what

really is Orange County, cruising Bristol. Every weekend it’s go to a house party, if nothing was cracking, go to Bristol for a couple hours, you’ll find something fun.

“That’s why we said we have to incorporate the Bristol street sign on top of the corner. And of course we had to put the Santa Ana water tower, which is for sure an iconic symbol of what is Santa Ana. Honestly, there’s so many people that have that tattooed on them.”

Salazar said he will continue developing the Blue Lot concept, bringing in more events and beautifying the property. He feels that his mission is to be a civil servant to his community.

For artists and residents like Marquez, the Blue Lot has already become fundamental to the city.

“I wouldn’t say it’s the last real part of Santa Ana that we’re holding onto,” Marquez said. “It’s just the fact that we finally really have somewhere to put our artwork and be represented correctly.”

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazil

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CONTACT US

Erik Haugli
Deputy Editor
erik.haugli@latimes.com

Raymond Arroyo

Advertising Director
(714) 966-4608
ray.arroyo@latimes.com

Online

timesoc.com
Social Media
@timesocofficial

Address

10540 Talbert Ave.,
Suite 300 West,
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Business Office

(714) 966-4600

Newsroom

(714) 966-4699

Email

dailyipilot@latimes.com

TCN Classifieds

800-234-4444

TCN Legal Phone

888-881-6181

TCN Legal Email

LAlegal@tribune.com

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FELIPE TOLEDO COMPLETES an air reverse in his match against Conner Coffin in the WSL Finals at Trestles beach.



BRAZIL'S ITALO FERREIRA attempts a huge air reverse in the WSL Finals against Toledo in San Clemente.



CONNER COFFIN from Santa Barbara surfs against Toledo. Ten surfers competed in a new format introduced this year.



THREE-TIME CHAMPION Gabriel Medina boosts a huge air and completes the ride in the World Surf League Finals against Felipe Toledo at Trestles beach in San Clemente on Tuesday as the 2021 WSL Championship Tour came to a close.



CARISSA MOORE banks off a foam wall of water in the Rip Curl WSL women's surfing finals at Trestles beach on Tuesday.



MEDINA RAISES his fist in a victory lap after defeating Toledo in the WSL Finals at Trestles beach on Tuesday.

Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

World Surf League finals roar to a close

The end of the 2021 World Surf League Championship Tour came to a dramatic close on Tuesday with Gabriel Medina and Carissa Moore capturing surfing world titles in the men's and women's championships respectively at Lower Trestles in San Clemente on Tuesday, the last event of the year.

Medina and Moore were not the only winners, as Mother Nature delivered smooth, dramatic and powerful South Pacific swells to the shores of the famous cobblestone surf break in San Clemente. Ten surfers competed in a new format introduced at this year's championships, one that would decide the men's and women's champions on the same day.

Medina defeated an in-form fellow Brazilian countryman, Felipe Toledo, and Hawaii's Moore, coming off a gold medal in the recent Olympics for the U.S., took down multi-heat winner Tatiana Weston-Webb in the finals. Both Webb and Toledo, rated lower, put serious pressure on their opponents, who were both rated number one in the world. However, Medina and Moore held true to their rankings and prevailed in the end.

Moore is a five-time world champion, and this is Medina's third world championship.

The event brings back Trestles as a competitive venue after it was left off the Championship Tour in 2019 and event cancellations took place due to the pandemic in 2020.

— Photos and story by Don Leach

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Eatery brings vaccines to Downtown Santa Ana

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

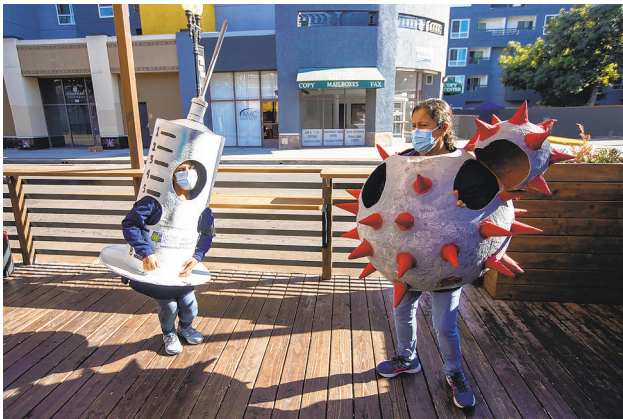
Oscar Olivares, owner of El Indio Botanas y Cerveza in Downtown Santa Ana, isn't waiting for the Latino community to seek out the COVID-19 vaccine. He is bringing the vaccine to them.

On Sept. 14, his popular establishment hosted a vaccine clinic inside the restaurant.

"I was born and raised here, and I am very familiar with everything that is Santa Ana cultural," said Olivares. "This is one of the best things I can do for my little hometown."

As vaccines became available, early reports revealed Latinos make up a low percentage of the vaccinated population, even though they are disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

According to *salud-america.org*, a national Latino-focused research organization, by Aug. 30 Latino residents accounted for 29.5% of vaccinated people in California, although they



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

SOCORRO JUAREZ, left, and Margarita Ochoa from Latino Health Access dress in costume at a mobile vaccine site at El Indio Botanas y Cerveza in Downtown Santa Ana.

make up 39% of the state's population.

Olivares said he was inspired by businesses similar to his that are hosting events like "A Shot for A Shot," offering alcohol shots on the house for vaccinated patrons. In August he partnered with Santa Ana's Latino Health Access, giving the nonprofit organization tickets redeemable for two tacos at El Indio.

"He gave us 200 tickets to give out to those participants getting vaccinated," said Karen Sarabia, Outreach and Education Coordinator for Latino Health Access.

Latino Health Access is dedicated to bringing health, equity and sustainable change to uninsured and underserved communities through education and services. Its Downtown Family Resource Center is

located at 450 W. 4th St., around the corner from El Indio.

The successful partnership inspired Olivares to bring the clinic directly into his restaurant, a move that Sarabia said can make all the difference.

"[El Indio] is located right in the middle of the community, and it is convenient for the community in terms of accessibility," Sarabia said. "The location is the key."

With Latino Health Access acting as liaison between El Indio and the Orange County Health Care Agency, El Indio was able to host the mobile clinic. The agency promoted the event on its Twitter account and El Indio posted appointment information on its Instagram account. Pfizer-Biontech and Johnson & Johnson shots were administered by the Aliso Viejo-based South Marina Pharmacy to those 12 years of age and older.

Latino Health Access set up in front of the restaurant playing music and distrib-

uting Spanish- and English-language materials with information on living through the pandemic.

Individuals sat at tables and chairs inside the restaurant for the shot and moved to the outdoor patio once they received it to be monitored for side effects before leaving. The full El Indio menu was available as well.

Natalie Perez, a 16-year-old from Laguna Niguel came to El Indio for her second shot.

"It's easy access here," Natalie said as her parents sipped Coca-Colas from El Indio's bar. Natalie received her first shot in Huntington Beach.

Olivares said he anticipated some pushback from guests who are against the vaccine.

"I have even had multiple people asking what am I getting out of it. They think I got bought out by big pharma or something," Olivares said.

But Olivares said those assumptions aren't true. "It's just the sheer satis-

faction of helping out my community ... do you need a better explanation than that?"

Schools, churches, community groups and other small businesses like El Indio interested in helping out their own communities can request to host a clinic through the Orange County Health Care Agency website. The site provides information and instructions on how to sign up for a mobile vaccination event with free COVID-19 vaccinations.

Olivares sees it as the simplest way to help the Latino community.

"For me it's very important to take care of our loved ones and get things going and make sure every one is working again and working safely ... going out and enjoying themselves safely. We just want to contribute to that," Olivares said. "The only thing it's going to cost me is some space in my restaurant."

sarah.mosqueda
@latimes.com
Twitter: @SarahNMos

TRIAL

Continued from page R2

above my pay grade."

"Orange County has a press office that can help you on their official position," Harrell said in an email to TimesOC.

During trial, Mkrtchyan grilled Renegar about what she described as a conspiracy between he and his fellow deputies to assault Holloway then lie about what happened.

"And isn't it true, officer, you were punishing him for verbally challenging you at the first contact when you met him at the campsite? Yes or no?" Mkrtchyan asked.

"No, that's not true at all," Renegar answered.

Jurors saw a photo of Holloway's bruised and cut face, which Harrell described to jurors as "not pretty."

Harrell said the deputies showed professionalism and restraint when confronted by Holloway. "We didn't want to do this. But our officer safety concerns and the safety for the other campers made it so that if he's not going to get down on the ground, then we need to do it. We need to get him down there so everybody is safe."

Honorably discharged from the Marines in 2000, Holloway was working as a copy-machine repairman and camping out of his truck when the confrontation occurred. He testified that he sought counsel from Paul Walters, the former Santa Ana police chief who now leads Orange County district attorney's Bureau of Investigation. Holloway said his mother

worked for the Santa Ana Police Department for 27 years and Walters "knew our family pretty good."

"He told me I should seek counsel," Holloway testified.

"I've seen how easy it was for law enforcement to lie and get away with it. If I didn't push for this, they would have gotten away with putting me in the hospital, and I would be in jail," he continued.

Harrell said Holloway testified in a deposition that he calmly obeyed them but was assaulted for no reason, apparently not realizing that while they didn't wear body cameras that night, they did have audio recorders, and the recordings "show that the deputies calmly addressed Mr. Holloway, showed him unfailing respect, tried to get answers as to what has happened." The second time, with heightened safety concerns, they still "showed him enough respect to tell him to get on the ground. They use a command voice and yes, it is loud."

Jurors heard the recording several times.

"This tone of voice is supposed to tell anyone, the scientists have told law enforcement, that you need to get on the ground," Harrell said. "Did it work with Holloway? No."

The judge dismissed Deputies Billinger and Gunderson as defendants mid-trial after concluding they weren't involved in a conspiracy, so if the case is retried, only five deputies remain as defendants.

MEGHANN M. CUNIFF is a contributor to TimesOC.

JUDGE

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tify, who claimed he was in the "right place in the jail at the right time" when Smith talked about his crime. According to the defense, Baytieh would have known due to Platt's interview that the confession would have been obtained at the urging and repeated questioning of the informants, not from being in the right place at the right time. The defense also alleges that Baytieh hid an important file revealing that Palacios was offered money by the Orange County Sheriff's Department for his informant work months prior to his testimony.

Baytieh also allegedly misled a Grand Jury by eliciting testimony from Palacios presenting Platt as being involved in a plot to kill or assault lead investigator Raymond Wert, though Platt was working with law enforcement. The motion says that Baytieh also hid an important file on Platt, which would have revealed that he was working as an informant.

The defense attorneys also contend that Baytieh never disclosed his connection with Art Longacre, who replaced Platt as an informant when he was released. The motion says Baytieh transferred Longacre to the Orange County Jail from state pris-

on to provide jailhouse testimony in another murder case.

The motion also says Baytieh failed to add members of the Sheriff's Department who engaged in misconduct while working on the Smith case to the Brady notification list, which is a record that district attorney's offices are supposed to update with the names of law enforcement personnel who have records of dishonesty, criminality and other issues that could affect their credibility as witnesses.

"Since this matter relates to a case currently pending in court, it will be inappropriate and unethical for me to comment in the media on the case because the proper administration of the justice system requires that all such pending matters be litigated and resolved in a court of law and not in the media," Baytieh said in an email on Tuesday.

D.A. spokeswoman Kimberly Edds said in an email that the department has hired an outside law firm to conduct an independent investigation into the handling of the Smith case.

"That investigation is ongoing and as such we as the district attorney's office will not be commenting further at this time," Edds said.

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazil



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

TWO FARMERS clear brush from the fields near the colorful arches at the Ecology Center Farm in San Juan Capistrano. The center will host a Green Feast, which celebrated community and culture on Saturday and will again on Sept. 25.

GREEN

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do a blessing for the land and the meal and for us all," Zaidman said. "Highlighting the cultural values that have been here long before is very important to us."

The meal served at Green Feast highlights everything that is grown on the farm and is prepared by James Beard Award-winning Chef Tim Byres.

"He is as aligned as a chef we have ever worked with," Zaidman said of Byres' commitment to not just the prepared final plate but where everything comes from, its effect on the environment and all the people who grew it.

"His superpower is cooking on what is called 'live fire' — cooking on the fire in front of you."

The dinner is designed around the four rotations of the center's regenerative organic farm. Mark Magiera, former operations manager of Chez Panisse Restaurant and Café, selects wine pairings. Tickets are sold in groups of four, as a table for \$1,600, and the funds directly benefit the Ecology Center's programming and

activities.

"Our philanthropic commitments really support a dozen initiatives everywhere from educational programming to scholarships and field trip opportunities," Zaidman said.

Surrounding schools and the nearby Boys & Girls club have access to educational programming at the Ecology Center at no cost, for example.

In addition, the money supports the nearly 100,000 pounds of fresh organic produce the center donates a year and keeps participants in the apprenticeship program paid.

Donations also benefit the center's Nourishing Neighbors program, a reoccurring giving campaign in which \$35 a month helps feed a food-insecure family. "We have 115 families a month receive our farm share boxes for free," Zaidman said.

While half of the center's operation and programming is supported through philanthropy, the other half is supported through earned income.

The center hosts several other events throughout the year with varying degrees of price points.

"During the spring we



A VARIETY of hot peppers at the Farm Stand in the Ecology Center in San Juan Capistrano.

did an event called Peace Pizza," Zaidman said.

The event was ticketed at a lower cost of entry and included pizza, salad, dessert and a drink on the farm.

"We also have our Hearth Dinners — we did 18 dinners this summer, with an intimate setting in direct conversation with Chef Tim, with a little bit more of a higher price-point experience."

Upcoming events besides Green Feast include Eco Tots, a sensory, hands-on learning experience in the garden for children ages 2 to 5 and their parents on Oct. 2, 9 and 16, and Jim Denevan's "Outstanding in

the Field" traveling dinner series on Oct. 14.

With support from the community, Zaidman said the center can continue its work of bringing back a culture of small-scale, culturally appropriate agriculture. It's important that others learn to replicate the work at the Ecology Center, he said.

"Replication is really to ensure that we are not just one of the last farms in Orange County but the first in a new generation," Zaidman said.

sarah.mosqueda
@latimes.com
Twitter: @SarahNMos

ANAHEIM

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life prepared me for this moment," Ma'ae said during public comments. "If I am selected, my priorities as an Anaheim City Council member follow my two decades of community activism. I will be a fierce advocate for neighborhood reinvestment."

Fred Sigala, Jr., a psychiatric nurse and also the child of Mexican immigrant parents, had been involved in an effort to recall Brundman before applying to fill the vacancy left by his resignation.

"I found that ideologies aside, the thing that most of my fellow residents seem to agree on is that we've been sorely lacking effective representation in our district," Sigala said. "I would strive to bring the voices of District 2 here in a professional, respectful and productive manner while also bringing your collective vi-

sion for our city to District 2."

After all candidates made their cases, the appointment process came under criticism from two Democratic council members. Avelino Valencia stated that he would've preferred more community outreach while colleague Jose F. Moreno questioned the fact that council members had to individually reach out to interview applicants.

"One of the things that's an important ethic in searches is that all candidates are actually sitting and interviewed by the people making the vote together," Moreno said. "This process was very difficult and very much counter to what I consider to be ways of being fair to all candidates."

Sidhu opened the dais to nominations following Moreno's comments. District 1 Councilman Jose Diaz noted his top two choices from the field were Phillip Wolfram, a real

estate executive, and Ma'ae before nominating the latter.

Moreno took the opportunity to question Ma'ae about policies for the city's west side during a five-minute round of council discussion.

Ma'ae didn't specify any specific policies she either supported or opposed during her first response, but outlined the need to revitalize the Brookhurst Street corridor when she returned to the podium. Ma'ae opposed the official designation of Little Arabia, an enclave of Middle Eastern businesses along the corridor, as a pathway to doing so.

After initially nominating Sigala, Moreno noted he would abstain from the vote altogether and expressed his opinion that Ma'ae's appointment seemed to be "pre-ordained." The criticism drew a sharp rebuttal from the mayor.

"This is one of the fairest

processes we've been through," Sidhu said. "This was completely a transparent process that we've done."

A majority of council members voted to appoint Ma'ae to serve out the rest of Brundman's term through November 2022 with Valencia joining Moreno in abstaining. The seat will be up for election after that.

Prior to her appointment, Anaheim's seven-member council had been all-male. Ma'ae is only the second Latina to serve on Anaheim City Council, which is now at its most ethnically diverse since 2006.

Ma'ae is also the first member of the council appointed since 1995, when planning commissioner Tom Tait, who later served two terms as mayor, was the compromise candidate chosen.

gabriel.sanroman@latimes.com
Twitter: @gsanroman2