

Daily Pilot

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Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

A RAINBOW is seen just over the Huntington Beach High School campus following a storm on Tuesday.

Storm brings heavy rain, strong winds to county

BY ANDREW TURNER

The wind picked up the sand and whipped it from west to east in Huntington Beach Tuesday, demonstrating the strength of a storm that announced the coming of winter to Orange County residents.

Rocky seas with whitecap waves, flags fully unveiling themselves, overturned trash cans and a volleyball net threatening to leave its posts were some of the visuals at the Huntington Beach pier in the early afternoon.

The National Weather Service issued a flash flood warning due to heavy rain for the surrounding area just before 1 p.m., advising people to avoid travel unless they were attempting to leave an area subject to flooding or under an evacuation order.

Nate Kosova, 51, of Newport Beach could not be deterred from his daily exercise routine, a trek to the Huntington Beach pier.

Stopped as he headed back in the direction of his hometown, Kosova, dressed in shorts, said he liked the cold weather. But he acknowledged the sand racing across the beach stung his skin as he walked into the wind. "It hurts," he said.

There was also a surfer on the east side of the pier that chose to brave the high-surf conditions. It would be a short stay, as the waves refused to break in the desired fashion.

Jon Barry of Ice-America was tending to the Surf City Winter Wonderland outdoor ice rink that has been at Pier Plaza since Thanksgiving. Barry skated around the rink

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LEFT: A woman braves strong wind and rain as she crosses an empty Broadway Boulevard Tuesday morning in Laguna Beach.

BELOW: A city worker clears debris from a drain that began to clog at Jasmine and South Coast Highway during the storm on Tuesday in Laguna Beach.

Photos by Don Leach
Staff Photographer



Masks return as new variant spreads

State announces new indoor masking after coronavirus cases grow 50% since Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

BY LILLY NGUYEN

Orange County residents, along with their counterparts statewide, are being told to mask up again through mid-January in an effort state officials describe as an "added layer of protection" from the Omicron variant of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, identified by South African scientists in late November.

The state announced the mandate for mask-wearing in all indoor public spaces, irrespective of vaccine status, on Monday. The mandate goes into effect Wednesday and is tentatively set to be in place through Jan. 15.

According to data released by the Orange County Health Care Agency on Tuesday, there have been no identified cases of the variant in the county yet but the Centers for Disease Control's COVID Data Tracker identifies Orange County as having "substantial" transmission of the coronavirus on a four-tier scale that ranges from "low" to "high." California as a whole is deemed by the CDC to have a high rate of transmission.

State officials said the seven-day average case rate has increased by about 47% and hospitalizations by 14% since Thanksgiving weekend.

"As expected, we are beginning to experience a rise in cases, not only here in Orange County but statewide and nationwide, due to

See **Masks**, page A4

C.M. woman pleads not guilty in theft case

Ekaterina Zharkova, 38, who allegedly stole \$328K from retailers, was arrested on Nov. 23 and posted \$20K bond.

BY SARA CARDINE

A woman suspected of stealing \$328,000 in designer merchandise from local retailers and attempting to sell it online appeared in court Tuesday, pleading not guilty to felony grand theft charges and responding to a failure to appear in another felony case.

Ekaterina Zharkova, 38, of Costa Mesa, was arrested on Nov. 23 by members of the California Highway Patrol's Organized Retail Crime Task Force, after an investigator witnessed her allegedly stealing thousands of dollars worth of items from a Nordstrom Rack in Costa Mesa, Orange County District Atty. Todd Spitzer announced Friday.

The cache from Zharkova's activities were discovered after a search warrant was executed at her home in Costa Mesa and officers learned she'd been attempting to sell stolen merchandise through a luxury item online consignment store, according to the district attorney's news release.

Prosecutors described in a Dec. 12 criminal complaint how, between Oct. 7 and Nov. 23, Zharkova made repeated trips to the Nordstrom Rack and TJ Maxx

See **Theft**, page A2

Families named winners in decorating contest



LINDA AND TERRY MORGAN, who live on Sierks Avenue, won Best Overall in the Costa Mesa holiday home decorating contest.

SANTA POSES with the Doyle family, who won Best Theme, "Santa Gone Fishing," during the awards party held Saturday at Neat Coffee.



BY SUSAN HOFFMAN

A handful of local Costa Mesa business leaders joined forces in recent weeks to renew a forgotten holiday home-decorating competition once celebrated decades ago, drawing several dozen entries that were considered by judges on Friday night.

In the 1950s and '60s, the Inter-city Yule Contest was an annual

citywide event, with trophies awarded and newspaper recognition given to the big winners. This year's contest creator, Kendra Fisher, asked the Daily Pilot last month to help get the word out that she hoped to revive the old tradition.

"After the article ran, we got so many submissions," said Fisher,

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Photos by Susan Hoffman

MOST CREATIVE went to Toni Elliott, seated with her grandchildren Brooklyn and Rigley, during the home decorating awards party.

FOR THE RECORD

In a story published Friday under the headline "Vendors display of political materials decried," it was reported a vendor selling conservative-leaning merchandise at the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce's Dec. 3 holiday event led to criticism of and a public apology from the chamber, whose leader said she wasn't told such items would be offered for sale.

The vendor, however, said in an email to the Los Angeles Times, the parent company of the Daily Pilot, that she sells donated items from across the political spectrum to benefit her animal-rights organization and that the chamber, a councilman and the initial report in the Daily Pilot mischaracterized her. She said her group, San Fernando Valley-based Recycled Pets, is nonpartisan and assists in animal-rescue efforts.

BOYS' SOCCER

Los Amigos strikes early, holds on against Estancia

BY ANDREW TURNER

The dark skies above opened to a downpour just as the match was ending on Monday.

As swiftly as the rain-drops came, so too did the goals for the Los Amigos High School boys' soccer team, which did all its scoring in the first half in a 4-2 win over Estancia at home.

In rapid succession, the Lobos got goals from Izaiah Franco, Omar Arciga, Anthony Gutierrez and Humberto Rincon, sending Los Amigos to halftime with a 4-0 lead.

"We practice all week, come out with the ball, come out playing together, find our strikers, and just putting pressure on the team from the get-go," Los Amigos coach Jesus Razo said. "I think that's what helped us...just following the game plan and how we wanted to play."

Los Amigos (4-2) has its second winning streak of the season, as the win over the Eagles follows a 3-0 shutout of Marina last Thursday. Monday's result marked the first time that the Lobos have come away victorious in a match in which they have conceded a goal.

"It shows that we were dedicated, and we wanted to come out and play," Los Amigos senior captain and defender Omar Martinez said of his team's fast start to the match. "The second half didn't go our way. We hope we can fix it for the next game and just work on what we're messing up and do better each game."

Arturo Mota and Rincon each recorded an assist for Los Amigos. It would be a tale of two halves, as Estancia played with the energy and competitive fire to give itself a chance in the second half. The Eagles took 18 shots in



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

LOS AMIGOS' Omar Arciga, left, congratulates Arturo Mota after he scores a goal during a nonleague boys' soccer match on Monday.

their bid to get back into the game after the break, and 11 of those shots were put on target.

Richard Cervantes scored on a well-struck shot while making a run on the right side in the 52nd minute. Moments later, a red card against Los Amigos' right back David Macias with Kevin Flores forcing the action to the left of the box put the Lobos down a man for the remainder of the contest.

Estancia (0-6) continued to push the ball forward, and in the 59th minute, Felix Solis brought the Eagles closer when he deposited Cruz Valdovinos' cross in from the left into the back of the net.

The Eagles continued to put the pressure on. As clouds rolled in and daylight faded, Los Amigos goalkeeper Jorge Sanchez did well to stop the remaining six shots that came his way.

"It felt like the game wasn't going to end," Sanchez said. "They were pressuring and pressuring, and they kept getting closer and closer, especially since we didn't have our 11th man, it felt like the game was going to get tied up."

Sanchez gave insight into his mindset while his goal was under siege.

"My only goal is to make my team proud," Sanchez added. "I kept saying, 'You got this. Don't worry about it.' I wasn't trying to overthink anything."

The Lobos made a point of running back to their goal when the final whistle blew to recognize the effort of their goalkeeper, who made nine saves after entering the match for the second half. Daniel Terrones manned the net in the first half.

Estancia coach Robert Castellano was encouraged by the response from his team in the second half.

"Every season, every team, they go through their cycles, they go through their ups and downs," Castellano said. "It's never a straight line, but we haven't played consistently yet. Every team hits a good moment within a season. We just haven't hit ours..."

"I believe in them, I believe in myself, and I know that we're going to get there. It's only a matter of time."

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CONTEST

Continued from page A1

a new member of the Torrelli Realty team who learned about the previous contest when she was cleaning out her grandfather's garage and found news clippings. "Submissions have been sent to me the last few weeks and people have also signed up in person at Neat Coffee [in Costa Mesa]. We've had about 50 submissions."

Among the judges who drove through the community Friday night to check out the entries were Stefanie D'Alessandro representing Sift Bakery in Costa Mesa, Jaclyn Sanchez of MOXI3 Fitness studio, Neat Coffee's owner Ally Garvin, Chelsea Freeman of the UPLIFT Foundation, as well as Fisher and her grandfather, John O'Brien, the proud winner of more than one annual trophy in the old Intercity Yule Con-

test. On Saturday night during its movie night intermission, Neat Coffee hosted the holiday home-decorating awards party with popcorn and hot cocoa. Trophies were presented to the winners along with "Winner" signs to be displayed in their frontyards. Gift certificates were also donated by Newport Rib Co., El Rancho and Descanso restaurants.

The winners of the four categories were:

Best Overall: Morgan Family, 252 Sierks St.

Best Theme: Doyle Family, 3134 Barbados St.

Most Creative: Elliott Family, 2060 Continental Ave.

Brightest Lights: Bahena family, 1070 Townhouse Drive.

"I saw the Daily Pilot article and thought it might be kind of fun," said Costa Mesa native Linda Morgan. "I like anything that has Costa Mesa history.

We're honored to have been chosen as Best Overall."

Morgan and her husband, Terry, started out slowly decorating their house, also known as the "tree house," which has evolved over the last five years. This season they have been working on the set up since Thanksgiving.

"There's no theme to decorating, mostly random stuff," said Morgan. "There's a vintage blow-mold 5-foot Santa and a dummy-board snowman attached to a tree, a life-sized hard-plastic goat called Sir William, or 'Billy' for short. There's vertical lights or whatever we feel like doing."

Toni Elliott, whose house won Most Creative, thought it was the cutest thing ever. "This is the first prize that I won in my whole life," she said.

SUSAN HOFFMAN is a contributor to the Daily Pilot.

THEFT

Continued from page A1

stores in Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley and Tustin.

She allegedly walked into the locations and filled empty shopping bags with stolen merchandise, then left without paying. As a result, she faces five felony counts of grand theft and receiving, selling or concealing stolen goods and seven misdemeanor counts of petty theft under \$950.

Zharkova was released from custody on Nov. 25,

after posting \$20,000 bail, with court dates pending not only for her most recent spree but also for a previous felony arrest on March 15 for grand theft and possession of burglary tools.

In that case, for which she entered a not guilty plea on Sept. 29 after charges were filed June 10, she was reported to have stolen merchandise valued at more than \$950 and was found in possession of a tool used to remove store security tags.

Zharkova was scheduled to appear in court Friday

for that crime, but when she failed to appear, a judge issued a warrant for her arrest and a criminal complaint was filed in the second, more recent matter.

D.A. spokeswoman Kimberly Edds confirmed Monday Zharkova was found and rearrested by CHP officers on Sunday, after the warrant was issued for her failure to appear, and on the new charge. In a Santa Ana courtroom Tuesday, she pleaded not guilty to the latter charge.

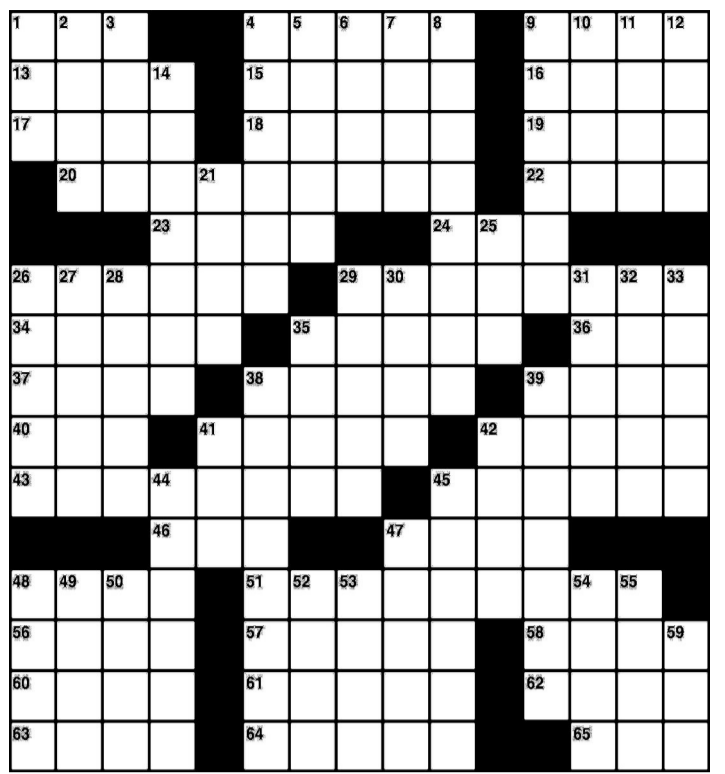
Orange County isn't the only jurisdiction with

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

- ACROSS 1 Joint nearest the waist 4 Part of HUD 9 Party giver 13 _ a test; passed easily 15 _ Haute, IN 16 Linear measure 17 Precious 18 Excludes 19 Stickum 20 Most ready for a nap 22 Mass song 23 Narrow cut 24 Whopper 26 TV screen display type 29 Mixing with a spoon 34 _ up; slackens 35 Express gratitude to 36 By way of 37 Uses a chair 38 Pitchfork tine 39 Ukraine's capital 40 TV's _ Tree Hill 41 Expands 42 Portion 43 Calmness 45 Graduation cap feature 46 Piña colada ingredient 47 Understands 48 Enormous 51 Capture 56 Gaping 57 Fortune-teller's deck 58 Has remorse for 60 Verboten topic 61 Wed without fanfare 62 _ at; answer sharply & irritably 63 Had down pat 64 Underground drain 65 Deceitful

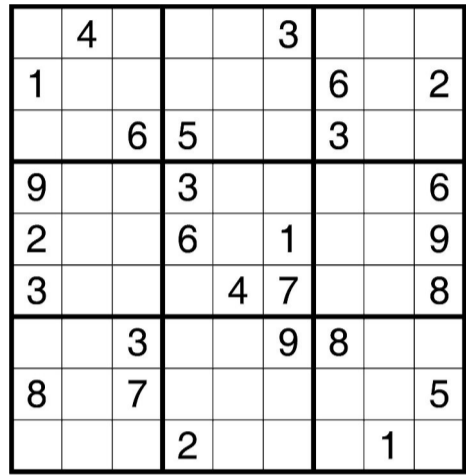
- DOWN 1 "If I Only _ a Brain"; Scarecrow's song 2 Decorates petits fours 3 Chime loudly 4 Perfect society 5 Send in payment 6 Oscar-winner Larson 7 _ and crafts



SUDOKU

By The Mephram Group

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



For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A4.

- 8 Newly hatched bird 9 Further up 10 Exclusively 11 Slimy film 12 Following that 14 Puts on clothes 21 Sprawling trees 25 Aggravate

- 26 Colombia's dollars 27 Singer Frankie 28 Fall flower 29 Flamboyant 30 Fawn colors 31 Twining vines 32 Caroline, to RFK 33 Court mallet 35 Turkey _; ragtime dance 38 Apes and monkeys 39 Mouths, slangly 41 African antelope 42 Walkway 44 Before this, to a poet 45 Wobble 47 Feel about blindly 48 Tap the horn 49 Sneak _; approach stealthily 50 Cowboy Autry 52 Light in color 53 Bow of a ship 54 Poor Clares & others 55 Great buy 59 _ on; watch from hiding

Tribune Media Services

STORM

Continued from page A1

with a squeegee to get rid of some of the standing water, but he said that the rain was not as problematic as the wind.

"When it's sunny, it does get a little wet, but it holds up," Barry said. "Obviously, the rain is not our best friend, but what's worse is the wind, because once the water's on top and the wind's blowing on it, it keeps an ambient temperature warmth, so it won't freeze. It will take forever. That's the reason I'm trying to get as much water off it as possible. After that, it should start to freeze up again fully, but you've just got to kind of wait out the rain and work when you can."

On Main Street, businesses remained open, although the downtown area was understandably more quiet than normal. Cali Clothing had laid some towels down at its entrance, but the rainfall had yet to become a concern otherwise.

Jonathan Kearney, 33, of Huntington Beach, a Chicago transplant, said he knew what to expect coming into the day because he had been following the storm.

"The wind is there," Kearney said of his former hometown. "The rain is kind of similar, too, but it's still not as cold [or] frigid [here]."

Laguna Beach city officials provided an update



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

THE APPLEBEE SIBLINGS, Crusade, 4, left, Selah, 6, center, and Weslee, 3, right, play in a rain puddle on Tuesday at Fairview Park in Costa Mesa.

on the impact of the storm in the early afternoon. The city was receiving a high volume of calls related to downed trees and power lines. Businesses were also advised to put up their floodgates to protect property.

The way out of Laguna Beach via Laguna Canyon Road was shut down at El Toro Road because of flooding just before noon, the city said in an advisory message. The closure was related to an evacuation plan for Anneliese School, which was experiencing flooding, Laguna Beach Fire Chief Mike Garcia told the Laguna Beach City Council on Tuesday.

Whether a car simply won't start or there are traffic incidents, inclement weather can make for a tough day for drivers.

There were a couple of tow trucks seen on Brookhurst Avenue on the way from Mile Square Park in Fountain Valley to Pacific Coast Highway in Huntington Beach.

A flash flood warning was also issued by the National Weather Service for the Bond fire burn area. Modjeska, Silverado and Williams canyons were under mandatory evacuation orders Tuesday morning, necessitated by rainfall in the amount of 0.5 to 0.75 inches per hour, according to a City News Service report. Orange County Fire Authority personnel was called upon to make several rescues of residents from debris flows caused by the storm.

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ther said he's assigned some of his most experienced investigators to work with the CHP task force and the sheriff's department to "help protect Orange County businesses from victimization and consumers from increased costs."

"Shoplifting and other retail theft is out of control across California as a result of reckless laws that have made the risk far less than the potential reward," he continued in Friday's news release. "These are not victimless crimes, and if you engage in these kinds of

outrageous theft schemes, we're going to arrest you, we're going to prosecute you, and we're putting you behind bars."

Zharkova, who retained the services of Glendale attorney Jilbert Tahmazian, is set to appear in Orange County Superior Court on Jan. 28 in a hearing related to both felony cases against her. Tahmazian could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

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Moving forward together

We've been through a lot together and have proved to be resilient. The approaching new year brings with it new possibilities to help our clients, communities and teammates move forward and prosper — safely.

Using our industry-leading digital tools, like mobile check deposits, Erica®, CashPro® and access to Zelle®, individuals and businesses are finding it easier to do their everyday banking. Across the country, the expertise of our specialists and our teammates in financial centers is helping clients meet all their financial needs at every stage of their lives.

In our communities, we continue to collaborate with local partners, business leaders, experts and academics across the public and private sectors to fuel job growth and financial stability. More than \$400 million of our \$1.25 billion commitment to advance racial equality and economic opportunity is already supporting diverse small businesses and partners, including many recipients here in Orange County who provide job skilling and hiring programs.

We've also increased resources to support our teammates' emotional and financial well-being. Recently, we raised our minimum hourly wage for U.S. employees to \$21 per hour, moving closer to our goal of \$25 by 2025.

My teammates and I look forward to growing existing partnerships and creating new ones as we work together to make a difference. Have a safe and happy holiday season.

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