

Daily Pilot & Times OC

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Secret university shares its curriculum

COMING TO Segerstrom Center March 23, "The University of Wonder and Imagination" lets young audiences learn about science, art and math in an interactive experience.



A show coming to Segerstrom Center from Northern Ireland lets young audiences learn about science, art and math in an interactive experience.

BY SARA CARDINE

Scholars may disagree over the value of a college education, but those interested in exploring the world's vast mysteries have a much cheaper option next weekend as Segerstrom Center for the Arts presents "The University of Wonder and Imagination."

Tailored to young learners ages 7 and up, the program takes place at the Costa Mesa complex's Samueli Theater with two afternoon shows Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m. and features an interactive element that lets audiences choose their own adventures in a fun and fast-moving format.

Lead character Professor Bamberg uses the wonders of "telecamology" to transport instructors from a secret university in Northern Ireland's Armagh directly to Costa Mesa, where they'll share a curriculum of mind-bending puzzles designed to

See *Secret*, page A6

Courtesy of Segerstrom Center for the Arts



Coming soon to Irvine

UCI Health

Anaheim school district to shed 100-plus teachers

Student, parent protest follows district trustees' approval of the cuts during a contentious March 7 board meeting.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Two dozen parents and students marched against steep cuts that will reduce teacher staffing by 10% across Anaheim Union High School District campuses.

Protesters gathered at the Brookhurst Community Center in Anaheim after school on Thursday and descended on the district's headquarters a mile and a half away with the chant "no

teachers, no future."

"We are very concerned and outraged to hear that a lot of our teachers are going to be let go," said Sofia Romero, a mother to two children attending AUHSD schools. "We understand there's a budget issue, but the district knew it was coming. They could've stopped investing in other things we don't need."

Hailey Sotelo, an eighth-grader at Brookhurst Junior High School, helped organize the protest march after many parents and students felt disheartened following the school board meeting where the cuts were ap-

See *District*, page A5

STUDENTS

LEAD parents in a march to the offices of the Anaheim Unified High School district Thursday in protest of over 100 recently announced teacher layoffs.

Eric Licas



ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Jessica Peralta

DISNEY CALIFORNIA ADVENTURE FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL RETURNS THROUGH APRIL 22 PAGE A4



Photos by James Carbone

MOHAMMAD OTHMAN holds up Sababa's famous falafel pita with fried vegetables. He and his father, Salah Othman, the eatery's owner, say they've won patrons with generous giveaways and high-quality food.

A falafel shop makes space for its expanding fan base

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Whether for a first-time customer or a regular, Sababa Falafel Shop in Garden Grove always offers a complimentary falafel to all waiting in line to place their orders.

It's equal parts *karam*, an Arabic word for "generosity," and business savvy.

Sababa's namesake falafels — light, fluffy and delectably seasoned — have tantalized taste buds since the fast casual Palestinian restaurant opened on the edge of Anaheim's Little Arabia District in late 2020.

During its first three weeks of business, the sandwich-style shop offered more than just free falafels. Patrons ordered from the menu of pita sandwiches and bowls and unknowingly ate on the house.

"We gave everything away," said Salah Othman, Sababa Falafel's owner. "That's how we built up our clientele. The customers that came in from those first three weeks have never left."

Since then, word of mouth has attracted longer lines — and



KAMYAR DIBAJ, who works in Garden Grove, enjoys his lunch sitting in the new open window dining area at Sababa Falafel Shop.

honorifics.

Sababa Falafel's popularity propelled it to being named one of Yelp's "Top 100 Places to Eat" last year, having landed in at number 10.

Now, the eatery has opened a new dining room area to better accommodate the crowds it

attracts.

For Othman, the secret to Sababa Falafel's success traces all the way back to Ramallah, a Palestinian city in the West Bank where he grew up.

Wearing a black sweatshirt

See *Shop*, page A4

Workout studio celebrates 15 years in O.C.

BY MATT SZABO

Marcia Lanum is a strong woman.

She's also 70, but that popular saying that age is just a number seems like it's meant for people like her.

The Huntington Beach resident had gone to the gym before, tried Jazzercise and even boxing. When a Pure Barre studio was set to open in the Seaclyff Village Shopping Center in 2009, it piqued her interest because it offers a full body workout that's described as a mix of Pilates, yoga and ballet.

Fifteen years later, she still tries to come to classes at least four times a week.

"My husband has had two strokes, so at my house, I'm the go-to for strength and all of the heavy lifting," Lanum said. "It's helped my posture, my energy level, certainly my emotional and mental state. When I'm stressed, I know I can come here and leave it all out the door. This 50 minutes is for me, and there's a great community here. Women can be very competitive, but here, everyone supports each other and cheers each other on."

This kind of success story is why Monica Pommier Grubin loves her job so much.

Grubin is the owner of four Pure Barre studios in Orange County — Newport Beach, Mission Viejo, Huntington Beach and Irvine. This month, she's celebrating the 15-year anniversary of opening that first location on 17th Street, which is technically in east-side Costa Mesa.

In that time, Grubin has gotten married to her husband, Tim, and had two children. But her studios have also impacted the lives of countless amounts of women.

She has a staff of about 50 people total, which does include one man. Men are also welcome to take the classes, though she said the clientele is about 95% women.

"It feels like a big sorority sometimes," said Grubin, who turned 40 last year and lives in Costa Mesa herself. "Some people move here and they don't have friends. They taught at the Pure Barre in Mississippi, and they come in and they have instant community. Next thing you know, we're good friends and we're at each other's barbecues and hanging out on the weekends."

"Everyone's stories motivate me, how people found this and then they found friends and the community. It changes people's lives and their health."

Grubin, originally from San Diego, fell in love with the classes after the Pure Barre founder, Carrie Dorr, opened a small studio down the street from where she grew up in Solana Beach.

"I was very broad and thick from playing water polo, and I saw my body go long and lean and tall and flexible," Grubin said. "My mom was loving it, too. We were doing it together. We always grew up kind of working out together, and kind of fell in love with it."

Grubin was moving to Orange County, but the plan was to go to Western University of Health

Sciences in Pomona to become a physician assistant. That path soon changed.

She took the money she had saved for school from living at home and jumped into Pure Barre instead. At the age of 24, she became the first to open a barre studio in Orange County.

"Everyone was like, 'You're nuts.'" Grubin recalled. "But my dad was a small business owner. He was like, 'You're the most relentless human being I've ever met. You're not going to let this fail.' And here we are, 15 years later."

Her studios started with just classic classes, but new ones have popped up. "Empower" has wrist and ankle weights and is a bit more cardio based. "Reform" uses resistance tubes. The newest class is "Define," which is more of a weight-training class and one that Lanum loves.

Martha Ventimiglia started coming to Pure Barre in 2016. Two years later, she became manager of the Huntington Beach studio.

"I had just started working out after I had my last child, and I just loved it," said Ventimiglia, who had two sons play for the Huntington Beach baseball program at the stadium that's little more than a stone's throw away from the studio. "I felt like I had connected with my instructors, and I loved the workout. I didn't have the learning curve that a lot of new clients do. It just checked all the boxes for me. Ever since then, I take like six days a week."

Of course, there's also the



James Carbone

MONICA GRUBIN, left, stretches with fellow instructors and members of Pure Barre Huntington Beach on Tuesday.

younger generation. Maddy Harris graduated from Huntington Beach High in 2021 and is an instructor-in-training at Pure Barre.

Harris was a standout swimmer for the Oilers, though she no longer swims competitively.

"My arm strength is the one thing that I've noticed a huge difference," Harris said. "Even how my arms look, because I know people work out for looks too."

Grubin is now the longest standing owner within the Pure Barre franchise. Especially with two kids in tow now, she has no immediate plans to expand.

"I feel like if I go any bigger, it's going to dilute the secret sauce

that makes it what it is, you know?" she said. "Maybe when my kids get older, or maybe I'll just really do great with these four and focus on the community we've built."

That word — community — is what keeps women coming back.

It's something that Lanum certainly cherishes.

"Especially as you get into my age, a lot of older women become isolated and feel like they're not seen," she said. "I feel like you need something like this, which has a community that lifts you up and supports you. I've found all of that here."

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ucihealth.org/wencenter

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Don Leach | Staff Photographer

A VIEW LOOKING south across the Talbert Marsh. The California Coastal Commission this week approved a permit application for the restoration of shorelines there.

Restoration project at Talbert Marsh wins state approval

BY LILLY NGUYEN

A restoration project at Talbert Marsh got the go-ahead Thursday after the state Coastal Commission approved a coastal permit application submitted by the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy as part of its consent calendar.

The roughly 25 acres of Talbert Marsh stretch between Brookhurst Street to the Santa Ana River Trail and make up one of four wetlands the non-profit owns and maintains. More than 90 bird species have been observed at the marsh in addition to the adjoining wetlands, according to the organization.

The project along the southeastern and western shorelines of South Island will address erosion, which Coastal Commission staff said causes the disappearance of coastal salt marsh vegetation and depletes refuge spaces for sensitive bird species that live there.

If left unaddressed, the erosion could continue into the shorelines and impact other habitat, according to commission staff.

Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy execu-

tive president John Villa said Friday the erosion is beginning to creep toward one of two electrical poles on the property and will eventually cause it to topple. But more than that, he said, Talbert Marsh is beginning to lose its shorelines.

"We'd be losing our sandy areas, and we want to reverse that because we're directly across from a California least tern preserve. We also have the Western snowy plovers that come into our marsh, so we're trying to restore habitat for those species," said Villa, who noted that both have been threatened by human activity.

Expected to begin in the fall after the end of nesting season for several species, the project will restore a "living shoreline" in an effort to reduce the amount of erosion and potentially reverse it. That includes the placement of fill, sediment retention devices and the planting of vegetation sourced from within the Huntington Beach Wetlands Complex — the Talbert, Brookhurst and Talbert marshes.

No heavy machinery will be used, and the work is expected to be completed within a few

months of starting, Villa said.

As part of the approvals, the Coastal Commission is requiring the non-profit to use biodegradable materials in the fill, maintain a physical monitoring plan and use sediment consistent with federal Screening Quick Reference Tables (SQUIRT) guidelines. The use of on-site sand dunes as fill material will not be allowed, and the size of rocks will also be limited, according to the staff report.

The project is being funded by AES Southland, managed by the California Energy Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and United Parcel Services, the non-profit said. The work is engineered by Moffatt & Nichol.

"It's taken a while, but that wasn't the Coastal Commission's fault," said Villa, who added issues on the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy's part came up during the application process. "They've worked really well with us. We've had the usual bantering back and forth on the project, and we're really happy with the process."

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THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

ACROSS

- 1 Burn with liquid
- 6 Honda's luxury division
- 11 Frozen water
- 14 Watch and keyboard brand
- 15 High-pH chemicals
- 16 Roll of grass
- 17 St. Patrick's Day cry: 3 wds.
- 19 Enter in a diary
- 20 Suit accessories
- 21 New version
- 23 Gridiron scores, for short
- 24 "Srsly?"
- 25 Desert formation
- 26 Go out with
- 27 "Help!"
- 28 Fender blemish
- 32 Baptism sponsors
- 36 Toledo's lake
- 37 Skirt fold
- 38 Fish eggs
- 39 Call up
- 40 Oil gulf
- 41 Exciting time for college football fans: 2 wds.
- 43 Prefix meaning "half"
- 44 GPS lines
- 45 Test out
- 46 Sneaker or sandal
- 48 Game official, for short
- 49 Sunday talk: Abbr.
- 52 Nut in Chinese cooking
- 55 Tiny details
- 57 Creative pursuit
- 58 Portfolio assets
- 60 Sphere in a pod
- 61 Encircling military tactic
- 62 Host
- 63 For example

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63							64							65		

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.

5	1							2
					8	9		5
9				2		8		1
					3			
8		4	6		1	3		9
			9					
3	7		6					4
6	9	5						
2							7	6

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

- 64 Austin's state
- 65 Paid out
- DOWN
- 1 Aroma
- 2 Gave a darn
- 3 Reebok competitor
- 4 Chain component
- 5 Reward for a good boy: 2 wds.

- 6 Monks' home
- 7 6-Across products
- 8 Mex. neighbor
- 9 Go back to an earlier phase
- 10 Fire remnants
- 11 "La _ Bonita"
- 12 Prepare a meal
- 13 Sharp razor part
- 18 Fuel-carrying

- ship
- 22 Seized an opportunity: 2 wds.
- 25 Roadside inn
- 26 Don Quijote's language
- 27 Winter "blankets"
- 29 Greek love god
- 30 Barcelona boy
- 31 Adolescent
- 32 Transcript nos.
- 33 Shoppe descriptor
- 34 Consider
- 35 Eat away at
- 39 Chanel No. 5 et al.
- 41 Young Girl Scout
- 42 Artery insert
- 47 Bank job
- 48 Stands up
- 49 Because
- 50 Ingested
- 51 Put back to zero
- 52 Baseball headgear
- 53 Field of study
- 54 Don't go
- 55 Big prefix
- 56 Seasonal worker, for short
- 59 Bedevil

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Diverse dishes, live bands and cat puns at Disney food festival

BY JESSICA PERALTA

The new carnitas-style pork belly with esquites corn mac salad at Disney California Adventure Food & Wine Festival is just one example of the diversity the culinary team is going for in this year's menu.

Available at LA Style — one of the 10 festival marketplaces spread throughout California Adventure — the esquites corn salad also features habanero, chili-lime seasoning.

Disneyland Resort Chef Luis Madrigal said this dish was an effort to create something new with the popular pork belly while eliciting a Los Angeles cultural experience.

Disneyland Resort Chef Luis Madrigal said this dish was an effort to create something new with the popular pork belly while eliciting a Los Angeles cultural experience. "So we wanted to incorporate it, carnitas being pork, but made in a different style," he said. "We wanted to see how we can add it into this pork belly now and this pork belly piece ... alongside with the esquites corn salad — esquites being a very street-friendly food in the streets of LA, or any outdoor vendors that like to sell their items outside. We wanted to include that cultural experience for guests that comes from chefs that experience it outside of work. That growing up they used to go to the elote man and have a cup of esquites and now bringing that together with the carnitas."

The festival, which launched March 1 and runs through April 22, includes more than 80 new dishes across the festival marketplaces, participating dining locations and some carts. This year, there are two Sip and Savor Pass options available — a new four-coupon and the returning eight-coupon option. They can be used for select food items or non-alcoholic beverages.

Beyond the considerable amount of food and drinks available, there's an educational component with local, celebrity and Disney chefs offering cooking demonstrations on the weekends at the Hollywood Backlot Stage.

Entertainment makes up the other half of the Food



Photos by Jessica Peralta

CHEF GOOFY visits with attendees of the Disney California Adventure Food & Wine Festival at Hollywood Land. The festival runs through April 22.



A CHEF CONFERS with Minnie Mouse during "Confection Purrfection with the SuperKitties" in Hollywood Land at Disney California Adventure Food & Wine Festival in March 2024.

& Wine Festival experience with a new interactive children's show in Hollywood Land, "Confection Purrfection with the SuperKitties," inspired by Disney Junior's animated series, "SuperKitties." One notable element that the show brings over from the series is the free-flowing use of cat puns — from "catastrophe" and "that's paw-some" to "cat-ch ya later" and everything in between. "The series has a ton of cat puns, we just kept adding," said Linda Love Simmons, show director for

Disney Live Entertainment. "We were laughing constantly."

The show includes on-screen appearances by the "SuperKitties" as well as cupcake decorating for children.

"We wanted to have some kind of activity for the youngest foodies to participate in," she said.

For those looking for some live music, Simmons said this year's festival features more bands — with 14 different live bands performing daily at the Palisades Stage and Paradise

Gardens Bandstand, ranging from reggae, top 40 and '80s to R&B, jazz and big band.

"Cookin' with the Jamin' Chefs" is back for its third year with cooking-themed music, character dancing and performers dressed as chefs drumming on pots and pans. Characters like Chip 'n' Dale, Clarabelle Cow and Daisy Duck add plenty of spicy dance moves.

"I love the idea of celebrating everyone. I love the

See **Festival**, page A5

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

S	C	A	L	D		A	C	U	R	A		I	C	E	
C	A	S	I	O		B	A	S	E	S		S	O	D	
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P	E	A			S	I	E	G	E		E	M	C	E	
S	A	Y			T	E	X	A	S		S	P	E	N	T

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4	7	2	1	3	8	9	6	5
9	6	3	7	2	5	8	4	1
7	9	6	2	5	3	4	1	8
8	2	4	6	7	1	3	5	9
1	3	5	9	8	4	6	2	7
3	5	7	8	6	2	1	9	4
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2	8	1	3	4	9	5	7	6

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Legal Notices

**CITY OF COSTA MESA
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
CHANGE OF DATE**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the previously scheduled public hearing for March 19, 2024 will now be held by the Costa Mesa City Council at its regular meeting at City Hall Council Chambers, 77 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa, California on **Tuesday, April 2, 2024 at 7:00 P.M.**, or as soon as possible thereafter to consider:

A resolution establishing and adopting fees related to the affordable housing in-lieu fees for the proposed Affordable Housing Ordinance (Ordinance No. 2024-XX). Pursuant to Government Code Section 66016, data and analysis indicating the estimated fees required to comply with the Affordable Housing Ordinance will be made available on or before March 18, 2024. Copies of the in-lieu fees data and analysis can be obtained during normal business hours at City Hall, 1st Floor, City Clerk's Office, 77 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa and on the City's website at:

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/trending/affordable-housing-ordinance>.

Public Comments:
Members of the public wishing to participate in the meeting may find instructions to participate on the agenda. Members of the public may also submit written comments via email to the City Clerk at cityclerk@costamesaca.gov and they will be provided to the City Council, made available to the public, and will be part of the meeting record. Any written communications, photos, or other materials for copying and distribution to the City Council that are 10 pages or less, can be e-mailed to cityclerk@costamesaca.gov, submitted to the City Clerk's Office on a flash drive, or mailed to the City Clerk's Office. Kindly submit materials to the City Clerk **AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE, BUT NO LATER THAN 12:00 p.m.** on the day of the hearing, **April 2, 2024**. All materials, pictures, PowerPoints, and videos submitted for display at a public meeting must be previously reviewed by staff to verify appropriateness for general audiences. No links to YouTube videos or other streaming services will be accepted, a direct video file will need to be emailed to staff prior to each meeting in order to minimize complications and to play the video without delay. The video must be one of the following formats, .mp4, .mov or .wmv. Only one file may be included per speaker for public comments. Please note that materials submitted by the public that are deemed appropriate for general audiences will not be redacted in any way and will be posted online as submitted, including any personal contact information. For further assistance, contact the City Clerk's Office at (714) 754-5225. The City Council agenda and related documents may also be viewed on the City's website at <http://costamesaca.gov>, 72 hours prior to the public hearing date. **IF THE AFOREMENTIONED ACTION IS CHALLENGED IN COURT**, the challenge may be limited to only those issues raised at the public hearing described in the notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City Council at, or prior to, the public hearing. Brenda Green, City Clerk, City of Costa Mesa
Published March 17, 2024

SHOP

Continued from page A1

with "Gaza" emblazoned on it, Othman leaned back in a chair at his office inside the restaurant before bouncing back to recount walking to school as a kid.

"Every morning, we would stop at a falafel shop and get a half pita stuffed with falafels and eat on the way," he said. "Those memories became something that created a taste in my palate. I had to have it. As I grew older, I always wanted that flavor."

Othman longed for home cooked Palestinian food after he immigrated to New York City at 12 to live with his dad and work at his Long Island deli.

Four years later, he moved to Southern California with his brothers. At 18, Othman bought his first business, a deli in Glendale. He opened several delis across the Southland, including a location in Huntington Beach, before selling the chain and moving on to other business ventures.

Othman returned to the food business in 2014 when he founded Bronx Sandwich Co.

But the falafels of his youth kept coming back to mind, especially as a bite to eat at a restaurant in Paris summoned the Proust effect from his taste buds.

"You know what? I'm going to perfect the falafel," he thought to himself. "I'm going to open something that's fast casual and use the highest quality ingredients. I know people are



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

SABABA FALAFEL SHOP owner Sal Othman and his son, Mohammad Othman, manager, in Garden Grove.

going to love it."

Othman spent 14 months taste testing what would become Sababa's signature falafel, using fluffy Italian chickpeas as its main ingredient.

He found a location in Garden Grove to open up the restaurant with his wife, Suzie, and decided on "Sababa" as its name.

"I always loved that word," Othman said. "It just rolls off the tongue easily."

For those not conversant in Arabic, a translation of "Sababa" is displayed on a wall at the falafel shop.

"Amazing." "Excellent." "Awesome."

And the dining experience lives up to the name. Gadeer Muhammad makes the trek from Rancho Cucamonga to dine at Sababa Falafel with her family.

"Anytime we're in Orange County for a beach day, or whatever, Sababa is one of those spots that we are going to stop at," she says. "They've literally brought Palestine to O.C. Their food is amazing."

From a speedy assembly line, patrons can have their pita sandwiches stuffed "Sababa style" with ingredi-

ents like red cabbage, spicy chili sauce, pickles, tahini, parsley and hummus.

The falafels are flash fried in fresh oil every day.

With grilled halal chicken, ribeye and fried veggie options, there's something for everyone when placing their orders.

"We have a lot of vegans," Othman said. "We have a lot of vegetarians. We have a lot of Middle Easterners. There's a mix!"

That eclectic, loyal customer base helped land Sababa Falafel on Yelp's coveted list last year.

Othman pulled a Yelp "Top 100" certificate off his shelf and then proudly donned a commemorative apron from the company over his head when recounting the honor.

"It's crazy to say, but our business increased by 200% thanks to Yelp," he said. "That's a huge increase."

The boost in revenue helped him make a successful offer on the hair salon next door in a bid to modestly expand the restaurant. Othman tapped architect Talal Ammouri to design a new dining room, as he had with the restaurant's original wing. After months of con-

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MAILBAG

Time for some trash talk

The older I get, my tolerance for the misbehavior of others is getting lower and lower. If I were to list my top 10 issues when it comes to civility and what it takes to be a good citizen in our city, graffiti and trash are on the top of my hit list.

I belong to a local gym that provides parking in a parking structure. Most of the time I have no complaints, but one recent evening when I arrived, I noticed someone had dumped the contents of their dinner on the ground. Papers, cups and uneaten food were spread out on the concrete, most of it squashed by cars driving over it.

I checked in and asked the front desk if someone could clean it up.

Gym: "That is the responsibility of the facilities. They monitor the parking lot for trash."

Me: "Most likely it was dumped by one of the members here, it reflects poorly on the club."

Gym: "Sorry man, can't do anything about it."

I headed toward the locker room and saw the janitor. I asked the nice young fellow the same question. "Not my job" he said. Feeling frustrated, I asked him if I could have a plastic bag to clean it up myself. He complied.

Ninety minutes later, I returned to my car, and the mess was still there but only more squashed. I proceeded to clean it up.

This not the first time I've done this. I usually wait a period of days to see if things get taken care of by the responsible party but inevitably I end up doing it myself. I've seen people's trash dumped from their cars at parks, schools, behind businesses, in alleys and the streets in my neighborhood. I've driven behind cars along Harbor Boulevard and watched as someone unloaded their trash while driving down the street. It sickens me people behave this way and have an "I don't give a damn" attitude. Their message: "It's someone else's job to clean up after me, don't you know how special I am?" I've also noticed how combative people get when you confront them. It never goes well and can be dangerous, so I restrain myself.

This gym is considered one of the better clubs in town and I'd say most of the members are under 30 years old and well educated. During my workout, I thought about the trash and how the parents of these people failed so badly that their kids feel it is perfectly OK to dump all their trash onto the driveway.

Why do they feel it is okay? How selfish and narcissistic do you have to be to do that?

B. Friedland
Costa Mesa



B. Friedland

A READER noticed and later cleaned up a fast-food dinner discarded at a parking structure beside a Costa Mesa gym, arguing that too many people lack a sense of personal responsibility.

Library censorship spreads

There has been constant and overwhelming public criticism over many months regarding the Huntington Beach City Council majority's insistence on banning books in our public libraries and appointing a "book review board" of untrained individuals to decide which books will be available. There have also been repeated calls for transparency about the majority's plans for this undesirable action. These calls from the public have been met with complete silence from the majority.

Nevertheless, H.B. Central Library librarians have been forced to move all teen and young adult books to a dingy room that is off-limits to anyone under 18, like the entire adult book stacks. And the teen section, where students used to gather to do homework and access books for their schoolwork has been eliminated. Teens can now only frequent the library's children's section; I suppose to sit on the rug with the toddlers for "story time." All library cards for residents under 18 are being canceled, and young people's parents must come to the library personally to establish their child's access level. Without an "all-access" card authorized by a parent, kids under 18 will only be able to look at books in the children's section. One wonders where books like dictionaries, encyclopedias and the Bible will be sequestered due to content that some people with extreme sensitivity think is too graphic for residents under 18.

Those of us who value the learning experiences that books provide must continue to speak out against this absurd and dangerous effort to dumb down our populace.

Diane Bentley
Huntington Beach

DISTRICT

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proved.

"From talking to a lot of students, I know we're all very worried and concerned," Sotelo said. "We're concerned about how big class sizes are going to be. Class size does determine how well a teacher can teach."

A petition circulated online has also garnered over 3,000 signatures from those opposed to the staffing cuts.

On March 7, trustees approved mass teacher layoffs by a 4-0 vote during a packed school board meeting. Since then, the original tally of layoffs has increased to include 119 teachers.

According to district officials, enrollment has declined by nearly 5,000 students since the 2011-12 academic school year, a drop that is expected to double within five years.

Currently, AUHSD serves 27,000 students across campuses in Anaheim, Buena Park, Cypress, La Palma and Stanton. According to Califor-



Eric Licas

ADELAIDA GIL helps her daughter, Camila Flores, hold up a sign that translates to "No teachers, no future."

nia Department of Education statistics, 70% of the student body is Latino.

Supt. Michael Matsuda addressed the layoffs in a video message released on Tuesday and likened declining enrollment to losing a "high school and a junior high school worth of students."

He dismissed what he called "misinformation" about the layoffs and claimed they don't unfairly target teachers.

"Contrary to such beliefs, we have worked tirelessly to prioritize the re-

duction of all staff members, including teachers," Matsuda said. "Last year, we made reductions across various departments, including counseling and classified areas in response to evolving needs and challenges."

Attendance, the district reported, is also down 6% from the 2020-21 school year, when students attended classes remotely during the pandemic.

The layoffs, which will become permanent on

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FESTIVAL

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idea of having everyone see themselves in the stories that we tell," Simmons said. "With 'Confection Purrfection,' the idea that when people feel included, it makes them happier. It makes everyone happier. We should all take that to heart, to make sure that everyone feels part of the story. And that laughter and fun is amazing. And that for the littlest chefs, that everybody has a superpower."

"And then for 'Cookin' with the Jammin' Chefs,' the last line in the show, I love so much: 'Go taste everything or try everything, because food, like life, is a celebration.' For me, that's what Food & Wine is, it's a celebration.



Jessica Peralta

A MICKEY-SHAPED Macaron made with Snickers at the 2024 Disney California Adventure Food & Wine Festival.

It's a celebration of the bounty of California. It's the celebration of art. In the gazebo, down by the beer garden, there's all the artwork that's been created for the festival. ... The mural is painted. So

for the first four days of the festival, you could watch this mural come to life with an actual artist [Marcella Swett]."

Jessica Peralta is a contributor to TimesOC.



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CHAMPIONS

DISTRICT

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May 15, are slated to reduce costs by \$18.4 million.

But district officials still anticipate reserve funds being in the red within three years and are eyeing a future bond measure to shore up its finances.

There is also some hope that California's bleak \$73-million budget deficit might improve in May when Gov. Gavin Newsom is able to make revisions.

Fearing overcrowded classrooms and a lower quality of education, students and parents spoke out against the cuts during the school board meeting.

"We understand that the district is facing declining enrollment and attendance," said Haley Nguyen, a junior at Oxford Academy in Cypress. "We understand that considering those statistics, the budget has to be dialed in. But we don't understand why this has to come off the backs of teachers alone."

The Anaheim Secondary Teachers Assn. estimated that the district's expected enrollment decline next year required only 45 layoffs, not 119.

Geoff Morganstern, president of the teachers' union, questioned why the district and its teachers bore the burden of mass layoffs alone.

"If we're heading off the cliff, then it seems very odd that we're just laying off teachers and not anybody else," he said.

It's not an attrition, Morganstern argued, that other school districts in Orange County are undertaking despite similar circumstances.

"All districts are facing reduced enrollment, all districts are suffering from absenteeism," he said. "I can't explain why our district leadership has recommended to the school board to cut 10% of our teachers when no other district around is doing it. It really comes down to budget priorities."

California Teachers Assn. staff is analyzing the district's budget

and will be preparing a formal response to it.

In the meantime, the district has argued that even with the layoffs implemented, classrooms sizes will still be under the negotiated maximum.

The current average high school class size is 39 students. For junior high schools, it's 37.

Morganstern said that the district has tried to leverage lower class sizes with cutting cost-of-living raises, a dead-end bargaining point for the union.

"We know that lower class sizes is best for all," Morganstern said. "It's not a gift for teachers. And with the complexity of school nowadays, with the needs coming out of the pandemic, it's really the only way for us to get everything done in a reasonable and effective way."

With the expected layoffs, the union president is doubtful that the district will be able to keep to the contract maximum on class sizes.

Trustees thanked students for raising their concerns at the

March 7 school board meeting but expressed reluctance ahead of the layoff vote.

"We do have an obligation to maintain a [fiscally] responsible budget and address the economic challenges ahead of us," said Trustee Jessica Guerrero.

Board President Annemarie Randle-Trejo told the teachers in the room that the layoffs had nothing to do with the hard work they bring into the classroom every day and everything to do with the district's financial future.

"If we do not face this, we do not have a school district," she said. "We can't run a school district on negative funds."

The school board was also set to discuss a 4.5% raise for Matsuda, his assistant superintendents and the district's lawyers, but the item was pulled before last week's meeting.

In his video message, Matsuda announced that he would forgo seeking the raise.

"While this gesture may seem small in the grand scheme of our



Eric Licas

ANAHEIM RESIDENT Gisele Aguilar speaks to Sofia Romero, a parent of students in the Anaheim Union High School District

district's operations," he said, "I hope it sends a meaningful message of solidarity and shared responsibility."

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SECRET

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entertain and amaze.

Science, art and "math-magic" converge in three classes led by lecturers working in front of a giant LED wall screen that guides lessons. Participants are called upon to work with instructors to figure out tricks and solve problems.

The show is produced by Cahoots of Northern Ireland — a Belfast production company whose past Segerstrom Center performances include "Secrets of Space," "Shh! We have a Plan" and "Egg" — and is funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the state agency Culture Ireland.

Created during the COVID-19 pandemic as a virtual performance, it was adapted for a live audience by artistic director Paul McEaney and is currently on the last leg of a U.S. tour that will wrap in Costa Mesa.

Gary Crossan, an associate producer for Cahoots NI, said the high level of audience participation in the



Gorgeous Photography

PLAYERS FROM Irish production company Cahoots NI present fun puzzles, problems and tricks for young audiences in "The University of Wonder and Imagination."

pandemic-era virtual shows was such a success, creators took great care to capture that magic in the live format.

"We get kids up on the stage to help us with the tricks, and it's all the audi-

ence suggesting what we should do next," Crossan said Thursday. "No two shows will ever be the same, because the audiences are never the same."

Ahead of the roughly one-hour program, which

on Sunday includes American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, attendees may enjoy an additional free hour of activities for kids in the Samueli Theater lobby. "Graduates" of the university will be sent

home with materials to reproduce tricks and activities at home.

Talena Mara, vice president of education for Segerstrom Center of the Arts, said the festivities are part of a Family Series that aims to increase access to theatrical experiences for Orange County families and provide engaging, enriching activities for parents to do together with children.

"It's our hope here at Segerstrom to put incredibly meaningful and important family programs out into the arts ether for people to see in their community," Mara said Thursday. "Sometimes we do stuff that's pure fun — we just want them to come play or dance — but more often than not, we're trying to address issues we're all going through."

Although next weekend's production of "The University of Wonder and Imagination" marks the conclusion of the show's American tour, it's not the last Orange County audiences will see of Cahoots NI.

Segerstrom officials have commissioned an exclusive

family production, a take on the brothers Grimm fairytale "The Bremen Town Musicians," that will premiere during the Costa Mesa complex's 2024-25 season and appear at the Belfast International Arts Festival next year.

"We love their work so much, we figured it would be a wonderful place for us to do our first big full-family theatrical commission," Mara said. "The exciting thing about it is that it's our show. It's going to open here first, then next year it will travel all over the country."

Entrance into next weekend's University of Wonder and Imagination requires no transcripts, applications or costly tuition (aside from the \$20 ticket price). There is but one prerequisite, according to Crossan.

"The whole point of it is about being excited and full of imagination, so come in with open minds and open hearts and be prepared to have a lot of fun," he said.

For more information, visit scfta.org/shows-events.

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