

Daily Pilot

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2025 // dailypilot.com



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

ALFONSO GOMEZ mixes a ricotta cheese filling for lasagna, at the Spaghetti Bender Italian restaurant in Newport Beach, which will soon close after 55 years in operation. "Al" Gomez has been the head chef at the restaurant for more than 40 years.

Spaghetti Bender serving final plates after 55 years

Regulars 'panicking' as every reservation slot at the Newport Beach fixture is booked through its last dinner service on Sunday.

BY ERIC LICAS

Regulars at the Spaghetti Benders came from all walks of life, including a former pro baseball player who often sought special treatment because of his celebrity status. But to owner Michael Hoskinson, the athlete's business was no more important than that of any other local who has come in to unwind after work, celebrate a birthday, propose to their fiancée or even just settle on a reliable, lovingly prepared plate of lasagna because they ran out of time to make dinner at home.

"I would never put up with his s—," Hoskinson said of the sports celebrity. "And he would come in and try to bluster his way in in front of all these people. And I go, 'You know the drill. Go sit down. Have a drink at



BRITTA PULLIAM, longtime director of operations, prepares for a busy night at the Spaghetti Bender.

the bar. I'll bring you a basket of bread." The restaurant on PCH has been serving Italian comfort food for over 55 years, and Hoskinson said it has been an honor to feed

and welcome people who make up the fabric of Newport Beach and surrounding com-

See *Serving*, page A2



Courtesy of Steve Engel

A WORK CREW removes branches and limbs from a eucalyptus tree that fell Wednesday on a vehicle at Huntington Beach's Central Park.

60-foot eucalyptus flattens vehicle at H.B.'s Central Park

BY SARA CARDINE

A massive eucalyptus tree came crashing down in Huntington Beach's Central Park Wednesday night, flattening a vehicle belonging to a city-contracted janitorial company but causing no apparent injuries, city officials confirmed.

Huntington Beach Deputy City Manager Jennifer Carey said the incident occurred at around 7 p.m. in a grove of trees along the

eastern edge of a Central Library parking lot, near a path used by the company to lock up restrooms at night.

The multiple-trunk eucalyptus, thought to be about 50 years old, was estimated to have been more than 60 feet tall and approximately 30 inches in diameter.

"No one was injured, but the tree did fall on the vehicle of one

See *Flattens*, page A2

PRO GOLF

Estancia alumnus Jake Knapp cards 59 at Cognizant Classic — a rare feat

BY ANDREW TURNER

Jake Knapp shot a 12-under-par round of 59 on Thursday in the Cognizant Classic at PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., producing just the 15th sub-60 round in a PGA Tour event in history.

A 2012 graduate of Estancia High who went on to play at UCLA, Knapp sunk a dozen birdies in the bogey-free effort. He finished one off the tour record of 58, accomplished by Jim

Furyk in the final round of the Travelers Championship in 2016.

There have been 14 players to shoot a sub-60 round. Furyk is the only one to have done it twice, having also carded a 59 at the BMW Championship in 2013.

Knapp drew an early tee time, and he got off to a roaring start with birdies on each of his first five holes, including a chip-in from the fairway on No. 2.

The round reached a crescendo when he sunk a 31-foot, 2-inch putt on the par-three No. 15

— starting the shot left of the hole and breaking to the right.

"I feel like I honestly had it going, like, well before then," Knapp told reporters after the round. "I didn't really make many putts today, if I'm being honest. I just hit it really close. I made a lot of, kind of, 8- to 12-footers but nothing of great length, and to shoot a score like that, usually you do."

"Yeah, on [No.] 15 I got a really

See *Knapp*, page A3



Fernando Llano | Associated Press

JAKE KNAPP, seen in the Mexico Open golf tournament in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, on Feb. 25, 2024, shot a 12-under-par 59 in the Cognizant Classic at PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., on Thursday.

H.B. teens join in library lawsuit

Effort led by multiple legal groups alleges the city's library policies violate Freedom to Read Act, state constitution.

BY MATT SZABO

Huntington Beach is being sued by three of its own residents, along with an Orange County-based community group, over its controversial library policies.

A lawsuit was filed in Orange County Superior Court on Wednesday by the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, the First Amendment Coalition, Community Legal Aid SoCal and Jenner & Block, LLP. It alleges that Huntington Beach is violating the 2024 California Freedom to Read Act, as well as the California Constitution, with policies including a parent/guardian children's book review board.

Alianza Translatinx, which describes itself as the first transgender-led organization by transgender people of color in Orange County, is one of the suit's plaintiffs. Two Huntington Beach teenagers are also listed as plaintiffs, along with Erin Spivey, a librarian.

"Libraries should reflect, not erase, and be spaces where young people can discover who they are," said Khloe Rios-Wyatt, founding member and chief executive officer of Alianza Translatinx, in a statement. "Huntington Beach officials, driven by fear of challenging ideas, are trying to erase stories and identities — but we refuse to be erased."

In June 2023, the Huntington Beach City Council first brought forward the idea of making books deemed obscene and/or pornographic inaccessible to children. It's long been a passion project of Councilwoman Gracey Van Der Mark, who introduced the item, and Resolution No. 2023-41 was passed by a split 4-3 council vote.

"Parents, check these books out," Van Der Mark said at the time. "If this is what you want for your kids, go for it, but a lot of parents don't know this material

See *Library*, page A2

ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Don Leach

SAGE HILL BOYS' BASKETBALL EKES OUT ANOTHER CLOSE GAME IN SEMIFINALS OVER SAN GABRIEL ACADEMY A3

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Sage Hill ekes out another close game in semifinals

BY ANDREW TURNER

Sage Hill's run to a second CIF Southern Section boys' basketball final in three seasons has been defined by determination and grit.

It took multiple clutch shots with the clock running down to send Sage Hill to the semifinals, and in an equally dramatic — and possibly more poetic — scene on Saturday, the Lightning ran out the final 19 seconds on defense without surrendering a shot.

All that is to say that Sage Hill, a 45-43 winner over San Gabriel Academy in a semifinal at home over the weekend, has proven its mettle in close games.

Sage Hill (18-9) now faces its CIF finals hurdle, a stage it has been on twice and is still looking for the first title in program history. The Lightning will take on Palmdale Knight (25-5) in the Division 3AA championship game on Saturday, March 1 at 8 p.m. at Edison High.

"I think it's just really grit and how bad everybody wants it," said Jackson Cryst, a senior center who had 14 points, 12 rebounds and four blocked shots. "At the end of the regular season, we went through a lot of tough losses. I think that bad taste in our mouth really led all the boys to just want it really bad."

"Knowing in those moments, in those tough losses, what it really takes, what made us lose, and then why we're winning now. That feeling, that feels



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

SAGE HILL'S Tre Cradle (23), seen against Tustin on Tuesday, had 10 points and two blocked shots against San Gabriel Academy on Saturday.

good, and even though in that moment you might not want to take that extra two steps that you have to get that shot, get that rebound, make that cut, our coaches told us, and we've learned through the playoffs that it's worth it — every time."

Knight, the Golden League champion, has excelled in close games, too. The Hawks have won their last three games — against Hesperia, Los Angeles Price and Pasadena Maranatha — by a combined six points.

Sage Hill's story is similar, all four of its playoff wins being decided by six points or less. The Lightning have fully committed to the defensive end of the floor, av-

eraging just 40 points against in the postseason.

Cryst, who is 6-foot-10 and led Sage Hill to a CIF title in volleyball as a junior, has committed to Long Beach State for that sport. His ability to defend without fouling has been a crucial piece of the puzzle.

"We take advantage of the things a lot of people don't see," Sage Hill coach D'Cean Bryant said. "For him defensively, we tell him to 'stay down, stay down, stay down,' and then he goes up, we crack down. ... That just comes from volleyball, right? He's got to time that jump, he's got to wait, he's got to see the block."

Cryst relished the oppor-

tunity to have a true battle in the paint with San Gabriel Academy sophomore Mahamadou Diop, a 6-foot-11 center who led the Eagles with 14 points, 10 rebounds and two blocks.

"I prefer this to a game where I'm going to be one-against-three, where I'm getting triple-[teamed], and when I'm not really getting to guard a true big," Diop said. "It was fun to bang down low, be able to get after it. He's a great player. He's really strong, really big, so I think we look forward to moments like this, where it could be challenging."

Outside of a game-tying basket in the closing seconds of regulation in the quarterfinals, sophomore

guard Tre Cradle largely struggled due to foul trouble against Tustin.

Cradle bounced back with 10 points, including a second-half dunk, in the semifinals. He added two blocks, one of which came against Diop to end the first half.

"I didn't score a whole lot," said Cradle, reflecting on the quarterfinal. "Our coach always says, 'You always have the right time to make plays,' whether it's a rebound, a game-tying bucket, a steal, whatever it is. You're going to have your moment. It's just a matter of time."

Sage Hill forged another fourth-quarter comeback, rallying from a 39-35 deficit and surrendering just one basket — a three-pointer by Marquise Humphreys — in the final four minutes.

James Karahalios added 10 points for the Lightning, and Carson Ellis chipped in with two steals. Cryst had the go-ahead score on a driving layup with just over a minute to go, then a key block on Diop on the next defensive possession.

When teams have had the Lightning down late, it hasn't phased them. Cryst believes preparation — both in practice and on the schedule — has contributed heavily to success.

"Our practices right now, they're not too difficult, because we built the capacity," Cryst said. "Throughout the whole season, we're building, we're building, we're building because you don't want to be the best in the beginning of the season. You want to be the best

now — in playoffs, in the championship.

"We've built the capacity to play these gritty games, these dirty games, and know what we have to do. That's why we don't want a cupcake schedule. We don't want easy games in the beginning of the year — blowouts. We want to build the capacity to play in games like this."

Also in the CIF Southern Section boys' basketball playoffs:

Pacifica Christian Orange County 84, Corona Centennial 80 (2OT): EJ Spillman had 33 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists to lead the visiting Tritons on Friday in a Division 2AA semifinal game.

Hudson Reynolds added 19 points and 10 rebounds for Pacifica Christian (23-7), which will face Fairmont Prep (21-9) in the championship game on Saturday at 1 p.m. at Toyota Arena in Ontario.

The Tritons and Huskies split the San Joaquin League title in the regular season.

Michael Noel scored 11 points for Pacifica Christian. Logan Stewart added eight points and 10 rebounds.

Pacifica Christian will be competing in its third CIF final, looking for its first section title. The Tritons previously met Fairmont in the Division 4AA final in 2019, a game the Huskies took by a score of 52-49 at Godinez High.

andrew.turner@latimes.com
Twitter: @AndrewTurnerTCN

KNAPP

Continued from page A1

good read off Tom [Hoge]. He was hitting from 8 feet left of me, similar length. I got to watch his go in dead center, so it gave me somewhat of an idea of the

pace and all that. Halfway, I knew it was on a pretty good line. It didn't have a ton of movement, but yeah, just kind of cozied right in there."

Knapp, whose lone win on tour came at the Mexico Open last February, also strung together two runs

of three consecutive birdies — from Nos. 9-11 and from Nos. 13-15. He tapped in for birdie on the final hole after getting a look at the tour record with an 18-foot, 8-inch eagle putt that pulled up short of the hole. He also lamented a 14-foot putt that lipped

out and left him with par at No. 17.

Bob Knapp, Jake's father, said the family is always tuned in when his son is competing. They began tracking the round online, and as Jake ascended the leaderboard, Bob said "they got a camera on

him," and they were able to see nearly every shot.

"Unless I'm having an emergency appendectomy or open-heart surgery, we're following," Bob said when reached for comment on Thursday. "... We were definitely watching. Obviously, we're at home

here in Costa Mesa, not in Florida, but if I had ruby slippers, I'd be clicking them and trying to be there right now. We're just very happy for him. It's a great day."

andrew.turner@latimes.com
Twitter: @AndrewTurnerTCN

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

- ACROSS**
 1 "Not!"
 6 Participate in a parade
 11 "I've got it!"
 14 Chicago airport
 15 Nebraska city
 16 _ artist (scammer)
 17 Ten Commandments mount
 18 Wildly popular online
 19 Portable bed
 20 Gravity-powered flying vehicle: 2 wds.
 22 Takes a chair
 23 Adhesive
 24 Gravity-powered winter vehicle
 26 Extremely
 29 "No way!": 2 wds.
 32 Best possible
 35 Bitter beer
 36 "Close _ cigar": 2 wds.
 37 Japanese comic book
 38 Florida city
 40 Stir
 41 Go into
 42 Fishing rods
 43 Solemn acts
 45 Director Lee
 46 Dictation-taking pro
 47 Tree liquids
 48 Operatic voice
 49 Performed vocally
 51 Tach numbers: Abbr.
 53 Goes bad
 55 Not completed
 61 Alias letters: Abbr.
 62 Ad gimmick: 2 wds.
 63 Tie in tennis
 64 Skin art, for short

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13
14						15							16	
17						18							19	
20					21							22		
			23					24	25					
26	27	28			29	30	31		32			33	34	
35				36					37					
38			39			40			41					
42						43			44			45		
46						47						48		
		49			50			51		52				
53	54				55	56	57					58	59	60
61				62					63					
64					65							66		
67					68							69		

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.

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

For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A2.

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 65 Most desired guests | 3 Author Martel |
| 66 A noble gas | 4 Rugged, as terrain |
| 67 Look at | 5 Actress Katherine |
| 68 Pants accessories | 6 Film idols: 2 wds. |
| 69 Full of rocks | 7 Surrounded by |
| | 8 Hard to find |
| | 9 Burns slightly |
| | 10 "2001" computer |
- Tribune Media Services

South Coast Repertory

ADDED PERFORMANCE
This Sunday at 7 p.m.

NOW - MAR. 16, 2025

JOYFUL, MOVING & TRIUMPHANT

YOU ARE GORDIALLY INVITED TO THE END OF THE WORLD!

By Keiko Green
 Directed by Zi Alikhhan

APR. 5 - MAY 3, 2025

Take your seat for a comic, irreverent celebration of life! Since Greg's terminal diagnosis, he's felt a deep connection to the Earth—and to save himself, he'll need to save the planet. Viv desperately wants to savor every last minute with her husband. Meanwhile M, our emcee, searches desperately to find meaning in the chaos of their final year with Dad. A heartfelt family story and joyful theatrical event, as magical as the world itself. Ages 16+

HONORARY PRODUCERS
 Julia Voce
 Nickie & Mickey Williams

CORPORATE HONORARY PRODUCER

 HASKELLWHITE
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS | BUSINESS ADVISORS

FOR THE BEST SEATS, BUY NOW!

(714)708-5555
SCR.org

