

# Daily Pilot

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024 // dailypilot.com

## Missing man's body found

Scott Breneman, who on Jan. 7 left a hospital in only a gown and scrub pants, was found dead near Talbert Park.

BY LILLY NGUYEN

A Newport Beach man who went missing earlier this month was found dead earlier this week, an advocate for his family said Thursday.

The body of 41-year-old Scott Breneman was found near the river jetties on the Huntington Beach side of Talbert Park. Family members were informed by the Newport Beach Police Department on Thursday and an update was swiftly issued by Cal Advocates for the Missing, the nonprofit that was helping search for Breneman since he disappeared on Jan. 7 after bolting from Huntington Beach Hospital.

The cause of Breneman's death has not been made public. The Newport Beach Police Department did not respond to requests for comment about the investigation.

Breneman was captain and owner of West Caught Fish Co. in Newport Beach. He lived in Dover Shores with his wife and children.

Breneman's mother, Lisa, told the Daily Pilot last week that Breneman had been acting irrationally and the family agreed to call Newport Beach's mobile crisis assessment team. He was transported to the hospital, where Breneman saw a nurse drawing a sedative into a syringe and became agitated, telling his mother, "Mom, I'm not going to be sedated. I'm going to run."

He fled barefoot, wearing only his hospital gown and beige scrub pants. His family was uncertain as to whether or not he would have remained in Huntington Beach, returned to his native Newport Beach or gone elsewhere.

A missing person report was filed with the Huntington Beach Police Department, but the investigation was later put under the jurisdiction of the Newport Beach Police Department because Breneman had been transported by Newport's mobile crisis assessment team and the NBPD had already been involved prior to his disappearance, according to

See **Found**, page A3



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**YARIB DHEMING** of the Orange County Department of Education's Inside the Outdoors program, left, shares a harmless gopher snake with youngsters during the Environmental Science Civic Engagement Showcase at Golden View Elementary school farm on Friday afternoon.

## Life on the farm: H.B. school hosts environmental showcase

BY MATT SZABO



**STUDENTS FROM** Kindra Chen's fifth-grade class show their Human Environmental Impact poster during the Environmental Science Civic Engagement Showcase.

The farm at Golden View Elementary School in Huntington Beach is certainly unique.

Julie Neubert has been teaching at the Ocean View School District campus for 27 years, and that's long enough for her to have substitute teachers who were formerly her students.

When they come back, there's a common refrain.

"They're always like, 'Do I get to go to the farm?'" Neubert said. "It's a multigenerational, really special experience."

Golden View hosted an Environmental Science Civic Engagement Showcase on Friday afternoon, giving families a chance to check out students' projects displayed in their classrooms while also having fun on the 2.5-acre farm on campus.

Different environmental partners such as the Orange County Water District, Pacific Marine Mammal Center, Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy and more were on hand to share knowledge and engage with the families.

See **School**, page A2

## Boat wrecks against rocks after coming aground in Laguna

BY ANDREW TURNER

A boat that made landfall at Victoria Beach in Laguna Beach on Thursday night was rendered not fit to sail after a rocky end to its voyage, authorities said.

Public safety officials responded to a call at 8:10 p.m. for a vessel that had come aground at the northern end of Victoria Beach.

"We were in unified command with the police department and the fire department, just assuring that there was nobody on board,"

Marine Safety Captain Kai Bond said. "After that, we decided to close the beach because the vessel went from a vessel that was potentially seaworthy to one that wasn't. ... It was on the rocks, so every wave that moved the boat damaged the boat more."

Additional agencies that responded to the incident included the Coast Guard, the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol, the California Department of Fish

See **Boat**, page A4



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

**NEWPORT BEACH** surgeon Grant Robicheaux and his girlfriend, Cerissa Riley, arrive at the Harbor Justice Center for a hearing to drop charges in the case against them on Feb. 7, 2020. They have filed a claim against the county for "false and misleading statements" made against them.

## Newport Beach doctor, girlfriend file claim against county for fizzled case

BY CITY NEWS SERVICE

A one-time Newport Beach hand surgeon and his girlfriend have filed a claim, which was publicly released Friday, against Orange County stemming from their prosecution in a case that alleged they drugged and sexually assaulted multiple women,

but ultimately fizzled into a guilty plea by the doctor on gun and drug charges and no convictions for his partner.

Dr. Grant Robicheaux, 43, and Cerissa Riley, 36, filed a claim against the county on Dec. 19. A claim is a necessary precursor to a lawsuit against a governmental agency unless the claim is settled

before litigation is filed.

The claim obtained through a public records act request from City News Service on Friday accused Orange County prosecutors of making "false and misleading statements" about the case filed against the two.

See **Doctor**, page A4



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**LIFEGUARDS WALK** along the Lagunita seawall near where a boat crashed. No one was on the vessel at the time of the incident.

# SCHOOL

Continued from page A1

Golden View Principal Lori Florgan said this was the first time Golden View has hosted an event of this scale. She's been working the last couple of years on those community partnerships.

Golden View has long integrated environmental science into its curriculum, but this year it started focusing on civic engagement as well.

Each student at the school, from transitional kindergarten to fifth grade, has a civic engagement project.

"Every grade level is doing something a little different that's all based around their science standards and the environmental principles and concepts," Florgan said. "They're engaged in the community, to try to get them on board with ways that they can do their part outside of school, at home and out in the community."

Neubert, who teaches both fourth and fifth grade, said her fourth-graders have learned about renewable resources and renewable energy types like solar energy, wind energy and hydropower. As part of the civic engagement element of the program they created slideshows and posters to encourage the community to use solar, wind or water energy.

The fifth-graders learned about the earth's different spheres — the atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere and geosphere. They chose one to study, looking at the positive and negative impacts that humans have on the different spheres while also creating models of drought-resident gardens to show how the different spheres interact together.

They also created posters and slideshows to encourage the community to have a positive impact on a certain sphere.

"We have taken our environmental science program to the next level by



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**FAMILIES GET** a closer look at a pair of turkeys during the Environmental Science Civic Engagement Showcase at Golden View Elementary school farm on Friday.

adding this civic engagement piece," Neubert said. "It's not just that the kids are learning about it, but also trying to teach the community about ways that they can be involved in environmentally sound practices."

The farm has been enhanced over the years. Some recent improvements include a leadership course that was added, very walkable paths as well as a higher wall to keep out animals like coyotes, OVSD Assistant Supt. Keith Farrow said.

"The trustees keep investing in it," he said.

Elizabeth Bray enjoyed the farm Friday as she visited with her two nieces. Zoey Timmons is a fourth-grade special needs student at Golden View, and her younger sister Riley is a TK student.

Zoey said her favorite part of the farm is the pigs, though she is part of a group that works with the chickens.

Bray is an alumna of Golden View herself.

"I know there's always shock when I say my nieces went to a school, and I went to a school, that has a farm," Bray said. "This is not a hands-on experience that everyone gets. We live in Huntington Beach. A lot of people would be like, 'I've never seen a goat.' It's just a wild, nice way to connect with the environment and get real-world [experience]."

Neubert, for one, was pleased with that outcome. "We felt very grateful for that decision because we feel like this is such an important and timely topic that we are instilling in our kids from TK on," she said. "Part of our mission is to create these stewards for the environment, so we're so happy that this program gets to continue on and we get to reach all of these kids and families. And they get to reach out to the community, to spread the word even further."

"It helps them care about it more. Not that they wouldn't care, but when it's tangible, there's more of a connect. It's nice to be like, 'Hey, this is part of the environment. If we don't take care of it, this won't be here.'"

This school year, TK and third-grade students across the Ocean View district take field trips to the farm at Golden View each Wednesday, Florgan said. The hope is to broaden that next school year to more grades, as well as possibly others outside the school district.

Golden View was one of three elementary schools the district was considering consolidating next year due to continued declining enrollments, but the Board of Trustees voted unanimously in November to keep it open.

Neubert, for one, was pleased with that outcome.

"We felt very grateful for that decision because we feel like this is such an important and timely topic that we are instilling in our kids from TK on," she said. "Part of our mission is to create these stewards for the environment, so we're so happy that this program gets to continue on and we get to reach all of these kids and families. And they get to reach out to the community, to spread the word even further."

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# THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

**ACROSS**  
 1 Opera hero, often 6 Assistance  
 10 Makes a wager  
 14 Movie section  
 15 Adidas competitor  
 16 Lit sign in a hallway  
 17 Italian fashion house  
 18 Team that plays home games in Queens  
 19 Peru's capital  
 20 Reality show with Immunity Idols  
 22 Vendor  
 24 Faucet problem  
 25 Frenzied way to go  
 26 Angry  
 29 Ricky Martin's boy band  
 31 In tow  
 34 "The \_ & Stimp Show"  
 35 Luxurious Russian home  
 40 Sacred book of Judaism  
 41 Mean: Abbr.  
 42 Mistake  
 43 Musical speed  
 44 Casual shirt  
 45 Mouthwash brand  
 46 Kept for later  
 49 Fairy-tale sleep disturbance  
 50 First-inning pitcher  
 54 Shelter for doves  
 57 Mother \_ (Nobel Peace Prize winner)  
 58 Place to get a drink when traveling  
 62 Ireland, poetically  
 63 Sudsy drink  
 65 Shoulder wrap  
 66 Discreet "hey, over here!"  
 67 Like some cheese and wine  
 68 Rich cake  
 69 Catches sight of  
 70 Pantheon members  
 71 Move furtively

# 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](http://sudoku.org.uk).

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

**For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A3.**

2 Raw linen color  
 3 Close at hand  
 4 How movies can be purchased  
 5 Run again  
 6 Amateur radio enthusiast  
 7 "Have I \_ told you..."  
 8 Ignited

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						70				71				

23 Slowly eats away  
 25 Tethers for adventurous jumpers  
 26 Actor Damon  
 27 Skincare ingredient  
 28 College student's home, for short  
 30 At no time  
 32 Siesta  
 33 "A Christmas Carol" visitors  
 36 Circle section  
 37 Harvest product  
 38 Have aspirations  
 39 Planar measurement  
 47 Orange Pekoe pouch  
 48 Part of a lowercase i  
 50 Parts of a process  
 51 Using few words  
 52 Come up  
 53 Has a lease  
 55 Tries out  
 56 Rocker Sir \_ John  
 58 Pay attention to  
 59 Person no one wants to listen to  
 60 \_ Vista  
 61 Smell awful  
 64 Sense of self

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# Casual Contemporary

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THE CROWD | B.W. COOK

Balboa Island Museum undertakes ambitious campaign

The Balboa Island Museum enters its second decade serving both the local and visiting community with unique exhibits and events focused on the nautical and marine history of the California Riviera.



Named by voters as the best museum in Orange County by Los Angeles Times readers

for the past several years, the museum is free to the public financed via private individual and corporate donations and public/civic support.

In the hands of founder Shirley Pepys working with her daughter, Tiffany Pepys Hoey, executive director and curator, the museum enters 2024 with great need.

With the support of a board of directors led by John Conners, an executive with Goldman Sachs, and a roster of community leaders, the team launches a multiyear campaign to support the museum's daily existence in conjunction with an ambitious effort to raise significant funding to purchase the museum property at 210 Marine Avenue on Balboa Island.

The community at large has rallied in support. "Our museum members and donors love this gallery," Pepys said recently at the annual museum fundraiser billed "Denim & Diamonds" held at the Fun Zone with support from the David Pyle family, museum donors and advocates.



SCOUTS ARE regular visitors to Balboa Island Museum, which is entering its second decade serving the community.

is a community treasure," she continued. "Programs year-round benefit students from preschool through college. We support our local veterans with events and ceremonies. The Galleries, of which there are many, offer both permanent and moving exhibits on the history, pioneers and culture of the marine legacy of Newport Beach and Orange County over-all."

Pepys noted that civic leaders have helped keep the facility open. "Supervisor Katrina Foley made a generous grant to the museum this year as well as grants from the Newport Beach City Council over many years," Pepys said. "As the only 501c3 local Newport museum operating solely on donations, we seek more government support to preserve and protect this legacy for Newport and for future generations."

been provided for the museum's operating expenses by Julia and George Argyros and recently in the past two years by their daughter, Lisa Argyros, honoring her mother's ongoing love for the museum's work with families in the community. Over the holidays Julia Argyros visited the museum with friends Wendy Hales and Neil Kite to check out the latest exhibits.

"It was wonderful to see Julia," commented executive director Tiffany Pepys Hoey. "We gave her the royal tour displaying all the current gallery exhibits."

"December 2024 was a milestone month," added Hoey. "We welcomed over 8,000 visitors to the museum and raised significant monthly income from membership, donations and gift shop sales. We need December's [fundraising] success every month of the year!"



Photos by Tiffany Pepys Hoey

LOCAL STUDENTS attend an educational seminar at Balboa Island Museum.

Additional major ongoing support comes from passionate donors including Paula Castanon, Richard Castanon, Don and Gwen Abrams, Jack and Jean Norhrup, and John Scudder, grandson of the late woman entrepreneur and potato chip mogul Laura Scudder. John Scudder is set to address the community at the museum's monthly guest lecture series honoring women of accomplishment in coming months.

Also front and center for the museum are James Quandt, Barbara Abbott, Keith Curry, Cynthia Shafer, David Beek, Dennis Bress, Lorraine Leavitt, Jeff Gehl, John and Diane Conners, John V and Kingsley Croul, mega-sports agent Jeff Morad, Stan and Renee Lowe, Pepys' family mem-

bers very involved in day-to-day operations and future development, Burton and Linda Young, Ron Salisbury, Sue Sibley and Stuart Winston of Lugano Diamonds, to name only a few.

On the slate of events open to the community coming up this quarter is a historic overview exhibit of the Irvine Ranch featured in the main gallery in January. On Thursday, the California Associates, a legendary Southern California philanthropic organization, toured the museum, addressed by local leaders Seymour Beek and John Valley, followed by a luncheon event across the street at Wilma's Patio.

Future events include Irvine Ranch historian Mike Stockstill on Feb. 29; Cabrillo Points Academy

will visit on March 6 and John Scudder will speak on March 28. A Vietnam Vets Pinning Ceremony takes place on March 29.

"We realize the enormity of our building fund goal this year, but we also believe it is possible to accomplish. Donors large and small are important. Come visit us and share in the spirit and the goal," said Pepys.

Indeed, spirit and passion can turn into building funds. To learn more about Balboa Island Museum and its many events and membership opportunities, visit balboaislandmuseum.org or call Tiffany Pepys Hoey at (949) 675-3952.

B.W. COOK is editor of the Bay Window, the official publication of the Balboa Bay Club in Newport Beach.

FOUND

Continued from page A1

Huntington Beach spokeswoman Jennifer Carey.

Cal Advocates for the Missing founder Brenda Condon said Friday the search for Breneman stretched as far north as Sunset Beach and as far south as San Clemente and Dana Point. Despite the efforts of volunteers and tips from the public as to his possible whereabouts, he could not be found.

"We had so many community members that came out to search for him on a daily basis," said Condon. "We had people out there

day and night looking for him, printing fliers, putting them up, knocking on doors, talking to restaurant owners and asking these businesses if they could see the tapes. It was an amazing outpouring from the community of support for Lisa and Scott's family."

Lisa Breneman, on Friday, declined to comment but conveyed that she wanted to express her deep gratitude for those who showed up on a daily basis to help her search for her son and who shared information about his missing status on social media.

In the comments on the post for Cal Advocates for the Missing that announced

he had been found dead, many offered their condolences while others shared their own stories of missing family members.

On Friday, a person who

saw Breneman's last Instagram post from Dec. 31 left a comment that reads: "You will be missed Scott. I hope you're with your dad, fishing in heaven! You were a

great man and one of the hardest working people I ever met. RIP brother."

lilly.nguyen@latimes.com Twitter: @lilibirds

Advertisement for Mark's Painting & Handyman Service, 714-222-3055, Wood Restoration Specialist.

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

Crossword puzzle grid with answers filled in.

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers filled in.

MARKETPLACE

Marketplace section containing various notices and advertisements, including City of Newport Beach public notices and classified ads.

## DOCTOR

Continued from page A1

Robicheaux pleaded guilty Nov. 29 to a felony gun possession charge and a misdemeanor drug count and was placed on one year of probation for the misdemeanor, which can later be dismissed if he successfully completes probation.

Robicheaux was sentenced to two years probation for the felony, which can be reduced to a misdemeanor after 16 months of successful probation and ultimately can be expunged from his record.

The resolution followed a hearing in October in which O.C. Superior Court Judge Michael Leversen agreed to dismiss felony charges of poisoning and sale of phenylhydrazine against Robicheaux and Riley.

That left no charges remaining against Riley, but Robicheaux still at that time faced a felony charge of possession of an assault weapon and four misdemeanor counts of possession of a controlled substance, including GHB, more commonly known as

the date-rape drug. As part of the plea deal, those remaining counts, including the GHB charge, were dismissed.

Leversen ordered Robicheaux to perform 32 hours of community service and take 16 hours of drug education classes.

The case began five years ago in the heat of a reelection bid by then-Dist. Atty. Tony Rackauckas, who held a widely covered news conference to announce the charges accusing Robicheaux and Riley of targeting women in bars and other settings, drugging them and sexually assaulting them.

The case quickly became a target of then-DA candidate Todd Spitzer, who criticized Rackauckas' handling of the case and questioned why Rackauckas did not move faster to file it — suggesting the incumbent was using the matter for campaign publicity.

After he was elected, Spitzer called for an internal review of the case, assigned two new prosecutors to the matter and then moved to dismiss all of the charges. That drew protests

from several of the alleged victims and an Orange County Superior Court judge refused to toss the case.

Spitzer's office was eventually recused from the case and the Attorney General's Office took over.

Robicheaux initially faced charges involving five alleged victims and Riley three alleged victims, but a prior Orange County Superior Court judge granted a motion from prosecutors to reduce the charges. There were initially a total of 13 accusers, some of whom prosecutors had planned to use as witnesses to show a pattern of behavior at trial.

Attorney Thomas Ferlauto said in the claim for the couple that "the salacious allegations against [the two] were widely publicized by the county through its agents. False and misleading statements were made by D.A. Rackauckas at a press conference on Sept. 18, 2018, and Oct. 17, 2018, and numerous other false and misleading statements were made to the media by both DA Rackauckas and [his chief of staff Susan Kangl leading up to the Or-

ange County district attorney election held on Nov. 6, 2018."

Ferlauto said there were statements that video evidence was available from one of the accusers and other evidence that could point to assaults of as many as a thousand women in addition to DNA evidence.

"None of that was true," Ferlauto said, adding it led to a "media feeding frenzy in which [they were] characterized throughout the world as voracious [rapists] with as many as a thousand victims."

Ferlauto noted that Spitzer assigned a team of prosecutors to reexamine the case and that after three months they "concluded that there was not a single video or photo showing an unconscious or incapacitated woman being sexually assaulted."

Ferlauto also alleged that the team concluded that "District Attorney Investigator Jennifer Kearns ... failed to mention key, exculpatory details in her reports, engaged in conclusory and suggestive interview techniques and provided an unsolicited search warrant to

the Newport Beach Police Department that overstated the evidentiary conclusions, usurped the Newport Beach Police Department as lead investigator, admitted to the de novo review team that each accuser's case was problematic, made statements to OCDA management that she had specific photos or videos of unconscious women being sexually assaulted when the review of the evidence by the de novo review team showed the precise opposite and persuaded women to identify as victims when they did not initially believe they had been victimized."

Spitzer and his office decided they did not have enough evidence to go forward and sought to dismiss the case, but an Orange County Superior Court judge denied the motion.

Ferlauto also claimed that prosecutors for the Attorney General's Office also concluded that it was "plagued with evidentiary problems and moved to dismiss many of the charges."

Ferlauto said the case was brought against his clients for political reasons to

boost Rackauckas' reelection chances.

Prior to the publicity, Robicheaux "had an extremely successful and profitable medical practice," Ferlauto said. "He has incurred unnecessary attorney fees. He has suffered severe emotional distress, damage to reputation, invasion of privacy, false light publicity, abusive process and interference with business relations and prospective economic advantage."

Riley could not pursue her career in education and dance as a result of the publicity and lost pay at a transportation company when she was demoted.

"She has suffered severe emotional distress, damage to reputation, invasion of privacy, false light publicity, abusive process, and interference with business relations and prospective economic advantage."

The claim names Rackauckas, Kang, Senior Deputy Dist. Atty. Jennifer Walker, former Deputy Dist. Atty. Mike Carroll and Kearns.

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## Daily Pilot

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## BOAT

Continued from page A1

and Wildlife, and a tow boat service.

Victoria Beach remained closed Friday, as crews worked to clean up the debris from the compromised vessel.

Bond ruled out the possibility of maritime smuggling activity. Officials have been in contact with the owner of the boat, a 30-foot cabin cruiser. It was unoccupied upon its arrival. Authorities searching the boat found a kayak and a surfboard on board, Bond said.

"This is an unoccupied boat that was detached from its anchor some time ago," Bond said. "We're still trying to identify which location it came from exactly. The name on the back had it out of Belmont Shore, which is in Long Beach, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it came out of Long Beach. Boats can go anywhere."

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Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**DEBRIS IS PILED UP** near the Laguna seawall on Friday, near where a boat ran aground Thursday night in Laguna Beach.

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### Los Angeles Times TimesOC



California State Parks seasonal lifeguard Sierra Fockler discovered a 14-inch Pacific football fish around 2:30 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 13, near the lifeguard station located at Crystal Cove State Park in Orange County. It's the second such case of the fish washing ashore over the last three years. (Courtesy of California State Parks)

Good morning. It's Wednesday, Oct. 25. I'm Carol Cormaci, bringing you this week's [TimesOC newsletter](#) with a look at the latest local news and events.

Watch where you're stepping on O.C.'s famed sands, because you may encounter a rare specimen of marine life. One, in fact, that has very sharp teeth.

That's what happened on a recent afternoon to lifeguard Sierra Fockler, who found a spooky-looking black angler fish, specifically a Pacific football fish, while she was walking near the lifeguard headquarters building on Moro Beach, located within Crystal Cove State Park.