



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**VOLUNTEER STEVE FISCHEL** loads his car up with tote bags with Meals on Wheels at Oasis Senior Center in Newport Beach.

## Meals on Wheels seeks volunteers in Newport



**TERRY IVINS** from Meals on Wheels loads a freezer and does a quality check on packages at the Oasis Senior Center in Newport Beach.

BY MATT SZABO

Meals on Wheels Orange County began servicing Newport Beach over the last few months.

The nonprofit offers meal delivery and lunch café programs for senior citizens in the area, but the mission goes beyond that, Meals on Wheels Orange County vice president of advancement Darla Olson said.

According to the National Institute on Aging, the health risks of prolonged isolation are the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

"This population is so grateful, and will go out of their way to tell you how much this means to them, that knock on the door, that check-in, that conversation," Olson said. "We know that it's not

just the nutritious meal they're receiving, it's that socialization that is just as equally important."

Meals on Wheels Orange County, which has already established programs in Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach, Seal Beach and Fountain Valley, is seeking more volunteers to deliver meals for the Newport Beach program run out of Oasis Senior Center in Corona del Mar.

Olson said there are 47 volunteers at the site, but Meals on Wheels needs an additional 10 volunteers per week. The program is funded in part through a grant from the California Department of Aging and administered by the Orange County Office on Aging.

See *Meals*, page A2

## Potential shelter site loses favor in Irvine

At cost of \$1M, council members back away from property sale that could have led to city's first homeless shelter.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

With a minute to spare, the Irvine City Council terminated the purchase of two properties that city officials eyed two weeks ago as a potential homeless bridge shelter during a special meeting held on Election Day.

By voting to shred the deal moments before it closed, the city forfeited a \$1 million deposit towards the acquisition of the buildings in the Irvine Business Complex along Armstrong Avenue.

"I am not very happy with the process that has brought us to today," said Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan, who called for Tuesday's special meeting. "What I really want to do is make sure that the location, the cost of the location, and everything else that goes with it is openly discussed so we're all on the same page moving forward."

Irvine council members debated the property sale during the Oct. 22 meeting and voted 4-1 to acquire and update the buildings for \$20 million. Dubbed "the Sanctuary," the pair of buildings served as a potential site for a bridge shelter with integrated services for homeless and at-risk people.

According to this year's Orange County Point in Time homeless count, 50 people are living on the streets of Irvine. Other statistics show that 124 people are receiving homeless services and 300 Irvine Unified School District students are homeless.

As the second most populous city in Orange County, Irvine currently has no shelter sites of any kind. City staffers considered the

See *Irvine*, page A4

## Planned Veterans Day events to salute military personnel in O.C.

BY SARA CARDINE

Although most civic operations will cease Monday in observance of federally recognized Veterans Day, many communities in and around coastal Orange County will honor U.S. servicemen and women in special events planned for the holiday.

Members of American Legion Newport Harbor Post 291, for example, will host a daylong celebration at the organization's headquarters — located near Newport Beach's Veterans Memorial Park on Balboa Peninsula, at 215 15th St. — which opens to the public at 10 a.m.

The ceremony will begin with a "call to order" at 10:50 a.m., followed by remarks from two guest speakers, former U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Terry Dunne, who served in Vietnam and is a five-time Purple Heart recipient, as well as active duty Marine Col.



American Legion Newport Harbor Post 291

**AMERICAN LEGION** Newport Harbor Post 291, founded in 1924, honors veterans each year in a ceremony on Balboa Peninsula.

Carlos Jackson.

From there activities will move outside, where an honor guard presentation will be followed by a ceremonial three-volley rifle salute and the playing of "Taps," a bugle call played at military fu-

nerals, to honor veterans lost but not forgotten.

The day continues with a two-entree barbecue dinner, available for \$19.99 from 11:30 a.m. to 6

See *Veterans*, page A2

### ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Courtesy of Court Appointed Special Advocates of Orange County

**CASA TOY DRIVE AT FASHION ISLAND BRINGS MUCH NEEDED WARMTH TO CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE** PAGE A4

**DISNEY-BACKED CANDIDATES TAKE BIG LEADS IN ANAHEIM CITY COUNCIL RACES** PAGE A2

**APODACA: COLLEGE ADMISSIONS REMAIN UNFAIR TO MANY DESERVING APPLICANTS** PAGE A6

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Christopher Reynolds | Los Angeles Times

**SAN CLEMENTE PIER'S** beach has been replenished with sand. Residents voted on a measure seeking to fund future beach projects.

## Sales tax ballot measure for beach sand is falling short in San Clemente

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Voters across several cities in Orange County weighed in on sales tax ballot measures on Election Day, but only one involved generating new revenue for eroded beaches.

Measure BB in San Clemente asked voters to approve a half-percent sales tax hike to fund sand replenishment, ocean water quality and infrastructure projects along the city's nearly 5-mile coastline.

If passed, Measure BB

would raise the city's sales tax to 8.25% and yield an estimated \$6.75 million annually solely for such projects.

With more than half of the ballots tallied by Thursday afternoon, the initiative was more than three percentage points shy of the 67% threshold needed to pass.

"I'm encouraged that we had a majority of residents supporting this," said Cameron Cosgrove, a Measure BB campaign leader. "We are within striking distance of the supermajority, which is really encouraging."

San Clemente residents have already had the opportunity to see beach nourishment in action this year.

After an initial delay, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers oversaw a federally supported sand replenishment project in April that pumped an initial 114,000 cubic yards of sand near San Clemente Pier.

Construction crews resumed work in late October to finish the project's first phase by pumping an

See *Sand*, page A5

## Disney-backed candidates take big leads in Anaheim

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Two out of three Anaheim City Council candidates supported by robust Disney spending enjoyed early, wide margins after Election Day.

Early returns showed Ryan Balius, a candidate in District 1, and Norma Campos Kurtz, an incumbent in District 4, far outpacing their opponents on their way to lopsided victories.

By Thursday afternoon, Balius, a parks and recreation commissioner, bested Ojaala Ahmad, a former Anaheim housing and community development commissioner, by more than 6,100 votes.

Campos Kurtz, who was appointed to council following former Councilman Avelino Valencia's election to State Assembly, is beating aircraft mechanic Francisco Rosas by more than 4,000 votes.

Both Balius and Campos Kurtz have earned more than 70% of ballots cast in their respective districts.

The race is tighter in District 5, where three candidates are vying for the seat. Kristen Maahs, a cultural and heritage commissioner, has taken an early lead over former La Mirada mayor and retired cop Andrew Sarega and Disney union worker Cristal Ruiz.

Maahs leads Sarega by more than 1,200 votes with Ruiz placing third.

"Our campaign has been focused on building a broad coalition to sup-



Gabriel San Román

**THREE CANDIDATES** supported by Disney enjoy top spots in City Council contests after Election Day.

port our community," Maahs told TimesOC. "Leading in this race shows the strength of our shared vision for an Anaheim that balances growth with the needs of our families, protects neighborhood integrity, and ensures a high quality of life for all."

As in past Anaheim City Council elections, Disney spent big.

The company has contributed nearly \$850,000 in independent expenditures in support of three favored candidates, according to campaign finance documents. The sum is down from the media giant's past spending in Anaheim City Council election cycles and is being channeled through a new political action committee.

Disney abandoned the Support Our Anaheim Resort Area (S.O.A.R.) PAC, which spent \$1.1 million of the company's contrib-

utions on a trio of council races in 2018 and most recently opposed the failed recall of Councilwoman Natalie Rubalcava in June.

This time around, the corporate cash is flowing through Anaheim Residents, Small Businesses, and Public Safety Leaders committees in support of Maahs, Campos Kurtz and Balius.

To date, Disney has contributed \$374,000 in support of Campos Kurtz's candidacy through the PAC. It has also contributed \$324,000 to back Balius and \$150,000 in favor of Maahs.

Sarega, with support from the Anaheim Police Assn., was the sole candidate not backed by Disney in any race to have had independent expenditures spent on his behalf.

"One of the consequences of district elec-

See *Anaheim*, page A5



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## MEALS

Continued from page A1

More than 70% of the program is funded by the state, Olson said.

"Our team's job is to garner the community support," she said. "With the growing [senior] population, we're going to need a lot more support from the community. Also, inflation. A lot of factors are making it very difficult to meet the needs."

The new site in Newport Beach came after the Orange County Office on Aging reshuffled the boundaries for service in July, Olson said, bringing Meals on Wheels to 24 centers in 21 cities in the county. Newport Beach was previously serviced by Age Well Senior Services, another nonprofit that provides for elderly and largely serves south Orange County.

Steve Pischel, 67, has remained on as a volunteer in Newport Beach, along with his wife Marilee, 60. His route on Tuesday mornings consists of delivering food to five seniors at

a complex nearby.

"Some of them are real talkative," said Pischel, who has been volunteering delivering meals for close to two years now. "We've gotten to know a couple of them really well, where they share pictures of their grandchildren with us and give us an update. It's really been sweet to be able to get to know them, feel like we're making an impact. We get as much out of it as they do, I think."

One of the seniors on his route is Trudy, 95, whose last name is not being published for privacy reasons.

Trudy said she has been receiving the visits for 13 years and appreciates the tasty meals, which are made at Meals on Wheels Orange County's 22,000-square-foot kitchen in Anaheim.

"The volunteers are wonderful," she said. "I can't say enough good things about them. It's so nice to get ready and wait to greet someone. They might be the only people who I get to

See *Meals*, page A5



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**VOLUNTEER STEVE PISCHEL** loads his car up with tote bags from Meals on Wheels at Oasis Senior Center.



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**MANY ORANGE COUNTY** cities – including Laguna Beach, pictured in 2022 – will observe Veterans Day on Monday.

## VETERANS

Continued from page A1

p.m., with an option for "burn your own" grilling afterward. Participants can also enjoy a live musical performance by O.C. band the Funk Doctors from noon to 4 p.m.

"This is a day to honor and recognize the veterans who have offered their time and commitment to serve this country that allows us to live the freedom we live every day," said Brian Fleming, a Tustin resident and former Marine Corp. staff sergeant who serves as commander for the 100-year-old post.

"It's a time for us to be able to celebrate veterans and for everyone to share

camaraderie and spend time with each other."

Here's a quick look at other Veterans Day observations taking place on Monday:

### HUNTINGTON BEACH

The city is teaming up with American Legion Huntington Beach Post 133 to present a Veterans Day ceremony at Pier Plaza beginning at 11 a.m. The plaza is located at 325 Pacific Coast Highway. The event will include remarks by U.S. Navy Command Senior Chief Vena Ramirez, of the Naval Weapons Station in Seal Beach.

That same day, a group of veterans, first responders and surfers will travel from Catalina Island to Huntington Beach in an annual Vet-

erans Day paddle-out event organized by the nonprofit Open Water.

Paddlers will depart Catalina Island at 5:30 a.m. on Monday with an expected arrival on shore, south of Huntington Beach pier, set for 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Community members are encouraged to gather on the beach near the Lifeguard Headquarters.

### LAGUNA BEACH

A ceremony is scheduled to take place at 11 a.m. at Monument Point in Laguna Beach's Heisler Park, 375 Cliff Drive.

### FOUNTAIN VALLEY

The city of Fountain Valley, Fountain Valley Community Foundation and West Orange County Veter-

ans of Foreign Wars Post and Auxiliary 9557 will host a Veterans Day ceremony at 10 a.m. in Veterans Park, 17635 Los Alamos St.

### SEAL BEACH

A ceremony honoring veterans will be held on Nov. 11 at 11 a.m. at Seal Beach's Eisenhower Park at Main Street and Ocean Avenue.

### IRVINE

The city of Irvine will host a ceremony from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the formal garden area at Colonel Bill Barber Marine Corps Memorial Park, 4 Civic Center Plaza. For more, call (949) 724-6715.

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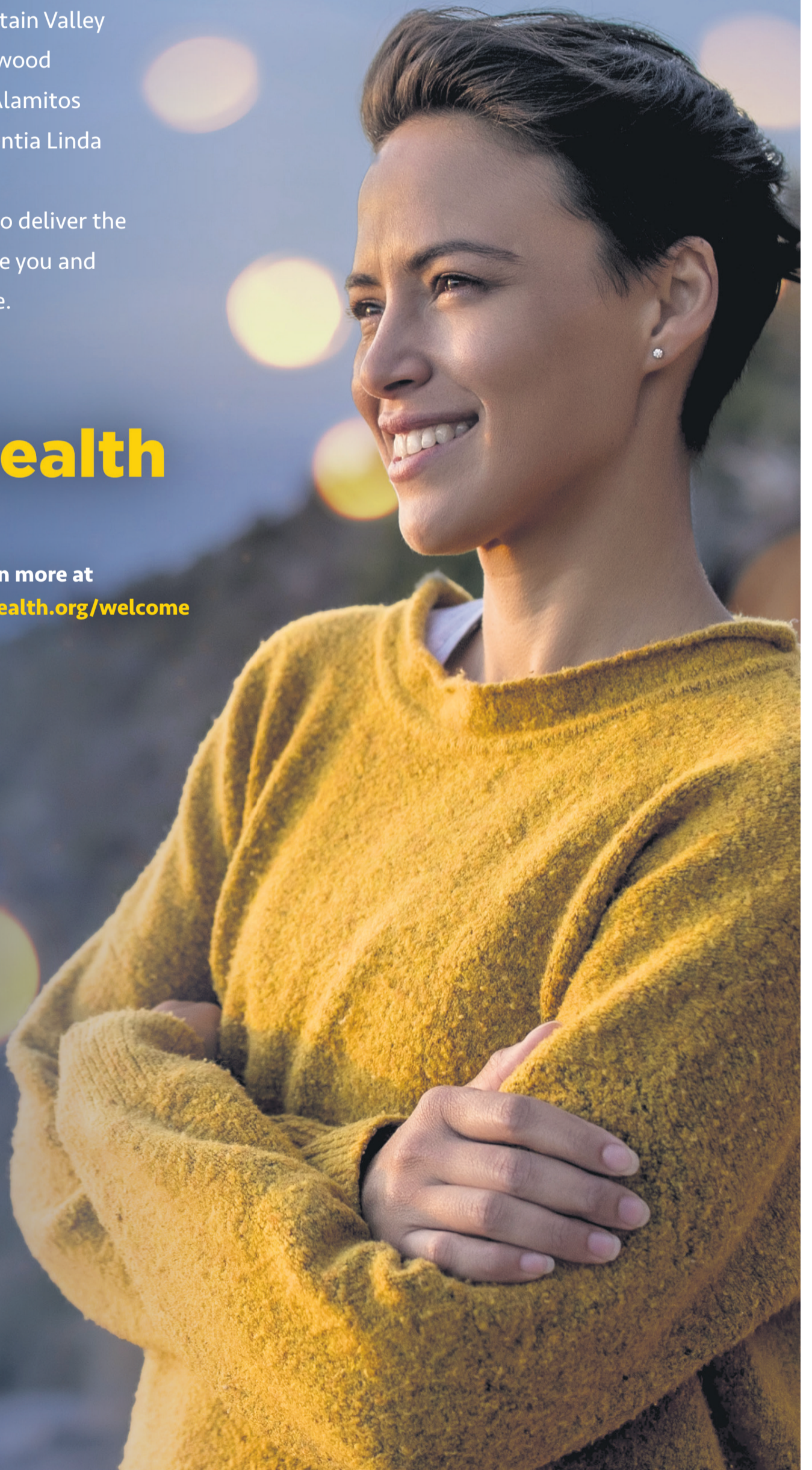
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# CASA Toy Drive brings warmth to children in foster care

BY ERIC LICAS

A frog cheerfully depicted amid a snowy winter scene hanging inside an ornament kiosk at the mall caught the eye of the 16-year-old foster child Sue Burke had been caring for. They had her name printed on it and took it back to their home so she could place it on their Christmas tree alongside those the Lake Forest resident's biological children had picked out years ago.

The gift couldn't have cost Burke more than \$10. But its value as a symbol of one of the few consistent relationships in the teen's life was immeasurable.

"She had been in foster care since she was 11," Burke said. "But none of her families had made her feel permanent."

That teen, now a young woman in graduate school, still visits Burke for Christmas each year. But not everyone who goes through the foster system is lucky enough to meet caregivers who invite them to join their families.

Gestures of kindness can mean a lot to kids and teens recovering from trauma,

separated from their families, cycling through housing arrangements and sometimes taking on parental roles in order to protect their siblings. For youth forced to grow up fast in order to survive, the simple act of unwrapping a present can offer a rare moment of joy.

A toy drive running Nov. 15 through Dec. 17 at Fashion Island in Newport Beach will give members of the community a chance to provide some measure of warmth to young people in need. Unwrapped gifts dropped off at the mall will be distributed by Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) to youth in the foster care system.

CASA is an organization that connects kids and young adults with people who can offer mentoring, companionship and a stable, persistent presence in their lives. They welcome well-meaning people of practically every background and provide extensive training before introducing volunteers to the kids they'll become advocates for.

See **Drive**, page A5



Photos courtesy of Court Appointed Special Advocates of Orange County

**A CHILD** in foster care sits next to Santa during the Court Appointed Special Advocates of O.C.'s 2023 Youth Holiday Party.



**A CHILD** in foster care holds ornaments gifted during last year's CASA of Orange County's 2023 Youth Holiday Party.

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## IRVINE

Continued from page A1

acquisition a key to a comprehensive policy approach to homelessness.

Along with three of her colleagues, Khan voted in favor of the property purchase at that time. Only Councilman Mike Carroll voted against it.

But on Monday, Khan sent a memo to City Manager Oliver Chi where she said outreach wasn't done prior to the original vote and claimed the purchase price was inflated by \$4 million.

Before Khan's memo, Irvine Business Complex residents organized against the site being repurposed as a bridge shelter.

"The whole transaction was rushed without involving the community, at all," Sam Abedi, an Irvine resident who lives within walking distance of the properties, told TimesOC after the meeting. "It's not to say we oppose the homeless. But to have a shelter put right



Gabriel San Román

**IRVINE CITY COUNCIL** reversed course on purchasing two properties for a future homeless bridge shelter.

behind our homes, and the fact that there's young families living here, it would only take one incident to completely change the outlook of the neighborhood."

The Irvine Business Complex was recently rezoned to include up to 15,000 housing units in the future. The council overturned the Orange County Airport Land Use Commis-

sion's objections in doing so.

A week after the vote, the MDL, an upscale, gated townhome community, hosted a meeting attended by Councilwoman Tammy Kim, Chi and Irvine police officers.

Concerned residents started a website, circulated an online survey and mobilized turnout for the

special meeting.

"The options for what we do with the property as we move the discussion forward, ultimately, are wide open," Chi said during the meeting. "We have some ideas as relates to a possible bridge housing facility on the site, but it could be a different type of project."

Within the first 10 minutes of the meeting, Carroll moved to terminate the sale altogether.

"What's going to happen is two buildings [are] going to be bought by a current owner, and seconds later, the city of Irvine is going to pay an additional \$4 million to buy those buildings," he said. "Now we have our city manager telling us, 'Let's use it for a gym [or] let's use it for a library.' Two weeks ago, my colleagues voted to make this a homeless shelter."

The dozens gathered at council chambers on Monday erupted in applause.

Chi said that the properties were appraised last month at about \$19.5 million and that the city's pur-

chasing price would be below market value.

Councilman Larry Agran, who is running for mayor against his council colleague Tammy Kim, supported the sale.

"A lesson I learned a long time ago is any time the city can acquire land at a reasonable price, we should do it," he said. "We're in great financial shape. It's important to invest in the land. Land values always go up here, and the city is here to stay forever."

The council meeting sped through the dozens of people assembled for public comment. Most opposed the property site being converted into a bridge shelter.

Michael Shepherd, who works at Orange County United Way near the proposed site, supported the original plan as did a letter submitted by the nonprofit.

"We engage with stereotypes, misunderstandings and fears surrounding homelessness every day," he said. "We desire for this

to be an opportunity for the council and the community and citizens together to work and build solutions that serve all of Irvine, both the housed and the unhoused."

With time running out, Khan cut public comments short to take a vote.

Kim, who is campaigning against Agran for mayor, arrived at the meeting to cast a vote alongside Khan and Carroll to kill the real estate deal before abruptly leaving. Councilwoman Kathleen Treseder and Agran voted to close the sale.

A trio of council members stayed for extended public comments after the vote.

Abedi welcomed the termination.

"It's good to hear the concerns of residents and businesses in a fair and balanced approach to this whole process," he said. "It was a good decision today for everybody."

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## MEALS

Continued from page A2

talk to that day.”

Each senior in the home-delivered meal program has a case manager who checks in with them and does in-home assessments.

Meals on Wheels Orange County has just introduced new options like Hispanic-inspired and Asian-inspired meals, as well as a vegetarian menu and a lactose-free menu, Olson said.

Additionally, Oasis hosts a lunch café every weekday at 11 a.m. There's a suggested donation of \$3 for those aged 60 or older, while it's \$5 for those under 60.

The lunch café has been averaging about 10 people per day, but a Halloween party brought nearly 50 people, many of them dressed for the occasion.

Pischel and his wife both have a heart for seniors, he said, so volunteering was an easy decision. He noted

that adult volunteers can bring their parents with them on a route, or their children, who can earn valuable volunteer hours for school credit.

“It's easy, and it's fun,” Pischel said. “There's just all different situations. There's folks that are having physical challenges who just can't get out. There's others who just can't afford it, so this is a good way for them to still get a healthy meal. A lot of different scenarios, but everybody seems to appreciate it and it's a good asset to have in this community.”

Most volunteers commit one day per week, and delivery routes take between an hour and 90 minutes in the morning to complete on average.

Learn more at [mealsonwheelsoc.org/get-involved](http://mealsonwheelsoc.org/get-involved). Volunteers must be at least 18 years old, and background checks are required.

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Courtesy of Meals on Wheels Orange County

**LORI MORGAN** and Janet Frumhoff enjoy the Halloween lunch hosted by Meals on Wheels Orange County at the Oasis Senior Center on Oct. 31.

## SAND

Continued from page A2

additional 86,000 cubic yards of sand.

Once completed, the Army Corps will continue to replenish beach sand around the pier every five or six years for the next 50 years.

Going forward, San Clemente will share half of the costs of every future cycle, a commitment that prompted a majority of council members, in part, to put a proposed sales tax hike on the ballot.

The city also spent \$2 million for its own project to replenish North Beach's critically eroded coastline with trucked-in sand.

Before council members voted to put the measure on the ballot, O.C. Supervisor Katrina Foley sent an Aug. 6 letter to San Clemente Mayor Victor Cabral and the council outlining her opposition to a sand tax.

“Orange County residents pay more than our fair share in taxes to the state and federal government, with historically little advocacy to bring these monies home,” she wrote. “The council's proposed sales tax increase places an undue burden onto the residents of San Clemente, at a time where unprecedented government funding is available from the taxes these residents already paid.”

The Orange County Transportation Authority has recently secured \$305 million in state and federal funding to protect its coastal train tracks in San Clemente from landslides and beach erosion, which

has shuttered passenger lines for a total of 12 months over the past three years.

Preliminary plans include sand replenishment.

On Oct. 31, Foley joined Rep. Mike Levin and Mayor Cabral for a press conference in San Clemente that announced the Federal Railroad Administration's \$100 million award to OCTA.

Despite the influx of funding to OCTA, Cosgrove still sees a need for Measure BB.

“The OCTA is only going to do what stabilizes the tracks,” he said. “We have almost 5 miles of coastline that need to be restored. While it will be helpful, it's not a restoration program by any means.”

If the two-thirds threshold isn't surpassed, Cosgrove and other beach activists aren't going to give up. He found a lot of enthusiasm for restoring San Clemente's battered beaches when talking to voters on the campaign trail.

Cosgrove is already looking ahead to 2026, if need be, to bring a similar ballot measure back before voters.

“I'd like to see residents take more control over a future ballot initiative, collect the required amount of signatures to qualify it and have greater engagement in that process,” he said. “Beach erosion is a serious problem. If we don't manage it, our beaches will disappear.”

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## CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

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Dr. David I. Lee is a nationally recognized fellowship-trained urologist who specializes in prostate cancer surgery.



## DRIVE

Continued from page A4

Without a persistent network of people behind them, it's not uncommon for young adults in foster care to slip into homelessness. Only about 53% manage to graduate high school on time. But those in touch with someone from CASA stand a much better chance of going on to college and finding meaningful careers, according to Burke, a volunteer with the organiza-

tion.

“It's very rewarding as a CASA to see these kids grow, see them mature and become who they could be, realize their potential, because you believed in them,” Burke said.

There are around 3,000 kids in foster care in Orange County. At any given time, as many as 200 of them are on the waitlist to connect with a CASA advocate. The group is in particular need of bilingual volunteers as well as men who want to make a difference, Burke

said.

However, the primary requirement of becoming a CASA volunteer is a desire to make a positive impact in a young person's life, she said. Joining the organization can allow people to accomplish that without taking on the responsibility of housing and caring for youth on a day-to-day basis.

Volunteers are required to make at least a two-year commitment to kids they're paired with. They typically meet at least twice a month

to share meals, go on hikes, visit museums or parks, have their nails done and otherwise just be there for youth.

Children in the foster care system experience a tremendous amount of disruption and instability. Burke said one of the kids she was sponsoring had cycled through four different group homes in the course of two years.

Group homes typically house four to six teens and are run by staff who are present for eight-hour

shifts, Burke explained. Working with foster youth is demanding, so there tends to be frequent turnover among the employees caring for them.

“So you maybe get close to somebody, and all of a sudden they're gone,” Burke said. “So you stop building relationships. That trauma of constantly losing people makes them hold back.”

Breaking through those barriers can be challenging, Burke said. It takes compassion, patience and,

most of all, persistence.

“I've had some where they've tried their hardest to drive me away,” Burke said. “And I've told them: ‘You can't do anything to make me leave.’”

“For the most part the kids do appreciate someone being there for them. They might not always show it, though, because they are still teenagers,” she added, with a knowing smile.

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## ANAHEIM

Continued from page A2

tions in Anaheim is that it has made it cheaper for Disney,” said Jodi Balma, a Fullerton college political science professor. “It's marginally cheaper to cover a district, rather than the entire city.”

Balma also opined that Disney's favored candidates also had strong ballot designations heading into

the race.

The election results come two years after an FBI investigation rooted out cannabis corruption, halted the sale of Angel Stadium and led to the conviction of former Anaheim Mayor Harry Sidhu.

A criminal complaint against former Anaheim Chamber of Commerce chief executive Todd Ament described “Company A,” which was Disney, as “an influential company

located in Anaheim.” It also described an employee, Carrie Nocella, as being a ringleader “to some extent” of a self-described “cabal” that ran Anaheim.

Neither Disney nor Nocella have been accused of any wrongdoing.

Since the explosive revelations, Anaheim ordered an independent investigation and enacted a series of reforms, including the recent hiring of an ethics officer.

Tensions renewed a year ago when Sidhu's plea agreement revealed a consultant's emailed plan to rehearse a council meeting in support of the Angel Stadium deal that included city officials and Angel executives.

The revelation led Anaheim Mayor Ashleigh Aitken to call on any city staff or council member involved to resign.

Anti-Disney sentiment flared with the Rubalcava

recall attempt and with critics opposed to Anaheim City Council's unanimous approval of DisneylandForward, a \$1.9-billion expansion plan.

But the recent election, Balma said, seemed to ease political polarization, whether related to Disney or allegations of corruption.

Maahs enjoyed the endorsement of both Aitken and District 5 Councilman Stephen Faessel, who

traded barbs with each other over mock council meeting allegations.

Former Councilman James Vanderbilt, a key vote in the Disney critical council majority under former Mayor Tom Tait, endorsed Balma.

“It felt like the temperature had dropped in these races,” she said.

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forum

COLUMN | **PATRICE APODACA**

# College admissions remain unfair to many

**R**emember Operation Varsity Blues?

The college admissions scandal orchestrated by former Newport Beach resident Rick Singer seems far less outlandish today, five years after he pleaded guilty to helping rich parents cheat their kids into top-ranked universities through what he called a “side door.”

Not to downplay what Singer and his clients did. Indeed, the arrogance alone was breathtaking.

To recap, Singer pleaded guilty to racketeering conspiracy, money laundering and obstruction of justice charges for carrying out a scheme that involved facilitating bribes from wealthy parents to university coaches and admissions officials; paying substitute test-takers to boost scores for students, and even arranging staged photo sessions to help applicants



submit fake sports accomplishments. One particularly brazen detail: As part of the scheme parents funneled their payments through Singer's sham charity, which allowed them to take tax write-offs.

About 50 people were ultimately charged, including coaches, testing administrators and some of Singer's clients. The actors Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin were among those convicted. Apparently they believed that, for the rich, rules are only suggestions.

But as sordid as this case was, it did help shine a light on the entirety of the unfair and messed up college admissions game. Singer and his co-conspirators certainly deserved to face justice. If their actions no longer feel quite so shocking, it's likely because they were always more of a symptom and not the rotted core of the disease itself.

**But as sordid as this case was, it did help shine a light on the entirety of the unfair and messed up college admissions game.**

Now Singer is back in the news. Out of federal prison and reportedly at a Southern California halfway house, he is once again a sought-after college admissions consultant. Because, well, of course he is. Makes perfect sense that a guy with a wonky ethical compass would still be in demand by parents with disposable income to spare and a burning desire to give their kids that extra edge on top of all the other advantages they enjoy.

Irony aside, Singer's resurrected career provides a good opportunity to consider whether we've seen, in the years since his scams were exposed, any changes in a too easily compromised college admissions system.

The answer: There have been changes, both good and bad, but definitely not enough good.

Some changes didn't stick. During the pandemic, for instance, many universities dropped the requirement that applicants submit SAT or ACT scores. Critics have long argued that these standardized

tests favor affluent students who can afford prep classes and private tutoring. The SAT has also been flagged in the past for alleged racial bias.

Now some schools are backtracking. They are reinstating the SAT/ACT requirement, contending that the tests can actually open doors for students of less resourced backgrounds. I'm not inclined to buy that rationale or that they're unable to replace the tests with better measures of student achievement and potential. Nevertheless, it looks like expectations of the tests' demise were premature, and they will continue to figure prominently in admissions.

A bigger and even more controversial issue — many universities' longstanding preferential treatment for the children of donors, alumni and wealthy and well-connected potential donors — has at last come under greater scrutiny.

Unfortunately, the increased attention is largely due to the Supreme Court's divisive ruling that barred consideration of race in

college admissions. That decision is leading to a predictably negative outcome — less diverse student bodies — but it has also prompted an outcry over what many call “affirmative action for rich kids.”

A recent L.A. Times investigation revealed just how egregious such preferential treatment can get. It found that USC, which has a 9% undergraduate acceptance rate overall, has for years admitted 85% to 90% of applicants from highly privileged backgrounds. In many cases, the scales were tipped by manipulating the system meant for athletes, a system that is problematic in and of itself — but that's a topic for another time.

The good news is that California passed a law set to take effect in September 2025 that will make it the fifth state in the nation to ban legacy admissions and only the second to extend that ban to private universities.

That's a positive step that will hopefully curtail some of the practices that have compromised the integrity of our institutions of higher learning. Yet we're still a long way from a transparent, equitable college admissions process, one isn't tainted by cynical commercial motives.

Singer has admitted that the conspiracy he engineered was wrong but, in a telling bit of obtuseness, he maintains that it was a “victimless crime.”

Oh yeah? Tell that to all the well-deserving students — the ones that didn't cheat, that came by their accomplishments honestly but narrowly missed out on spots at their favored universities. Explain it to the kids from underprivileged backgrounds who might have had a shot if the deck hadn't been stacked against them from the beginning.

The reality remains that, when it comes to education, money rules. Some people have a lot of it. Universities want it. Their attempts to portray Operation Varsity Blues as a rogue operation involving a few bad apples obscures the bigger picture, which is that college admissions aren't nearly as meritorious as we imagine or want them to be.

As long as that's the case, I fear there could be other “side doors” — legal or otherwise — that will only open for a fortunate few.

**PATRICE APODACA** is a former Los Angeles Times staff writer and is coauthor of “A Boy Named Courage: A Surgeon's Memoir of Apartheid.” She lives in Newport Beach.

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### CITY OF COSTA MESA NOTICE ANNUAL REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEE REPORT

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Costa Mesa City Council at the regular meeting on **Tuesday, November 19, 2024 at 7:00 P.M.**, in the City Hall Council Chambers, 77 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa, California will consider the following item:

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CITYWIDE DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEE AND TRAFFIC IMPACT FEE ACTIVITY FOR THE FISCAL YEAR**  
California Government Code Section 66000-66008 requires an annual review and accounting of the Citywide Development Impact Fee Activity and Traffic Impact Fee Activity for the Fiscal Year. Agency description of specified activity is posted in the City Clerk's Office.

**Public Comments:**  
Public Comments may be made in person by attending the meeting, may be made via Zoom Webinar, or send in written comments. Members of the public wishing to participate in the meeting via Zoom Webinar 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](mailto: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](mailto: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, **November 19, 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 November 3 and 10, 2024

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## MAILBAG

### Advice for young voters and disappointment in H.B.

Kudos to Professor Joel Powell and all the students who attended, listened and engaged at the Huntington Beach City Council candidates' forum at Golden West College. While national political races always garner the most attention, the outcome of local elections typically has the biggest impact on our day-to-day lives.

Those selected to lead our municipal government must be trusted to assume an immense responsibility. Never assume locally elected officials are simply figureheads or that the title of council member or mayor is honorary. The words and actions of elected officials directly impact the lives of residents and influence how outsiders view our community.

To the students who may have voted for the first time, thank you for getting involved! Your votes matter as today's decisions shape the community you'll be living in tomorrow. I encourage younger voters to keep a couple of things in mind before casting ballots in future elections:

1. The first responsibility of all elected officials is public service. If you are confused about who to vote for, look at the candidates' resumes and focus in on their record of public

service. You will rarely regret voting for someone with a long history of non-partisan service to our community.

2. Be deeply suspicious of anyone telling you that your priorities, ideas or goals for our community are unrealistic. Force candidates who blindly embrace a failing status quo to explain why they reject improvements. After all, reality is what you make it, and candidates who lack vision will never work to create a better future.

3. Focus on the issues rather than party affiliation and ideologies. Good ideas are good ideas regardless of party or affiliations. Demand information and explanations from candidates, and never settle for bland, detail-free political talking points. As the saying goes, talk is cheap. If a candidate cannot explain their position or refuses to admit they lack a detailed understanding of issues, this is a huge “red flag,” and you should be wary.

Good luck to all our younger voters, and a sincere “thank you” for caring and getting involved in improving our community.

**Steve Shepherd**  
Huntington Beach

The results of the election will not change matters except that now we will be governed by seven instead of four, and there will be no minority to keep all of them honest. As to why the Surf City electorate chose to replace the minority with three like-minded stooges might mean that they may have actually gargled with bleach as their glorious leader advised them to do to avoid COVID.

The difference in governing will be that the general public will have very little notice about what the conservative council attempts to accomplish behind our backs. The office of the city clerk was also taken by an inexperienced,

dubious individual who believes that voter ID is a good idea and will lead to costly frivolous lawsuits against the state and will continue to make H.B. the laughing stock of California cities.

The loyal opposition will be present to notify the general public what is taking place and what books are being banned, which will be a full-time job. We will not stand down and will continue to be vigilant!

**Richard C. Armendariz**  
Huntington Beach

On election night, I observed the pernicious power of poisonous partisanship take down my city and its government. It was aided and abetted by the infusion of influence from spurious special interests who stood to gain from the trampling of community rights by the MAGA machine in Huntington Beach.

Taxpayers will pay dearly for this assault on democracy in two ways. First, they will be at the mercy “within” from those now running the show here. It will cost us plenty with the deals they are making to cater to their cronies. Second, they will be at the mercy “without” from the punishing costs of penalties, restrictions, lawsuits and loss of local control from the state government over their errant and defiant decision-making. It is “lose, lose” for our residents, whether they know it or not.

Even if things are reversed down the road, the damage done could be deep and lasting. Surf City joined a long list of grievance-driven election decisions and outcomes this November. However, it is likely that many in the community will soon be feeling grief stricken over the results.

**Tim Geddes**  
Huntington Beach

To the newly elected council members: Good luck as you take on the responsibility of leading our city and improving our community. Prioritize addressing our roads, building our economy without sacrificing our parks and genuinely saving our libraries. Focus on local issues that impact our citizens, not topics meant for a national audience.

Before the election, the newly elected council members appeared more focused on attacking incumbents than presenting a coherent vision for our city. This divisive approach must stop if we are to foster unity. If you cannot demonstrate constructive leadership and end this toxic partisanship, you will further fracture our community. Polarizing our city is not only reckless — it threatens to destroy the unity we need to move forward.

Fiscal responsibility is also essential. Stop wasting taxpayer money on needless legal battles. A prime example is the air show settlement failure — a financial burden now forced on taxpayers, who will pay roughly a million dollars a year over the next 40 years for police, fire, cleanup, environmental studies and more. Claims that the air show drove substantial hotel revenue were misleading; Our hotel stays tell a different story. An event that has people staring at the sky for days may not be the smartest draw — or a recipe for spine health.

We can still secure a brighter future by coming together to form coalitions rooted in loyalty to our city and dedication to representing all residents. Respect fundamental rights for everyone and find the courage to think for yourself. Vote based on what truly benefits our city — not on group think or factional loyalty. Lead with integrity and accountability and show our community the kind of leadership it deserves.

**Andrew Einhorn**  
Huntington Beach

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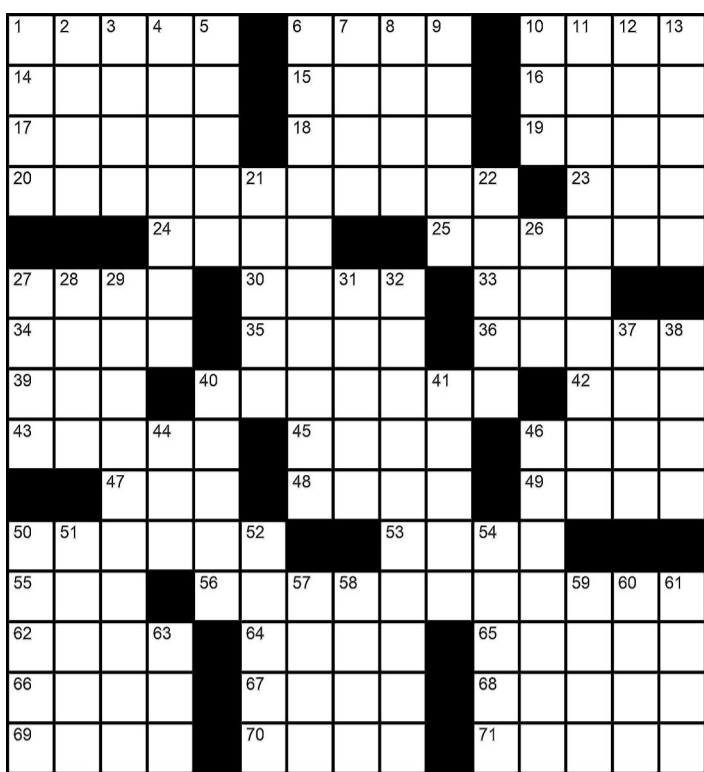
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**THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE**

By Stella Zawistowski

**ACROSS**

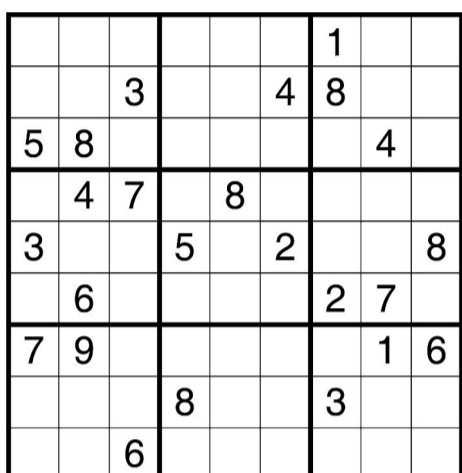
- 1 Has difficulty pronouncing S's
- 6 Felines
- 10 Egyptian bird
- 14 At rest
- 15 Leave out
- 16 Vaccine type: Abbr.
- 17 Heart chambers
- 18 Bossa \_
- 19 Serving of beer
- 20 "The Road Not Taken" poet: 2 wds.
- 23 Actress Ruby
- 24 \_-Ball (arcade game)
- 25 Base-clearing hits
- 27 True statement
- 30 Spanish ladies: Abbr.
- 33 Negative replies
- 34 Makes a mistake
- 35 Pre-Easter season
- 36 Addams Family dad
- 39 Summer zodiac sign
- 40 Plane shelters
- 42 Broad street: Abbr.
- 43 Siberian forest
- 45 Actor Michael
- 46 Eating regimen
- 47 Family car type: Abbr.
- 48 K through 6: Abbr.
- 49 Dame \_
- Everage
- 50 Small handgun
- 53 Small tastes
- 55 Actress de Armas
- 56 Fancy light fixtures
- 62 Karaoke performance
- 64 Designer Gucci
- 65 Bandleader Shaw
- 66 Location
- 67 Cole \_ (side dish)



**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).



**For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A5.**

- 68 Stop
- 69 Otherwise
- 70 Trade group: Abbr.
- 71 Ruhr Valley city

**DOWN**

- 1 Trickster
- 2 Vanish \_ thin air

- 3 Belgrade native
- 4 Some clergymen
- 5 "Game of Thrones" name
- 6 Business meeting
- 7 Love: Spanish
- 8 DVR brand

- 9 Secret hoard
- 10 Little demon
- 11 Wedding attendant
- 12 Not external
- 13 Fills completely
- 21 Cybertruck maker
- 22 Salad utensil
- 26 Cow's sound
- 27 Fedora fabric
- 28 Region
- 29 French rolls
- 31 \_ hair pasta
- 32 Intimidates by looking at: 2 wds.
- 37 Tied up
- 38 Catherine \_ Jones
- 40 Mayhem
- 41 Cottonlike fiber
- 44 Eviscerate
- 46 Wants
- 50 Out of style
- 51 How food may be fried: 2 wds.
- 52 Tibet city
- 54 Location
- 57 " \_ Well That Ends Well"
- 58 Secrecy documents: Abbr.
- 59 Schedule data: Abbr.
- 60 Go up
- 61 Noticed
- 63 "Golly!"

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