

Food bank enjoys life on the farm



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

With a goal of providing fresh produce to O.C.'s food insecure, Second Harvest finds a more stable home to grow it.

BY MATT SZABO

Red and green vegetables alternate in rows, a display of holiday spirit at the Second Harvest Food Bank's Founders Farm in Irvine.

The farm itself has finally found a more permanent home, at Southwinds Farm & Gardens, just down the street from the Second Harvest distribution center.

While this may fall short of a Christmas miracle, it's a welcome development for Second Harvest as the Founders Farm prepares for its first harvest in the new space.

"Southwinds likes to showcase that people can have edible landscapes in their backyard and have it in a beautiful way," said Kelly Alesi, director of supply chain at Second Harvest. "It's a great partnership for us."

Alesi said it keeps produce as fresh and early in its lifespan as possible, while also helping maintain a zero-waste status. Partnerships matter a lot for

VOLUNTEERS HELP manage the Second Harvest Food Bank's lettuce sprouts at Founders Farm in Irvine.

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Now open in Irvine

UCI Health

Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center

Diocese of Orange settles Mater Dei sex abuse case

Case alleging abuse by former vice principal reaches a settlement just before a jury was to be selected.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

A \$3.5-million settlement announced Tuesday in the case of a man allegedly abused by a former Catholic priest at Mater Dei High School decades ago is not the only such case involving the school, according to the law firm representing the victim.

Attorneys on the case held a news conference outside of Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove on Wednesday where the lawsuit against Michael Harris, a onetime Mater Dei administrator, was presented as one piece of a predatory puzzle at the private Catholic school overseen by the Diocese of Orange.

Attorney Mike Reck said there are two more cases involving

Mater Dei High School that are set to go to trial next year as "bellwether" cases that could help predict the outcome of other similar lawsuits.

"More of these trials are coming," he said. "They're coming because survivors are tired and because the survivors deserve it."

The settlement with the Diocese of Orange came just days before a jury was set to be selected for a trial at the Orange County Superior Court's North Justice Center in Fullerton.

"For decades, the bishop and the administrators at Mater Dei have allowed Harris and 17 other known offenders ... to prosper, to teach, to build trust and then prey

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Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

STORE WORKERS Danna Ortiz, Ashley Castelan, and Kaye Regalado, from left, load books at LibroMobile, a struggling independent bookstore in Santa Ana.

Youth keep LibroMobile rolling, even as bookstore faces closure

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Danna Ortiz always dreamed of working at a bookstore. So when she sought help at the Titan Dreamers Resource Center at Cal State Fullerton with help finding a job, she was connected with Sarah Rafael Garcia, owner and founder of LibroMobile in Santa Ana.

"During my interview I did tell her one of my dreams was to own a loft on top of my own bookstore/coffee shop," said Ortiz. "It was like a dream come true coming to work here."

Ortiz graduated with a degree in philosophy and today is the manager at LibroMobile. For the last three years, youth like Ortiz have been in charge of the store.

"You can walk in any given day we are open and you will not see me here; you will see



A CHRISTMAS TREE made of books at LibroMobile.

youth," said Garcia.

As the volunteer founder of LibroMobile, Garcia doesn't make money from the store, but she is a mentor for the youth employed there through work study programs.

Garcia launched LibroMobile Arts Cooperative in 2016 when Santa Ana's only other book-

store, Librería Martínez, shuttered. The name makes reference to the pushcarts she used to peddle books like paletas throughout the city. The hybrid nonprofit works to cultivate diversity through literature, free art programming and prioritiz-

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ALSO FROM THE DAILY PILOT:



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

AN ITALIAN CHEF BRINGS PANETTONE HOME TO O.C. PAGE A7

Visit Anaheim CEO apologizes, explains comments

Mike Waterman addressed Anaheim City Council and offered an apology for past comments that were seen as dismissive of an advisory board following scandal.

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Prompted by comments that appeared dismissive of city oversight efforts, Anaheim City Councilwoman Natalie Rubalcava grilled Mike Waterman, Visit Anaheim's new chief executive, during Tuesday's council meeting.

Waterman previously stated that the advisory board created in the after-

math of a state audit of Visit Anaheim contracts might not be needed in the future.

"Selfishly, my belief is over time, maybe after the second or third or fourth meeting ... we will all decide this is not necessarily the most effective use of our time and we will disband it," he said at an Oct. 16 advisory board meeting. Rubalcava quoted Water-

man's comments during Tuesday's discussion in requesting an update from him on advisory board matters.

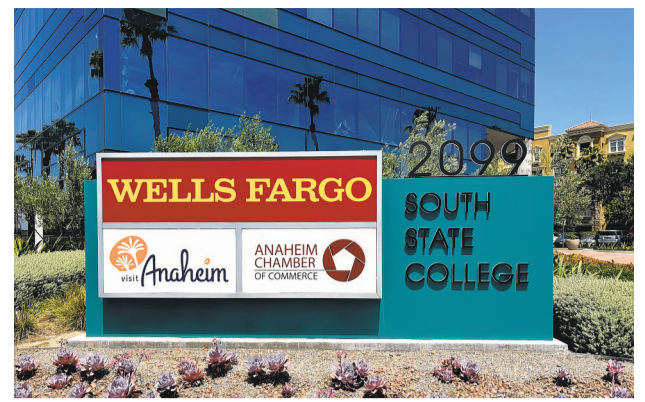
"I was out of line and definitely did not use the appropriate words," Waterman said. "What I was trying to articulate is many of the state's [tourism improvement district] boards that were created, usually years ago, have been dis-

banded because some of those cities found it to be redundant."

Waterman stated that he did not know his comments during the advisory board meeting for the local tourism bureau were recorded.

"If you would have probably read the binder that you referred to, that might

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Gabriel San Román

VISIT ANAHEIM'S office near Angel Stadium.

FACES

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ing BIPOC voices.

"We have a bunch of books that are not like the ones they sell at Barnes & Noble. We have bios and memoirs, poetry by people of color," said Ortiz.

In 2021, the shop moved into a brick-and-mortar space at the Bristol Swap Meet at 1150 S. Bristol St. #A3 in Santa Ana. But now Garcia said, LibroMobile maybe face closure.

"We have been watching book sales decline for the last six months ... but I can't say that we were thriving off of book sales; I can say we were surviving," said Garcia. "What we were really thriving off of were grants."

Cuts in arts funding have made it unclear if LibroMobile can stay open beyond June 2025.

"The California Arts Council itself lost a percentage of funding which caused a trickle down impact ... it's not that we didn't qualify; they can no longer support as many



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

ASHLEY CASTELAN loads books by local authors onto a shelf at LibroMobile, a bookstore in Santa Ana that is struggling to stay afloat.

recipients as they used to," said Garcia.

LibroMobile typically gets two grants each year, totaling about \$50,000 in funds, used to pay for free art programming and to give stipends to young

artists and cultural producers who keep the shop open. Free events, like Cafecito y Cuentos with Santa Ana Unified school board member Katelyn Brazer Aceves on Jan. 18, bring people into the store,

but Garcia has had to dip into her savings and cancel LibroMobile's annual literary festival.

Closing would leave the city without a bookstore during a time when its Main Library is closed for

construction until 2026.

A longtime activist, Garcia has reached out to local civic leaders for help, hoping they will see LibroMobile as more than a bookstore. It is a community, Garcia believes, especially to young people who work there like Ashley Castelan, assistant manager at LibroMobile.

The 18-year-old moved up quickly after being placed at the store through the Santa Ana Youth employment program, just a week after graduating high school.

"I started off as a book adviser, checking inventory and assisting customers if they had any trouble while browsing, and the more time I spent, the more I learned, and Sara and Danna noticed that," said Castelan.

Ortiz and Castelan are both children of immigrants, and LibroMobile is their first job. They have not only developed skills that will serve them in the future, Garcia said, but they get the chance to mentor the youth that come in after them.

"I like to leave it in their hands, I think when the youth feel empowered they step up and take the lead," said Garcia.

Castelan is younger than some of the youth who have joined the staff since she became assistant manager, but she feels comfortable guiding them.

"When new youth employees come in, I love the fact that I can make them feel safe here too," said Castelan.

The girls have seen how the bookstore impacts the people in their community. Recently a man came in asking for help writing his declaration statement to file for asylum. The LGBTQ+ rainbow flag and the titles on the bilingual books signaled to him this was a safe space, Garcia said.

"Danna got to witness that. I think those are the things people don't see; we are not just selling books," she said. "Books allow us to open doors to other conversations."

Ortiz said the incident

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UCI Health Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center & Ambulatory Care

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Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center



FARM

Continued from page A1

Second Harvest, as it continues fighting food insecurity in Orange County. One in 10 Orange County residents is deemed food insecure, a number that climbs to one in eight for children.

The coronavirus pandemic brought an influx of cash to many food banks, Second Harvest chief executive Claudia Bonilla Keller said. The food bank made a conscious decision to buy good, healthy food.

"That was received so well by the people that we serve, by the pantry operators, that we said, 'This has to be the way,'" Bonilla Keller said. "... This not only feeds people, which is our primary mission, but this helps them in so many other ways. We made a commitment to stick to healthy food, produce being a big part of that. We've not wavered from that since the end of the pandemic, and we've done things like develop a nutrition policy that supports that."

"Then we did this crazy thing — we opened a farm."

Along with purchasing or rescuing food, Second Harvest has been growing its own produce since 2021. Harvest Solutions Farm, located less than 4 miles from the food bank, uses more than 40 acres of the University of California South Coast Research and Extension Center. It is run through a partnership between Second Harvest, the UC system and Solutions for Urban Agriculture.

Alesi and Second Harvest sourcing manager Rachel Parris oversee that site, and are always looking for volunteers ages 7 and older, from Tuesdays through Saturdays.

On Thursday morning, they guided a small volun-



DYLAN CROMWELL of Second Harvest Food Bank helps manage and grow lettuce sprouts at Founders Farm.



VOLUNTEERS HELP manage the Second Harvest Food Bank's lettuce sprouts at Founders Farm in Irvine.

teer shift of about eight people, a day after harvesting 40 bins of product — more than 10,000 pounds.

Yes, the holiday rush is on for everyone.

"We know that people are getting ready for the holidays and volunteering is not really a high priority at this time, but we need to get these groups coming in to help us keep this project going," Alesi said. "To hire professional crews, it's so incredibly expensive and really drives up the cost of operating this program."

The first plantings in 2021 were all cabbage, but the farm quickly branched out. Broccoli, cauliflower, cauliflower and spaghetti squash are some of the other vegetables currently

being grown at Harvest Solutions Farm. They also grow bell peppers, zucchini, honeydew melon and watermelon, depending on the season.

A batch of jalapeños grown at Harvest Solutions Farm earlier this year were a hit at the Second Harvest mobile food pantry in the Oak View neighborhood of Huntington Beach, though they were a bit of a happy accident.

"The transplant company thought they were giving us bell peppers, and they were actually jalapeños," Alesi said with a smile. "We were watching them grow and we were like, 'Something is wrong.'"

While the Harvest Solutions Farm has become



Photos by Don Leach | Staff Photographer

SECOND HARVEST Food Bank's Dylan Cromwell, Kelly Alesi and Rachel Parris, from left, stand with lettuce sprouts at Founders Farm at Southwinds Farm and Gardens.

established, the Founders Farm was always a bit of nomad, spending time in the Second Harvest distribution center parking lot.

"We have a history of farms in this area," Bonilla Keller said. "We often squatted on little 2-, 4-, 5-acre farms. With the development in this area, they were short-lived."

Now Founders Farm has its home at Southwinds, just more than a mile from the distribution center and in the shadow of the 133 Freeway.

"We grow more delicate plants here," said Founders Farm manager Dylan Cromwell, naming off different types of lettuce like romaine and red sail, along with Swiss chard and kale.

Instead of in-ground planting, the Founders Farm utilizes transplant vegetables in raised beds equipped with Garden Soxx, essentially a sleeve for the vegetables to grow in.

The Founders Farm is also taking volunteers on Tuesdays and Thursdays,

and is able to accommodate those who might be a bit more immobile since there's less bending down.

Since the Harvest Solutions Farm opened, more than six million pounds of produce have been harvested for the community. Bonilla Keller has even gotten into the spirit by growing lots of kale at her house, though she said it's to the chagrin of her boyfriend.

"We control part of our supply chain," she said. "It demonstrates to the community that we have this commitment, and it allows us to try different things. I think a lot of people in our supply chain know that we started with a lot of cabbage, but we were able to change the mix of produce very quickly. Now we grow multiple crops at the same time. We responded to what the community and the pantry network was telling us, and we continue to be responsive in that manner."

Produce grown at the farms comes to the distri-

bution center. It has about 15,000 square feet of cooler space and two dock doors that lock in the cold temperature, set to 35 degrees. Bonilla Keller pointed out a batch of broccoli, that came in the day before and was ready to be shipped out soon.

She compared the operation to a small supermarket; Second Harvest distributed 35.8 million pounds of food last fiscal year. But the addition of the collaborative farm sites has given Second Harvest an additional important component.

What happens when Second Harvest tells Feeding America or people in the community that those most vulnerable are getting local produce?

"Jaws drop," Bonilla Keller said. "That's really the story, I think."

For more information on the Second Harvest farms or to volunteer, visit feedoc.org.

matthew.szabo@latimes.com
Twitter: @mjszabo

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Dr. Farshid Dayyani is a nationally recognized medical oncologist who specializes in the advanced treatment of gastrointestinal and hepatobiliary cancers.



Lions Park café set to open in fall 2025

BY ANDREW TURNER

Those visiting Lions Park in Costa Mesa next year can look forward to having one more way to beat the heat, as construction is underway to bring a café to the area.

City and local officials gathered for a delayed groundbreaking ceremony on an unseasonably warm Wednesday afternoon. The café will come at a projected cost of \$2.3 million.

Remarks were made, the hard hats came on, dirt was turned, and then the construction crews that have been working on the project since September picked up where they left off.

The framework of the 1,100-square-foot building is emerging above the covered fencing enclosure. A city spokesperson said the project is expected to be completed in time to serve the public by fall 2025.

Costa Mesa plans to contract with a vendor to operate the café, which will be a walk-up facility offering food and beverages with adjacent outdoor seating.

"It will really be the final amenity in this endeavor to create this social gathering space with the event lawn and the library and the community center and the aquatics center," Assistant City Manager Cecilia Gallardo-Daly said. "It will really position Lions Park to have an even more enhanced experience for visitors and residents."

The Lions Park campus includes athletic fields, a children's playground, the Donald Dungan Library and the Norma Hertzog Community Center. The café is being built between the latter two gathering

spots. "This project was supposed to be part of the library building and the Norma Hertzog Center," Public Works Director Raja Sethuraman said. "However, due to funding constraints, this project was deferred."

As the café will serve as the final piece in what came to be known as the Library Project, Mayor John Stephens wrapped up his comments by stating, "Great things are worth waiting for." Stephens shared his disappointment in the café being pulled out of the original budget.

"Just like now, back then, things cost a little bit more money by the time it ended, and our budget got pinched," Stephens said. "We approved the project. We, of course, have a library. We cut the ribbon and turned the dirt on the library. Remember, we did that in 2017. We have a beautiful Norma Hertzog Center, but it always kind of nagged at me ... that we couldn't deliver this café to the community."

"Even though now what we see on a daily basis — people enjoying the library, enjoying the community center, we have wonderful events there, we have people every night having a great time playing soccer under the lights, we've got so many things here — we didn't have our café," he added, pounding the podium as he finished his statement.

Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley contributed \$1.2 million from her office's discretionary budget toward the café. The remaining \$1.1 million



Photos by James Carbone

COSTA MESA Mayor John Stephens, center, and Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley, with local dignitaries, take part in the Lions Park Café Mesa groundbreaking ceremony on Wednesday.

is coming out of the city's general fund.

"We have an agreement between the county library system and the city of Costa Mesa, so that all the funds that are generated — the net proceeds — will go back into the library system, 50%, as well as to the city of Costa Mesa for programming right here at Lions Park," said Foley, who represents the 5th District. "The money that is generated here in the café will stay here."

Foley also shared her vision for the space, which included a local operator representative of the community where she formerly

served as mayor.

"We have lots of local coffee operators here in Costa Mesa," Foley said. "Hopefully, they will bid on this, and we will have something that is representative of the community."

"We talked about [offering the public for play] ... any number of games. I kind of like that giant Jenga game, but it would be fun to see that going on here as the community enjoys this beautiful, beautiful space that we've created right here in Costa Mesa."

andrew.turner@latimes.com
Twitter: @AndrewTurnerTCN



COSTA MESA Mayor John Stephens makes remarks at a groundbreaking ceremony for a café at Lions Park.

FACES

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made an impression on her.

"You could tell his voice was cracking; he wanted to cry. He was desperate for that help," said Ortiz.

A pot of poinsettias in the store is a thank-you gift from him.

Castelan said she also notices young people like herself taking advantage of the services and programs offered at the store.

"I know the youth are appreciative of the fact that the resources here are free. We let them print stuff for free, if they need a place to study and whatnot, they can come in here and use



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

SARAH RAFAEL GARCIA stands among the shelves at the LibroMobile bookstore she founded in Santa Ana.

the Wi-Fi for free," said Castelan.

Joan Todd, an Orange resident who is a regular at

LibroMobile, started coming in to find bilingual books for her nieces in immersion school but has found books for herself, as

well. "There are so few bookstores these days, and to have one that has got such a wide variety of books is wonderful," said Todd.

Kaye Regalado is the digital humanities coordinator at LibroMobile. The recent UC Irvine graduate created the oral history page on the store's website and is currently working on a local author oral history. During college she volunteered with LibroMobile and found support there when she lost both parents.

"In a lot of ways LibroMobile has been an anchoring point for me," said Regalado. "These kinds of resources have reminded me how important it is to have community even outside of family, to have

friends and other people that support you."

Now workers at the bookstore that has been there for the community are hoping to see the favor returned.

"This place feels like a second home, if you will," said Castelan.

So far Councilman Benjamin Vazquez, who represents Ward 2 in Santa Ana, suggested a book sponsorship program Garcia was quick to launch called "Santa Ana Reads." The LibroMobile Movement initiative allows members of the community to sponsor books, something Vazquez has done for LibroMobile in the past.

"We need to create a reading culture in Santa Ana, and LibroMobile is

one of the few resources our community has right now," said Vazquez.

Also a teacher at Valley High School, Vazquez has signed up for a book sponsorship, and Garcia hopes other city leaders will take his lead.

"We hope that it grows into 'Orange County Reads.' We will see how it goes. I don't know if its going to help us make rent until the end of next year," said Garcia. "But it's a start."

Anyone interested in book sponsorship through the "Santa Ana Reads" initiative can apply through LibroMobile.

sarah.mosqueda@latimes.com
Twitter: @SarahNmos

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Nancy Louise Robison
January 1934 - December 2024
In Loving Memory of Nancy Louise Robison January 20, 1934 – December 3, 2024
Nancy Louise Robison, beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, passed away peacefully in her sleep on December 3, 2024, at the age of 90.
Born in Los Angeles, California, to Ivar and May Johnson, Nancy was lovingly adopted by family friend Esther Rempel during the Great Depression. She enjoyed a rich and adventurous childhood, traveling the world with Esther and forming cherished memories with her adopted brother, Bob.
At 14, Nancy met the love of her life, Robert Robison, and they married when she was 19. Together, they raised four sons while enjoying a life filled with skiing, sailing, tennis, and beach days. Nancy also pursued a brief Hollywood career, appearing in Seven Brides for Seven Brothers and other musicals of the 1950s.
A talented writer, Nancy authored over 100 children's books, including the award-winning Ten Tall Soldiers. Later in life, she explored her love of history, writing about World War II and serving as a docent at the Lyon Air Museum.
Her greatest joy was her family. Nancy is survived by her three sons, nine grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. She was deeply loved and will be dearly missed.

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CONTACT US

Carol Cormaci
Executive Editor
carol.cormaci@latimes.com

Gabriel San Román
TimesOC
gabriel.sanroman@latimes.com

Beth Raff
Advertising Manager
(424) 225-9928
beth.raff@latimes.com

Matt Szabo
Huntington Beach and Sports
matthew.szabo@latimes.com

Andrew Turner
Laguna Beach and Sports
andrew.turner@latimes.com

10540 Talbert Ave., Suite 300 West, Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Reporters:
Sara Cardine, Costa Mesa
sara.cardine@latimes.com
Eric Licas, Newport Beach
eric.licas@latimes.com
Sarah Mosqueda, TimesOC
sarah.mosqueda@latimes.com

Send Letters to the Editor to erik.haugli@latimes.com. See Mailbag for guidelines.
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COMMENTS

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have been helpful," Rubalcava responded.

The tourism bureau chief previously apologized in media reports following the meeting.

Visit Anaheim has come under increased scrutiny after an independent corruption report commissioned by Anaheim City Council in the wake of an ongoing FBI investigation alleged that Visit Anaheim's past president engaged in a grafting scheme involving \$1.5 million in COVID-19 relief funds.

No criminal charges have been filed to date, but Jay Burrell, Visit Anaheim's chief executive at the time, resigned in November 2023.

"The past president made some mistakes and paid for those with his job," said Waterman, who was

hired in April. "My promise was we're going to be much more transparent, we're going to be much more communicative."

In January, a state audit ordered by Assemblyman Avelino Valencia found that Visit Anaheim misused funds with little oversight of how public money was spent. The audited contracts between Visit Anaheim and the Anaheim Chamber of Commerce, which the city didn't approve, found that some of the funds were improperly used for political lobbying and to back tourism-friendly council candidates.

Anaheim City Council created the seven-member advisory board in June in response to the audit's findings and recommendations.

Rubalcava made suggestions for future advisory board meetings, including having Waterman be more engaged with what's on the agenda.

She also asked questions about the status of the \$1.5 million that the city has requested Visit Anaheim return in light of the corruption report.

"We are having conversations with the city to try to figure out how to rectify that," Waterman said.

The tourism bureau is funded by a 2% Anaheim Tourism Improvement District tax on nearly 100 hotels in the area, which collected about \$30.5 million between June 2023 and June 2024.

gabriel.sanroman@latimes.com
Twitter: @gsanroman2

CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU ANSWERS

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Student helps girls break boundaries in STEM with Girls Inc.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

High school senior Katie Kee didn't always enjoy studying STEM (the acronym for science, technology, engineering and mathematics) coursework, although she puts it a little more bluntly.

"I basically hated STEM," said Kee.

Today, she feels differently. She sits in a space at the Girls Inc. of Orange County headquarters in Santa Ana, where staff members are busy putting up red and silver decorations. Kee and other graduates of the organization's Grad Lab college readiness program will celebrate later in the evening with an awards ceremony. With help from Girls Inc., Kee has made it her mission to break down the barriers that prevented her from enjoying STEM earlier in her educational journey.

"The middle school that I went to only let kids in the gifted and talented program that had these really high test scores take STEM classes like programming and engineering," said Kee. "I wasn't ever identified as one of those students and it gave me the mentality that you have to be really good at standardized testing to succeed in STEM."

There is also a notable gender gap in STEM. According to the American Assn. of University Women, men outnumber women in most STEM fields in college, and women make up 34% of the workforce in that set of related industries. Engineering and computer science are two of STEM's most lucrative fields, but they remain heavily male dominated. Gender stereotypes that

insist boys are better at math and science subjects than girls persist, and that thinking prevents girls from even considering exploring a career path in the STEM industries, according to researchers.

"It wasn't until my freshman year AP Computer Science Principles class that I saw I was actually not bad at this subject," said Kee.

Kee is currently enrolled in the computer science program called Global Information Technology Academy at her school, Brea Olinda High School and is a member of the first graduating class of the AP Capstone program. She also completed an eight-week internship with Boeing in Huntington Beach.

Girls Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to equipping girls like Kee with the skills and resources to reach their full potential. Part of that mission means working to close the gender gap in STEM is by introducing it to girls at an early age.

"A lot of the work that we do and the time that we spend is providing opportunities for exposure to STEM. It is really important" said Lucy Santana-Ornelas, chief executive officer at Girls Inc. of Orange County. "Girls might not have many people around them that are in those STEM fields or careers."

Kee said participating in Girls Inc. Grad Lab program helped empower her to take on the challenge of STEM.

"Girls Inc. really helped me realize the power of females bonding together and the importance of the female voice; in STEM in general it is predominately

male influenced," said Kee.

She points out there are few young women in her Global Information Technology Academy class.

"There are only five girls, including me, out of a class of 35 students," said Kee. "Girls Inc. really helped me realize the power of that community."

A STEM HAVEN FOR GIRLS

Girls Inc. of Orange County also offers STEM-focused programming itself like Imagine Science Fun-Engineering, STEM Success and a Robotics program that teaches coding and allows students the chance to program an NAO humanoid robot using Choreographer software.

"We also have our Eureka! program, which is a four-week summer camp for middle school girls that has different aspects of science and technology every summer," said Santana-Ornelas.

During the Eureka! program, hands-on activities center around themes that in the past have included robotics, biomedical engineering, theme park design and a CSI week, with girls using evidence to solve a camp "crime."

"The opportunity to experience [STEM activities] without fear in a girl-only environment that is supportive — that is important," said Santana-Ornelas. "What we hear from parents is about how their daughter used to be very quiet and shy but [after being in a STEM program] she is talking up a storm about things she is learning."

Kee was inspired to make change herself by launching the Stem Stitch, a nonprofit organization



Photos by Don Leach | Daily Pilot

KATIE KEE, a Brea Olinda High student, created the STEM Stitch, a nonprofit that aims to provide STEM resources to students in rural areas. Above, Kee attends the College Grad Lab ceremony at Girls Inc. in Santa Ana on Tuesday.



JESSICA CUNIFFE, of Girls Inc., greets students at the College Grad Lab ceremony at Girls Inc.

promoting social justice in STEM education.

"I started it sophomore year because I wanted to bridge the gap that I had in STEM education when I was younger," said Kee. "We are a completely remote organization, but we have had such an impact on younger students."

Kee's nonprofit helps connect young girls with STEM opportunities such as fellowships, high school STEM internships or connecting groups of students with undergrad students from MIT and Columbia to mentor them.

"I have had alumni come back and say, 'The commu-

nity that I have met here has been so amazing, and I have started my own initiatives in my area,'" Kee said.

She is now preparing for the next phase of her education, with Grad Lab helping her with the college application process. She is hoping to get accepted to UCLA, where she plans to pursue a degree in a STEM-related field.

"I am currently looking at a career in cybersecurity, which combines law and ethics with computer science," said Kee.

Creating a safe space for young girls to test out STEM activities helps them

feel more at home in industries that typically count them out, leading to young women like Kee finding their true passion, according to Santana-Ornelas.

Kee hopes her work will inspire other girls.

"When I was in middle school, I was afraid to try STEM because I was told I couldn't do it, but if you try you might find out you are really interested in it or you are really good at it," said Kee. "Maybe like me, you won't ever look back."

sarah.mosqueda@latimes.com
Twitter: @SarahNMo



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forum

COLUMN | PATRICE APODACA

Driving responsibly is a gift that could last a lifetime

From my home in Newport Beach I sometimes hear the unmistakable sounds of screeching tires and cars crashing. It's a bone-chilling few seconds during which I hope the accident isn't too bad, though on occasion it certainly has been.



I'll never forget the day, several years ago, when I heard that terrible yet familiar noise and knew instantly that this was a bad one. The worst, it turned out. A carful of teens crashed into a tree while traveling south on Jamboree Road, and all were killed. We call these incidents traffic accidents, but no words exist that can adequately capture the awfulness of such an outcome, made that much more tragic because it was completely preventable.

Last month, another accident near the same spot on Jamboree — a thoroughfare, like many in coastal Orange County, that is prone to speeding — could also have been deadly. I didn't hear the crash this time, but I imagine others did.

Described by authorities as miraculous for the absence of serious injuries, the accident occurred in the wee morning hours when a Range Rover struck and severely damaged two light poles and then slammed into a

tree near the Palisades Tennis Club. The car burst apart as the engine compartment caught fire and the main body came to rest about 20 feet away; other parts flew in various directions. One of the tires was reportedly found on the tennis club grounds.

I don't know how, and maybe no one can fully explain, how the driver and one passenger escaped with only minor injuries. A couple of days later, while walking my dog, I passed by the area where the crash had occurred and saw that debris from the wreckage remained scattered about. A Range Rover nameplate lay beside the sidewalk, next to shrubbery and other automotive detritus. It was an eerie sight, yet also weirdly banal because we've become so accustomed to the prevalence of motor vehicle accidents.

Now Christmas and New Year's are upon us. I deeply love this time of year, but that affection is accompanied by the usual worries that all the merriment could lead some of us to abandon common sense and caution during one of the busiest travel times of the year.

My worry is not unfounded. Sadly, but not surprisingly, holidays are typically associated with an uptick in motor vehicle colli-

sions that result in serious injury and death, as long drives to see friends and relatives, driver fatigue and alcohol-fueled celebrations create added risk. I've witnessed several perilously close calls in recent days, a common occurrence this time of the year.

It's not as if we're powerless do anything about this situation. Indeed, when it comes to motor vehicle safety generally, it has been clearly demonstrated that public safety measures can have a positive impact. Over about a 30-year span, the rate of roadway fatalities continuously declined because of successful interventions such as seat belts, air bags, stricter laws on impaired driving, and improvements in road design and traffic control.

That progress stalled about a decade ago and even backtracked in 2020 and 2021 when traffic-related deaths increased again. Then, beginning in 2022 and continuing into this year, the decline in traffic fatalities resumed. During the first half of 2024 — the latest period for which the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has released data — deaths from motor vehicle crashes declined by about 3.2% from a year earlier.

But that small decrease is no doubt cold comfort to the families of the 18,720 people that died during that six-month period or

to those whose loved ones' deaths have yet to appear in official government counts.

The fact is, public safety measures can only do so much. When it comes to roadway safety, all of us can, and must, do our part. It should not require such reminders, but using good sense while driving — and before even getting behind the wheel — should be second nature.

That means driving only when rested and alert, minimizing distractions, moving at a reasonable speed, keeping a healthy distance from the car in front, staying aware of other drivers and pedestrians, and just generally using caution at all times. Eyes on the road, focus on driving, not the million things you have to do. No texting. And no drinking and driving, period.

In 2023, Orange County had 12,518 car accidents that resulted in a serious injury or a fatality. We don't yet know what this year's total will be — hopefully lower, but any number is too many and we should never accept that such casualties are an inevitable consequence of modern living. It's worth repeating: Traffic accidents are preventable.

The winter holidays are meant to be a joyous time, and naturally we want to share that joy with those we love. So by all means, let the celebrations continue. But



Patrice Apodaca

AFTER A Range Rover struck two light poles, crashed into a tree near the Palisades Tennis Club and burst into flames, authorities called the survival of its driver and passenger miraculous.

please remember that not every present can be found under a tree. This Christmas, give yourself and everyone you care about the gift of being a responsible driver.

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.

MAILBAG

Decision to boycott H.B. proves grounded

After watching the goings on of the Huntington Beach City Council for the last two years, my husband and I refused to spend one dime more in that city during those two years.

No more shopping, restaurants, air show, nothing.

Now the fact that some citizens in that city have gone all in on electing a full MAGA crowd we are very happy with our decision and will continue to boycott the city.

I wouldn't be surprised if home values start to fall when their agenda really gets going.

Be careful what you wish for.
Patricia Miller
Costa Mesa

he passed 10 years ago. His son, my nephew, has lived in Huntington Beach for years. Just this month he moved to Florida.

I moved to Garden Grove in 1962. Made so many trips to the dump in Huntington Beach, I can't count them. We had moved into the middle of an orange grove.

When I lived in Bellflower, my friend from Arcadia, came down once a week and we rented "air mattresses" to ride the waves at the pier.

Zoobie was a friend. Zoobie's is still a restaurant in H.B.

Chuck Dent and went to high school together.

When I took chemistry at Orange Coast College the teacher was Mr. Poor. He had a hamburger stand on the beach. The motto: You never had a good burger til you had a Poor Burger.

I have many friends in Huntington Beach and none voted for the anti-MAGA group. So, when I see, week after week, month after

month and year after year, a reader "mouth off" about how bad the City Council is going to be ... I don't think you try to be fair or balanced.

With the owner of the company that owns The L.A. Times and Times Community News wanting a paper that people will read, maybe now is the time for you to change your approach, before someone changes your job.
MAGA,

Ronald Lloyd Hill
Cowan Heights

Looking for balance

You might wonder why I care about Huntington Beach. My brother had telescopes on the pier for probably 25 years. He lived in Huntington Beach until

month and year after year, a reader "mouth off" about how bad the City Council is going to be ... I don't think you try to be fair or balanced.

Looking for balance

You might wonder why I care about Huntington Beach. My brother had telescopes on the pier for probably 25 years. He lived in Huntington Beach until

month and year after year, a reader "mouth off" about how bad the City Council is going to be ... I don't think you try to be fair or balanced.

Too bright for night

I strongly oppose lighting up Central Park. It's a reckless proposal that threatens to disturb residents, harm wildlife and destroy the natural beauty of our park. Lighting up the park by an outside vendor that plans to have three shows each night for three months is not something our residents need. The number of speakers and lights will greatly

affect residents and wildlife.

Is anyone on the council friends of the vendor? Let's avoid another "air show settlement failure," a glaring example of irresponsible governance and a financial disaster saddling taxpayers with an estimated \$1 million annually for the next 40 years. Is this what our city has come to?

Andrew Einhorn
Huntington Beach

Council's decision was a surprise

While the new conservative Huntington Beach City Council maintained a modicum of responsibility in pulling a contentious item from the Dec. 17 meeting agenda, one which would have approved a license agreement for a profit-making attraction on city-owned property that would have denied public access to open parkland without adequate public input, it never

should have gone that far to begin with. Any vestige of transparency was called into question by a multitude of residents and community members who complained about the lack of public notice and input into the decision-making process.

Like the disastrous Pacific Air Show settlement, hatched in private, the council majority seemed all too willing to conduct another concessions giveaway to a private company at public expense. This time the community was not hornsawged. In my public comment remarks, I stated my holiday wish for the new "Seven Zeroes" council to include both diversity and transparency in their actions. It remains to be seen how the new majority will "make Huntington Beach Great Again" if they ignore public outcry and continue to cater to partisan special interests.

Tim Geddes
Huntington Beach

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CASE
Continued from page A1

on kids," attorney Jeff Anderson said at the press

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James Carbone

A PRESS CONFERENCE was held outside of Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove to announce a \$3.5-million abuse settlement.

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conference. "Today is not only just to sound the alarm about the peril that has long existed but to do something to require Mater Dei and the Diocese of Orange to clean it up and to come clean."

The alleged victim in the suit remained anonymous and did not appear at the news conference, but an attorney read a statement on his behalf.

"Harris, Mater Dei and the Diocese of Orange made promises to me and promises to my parents," his statement read. "They promised that I would be safe at school. They also promised I would be part of a community, a community that would help me grow as a student, as a Catholic, as a human, and instead, they put me in path of a serial predator."

The alleged incident was said to have happened at Mater Dei High School in 1978, when the man was 15.

According to the lawsuit, Harris allegedly summoned the student to his office to tell him his "grades were too poor to continue his education" at Mater Dei High School. The victim became distraught knowing how hard his mother had worked to get him enrolled.

The lawsuit claims Harris, who worked as a vice principal at the time, consoled the student before forcefully performing oral copulation during the encounter.

In a statement of their own, the Diocese of Orange

said it was prepared to take the case to trial.

"All parties — the plaintiff, the Diocese's insurers and the Diocese — agreed that a pretrial settlement was most beneficial to everyone involved," said Jaryd Gonzales, a Diocese of Orange spokesperson.

The Catholic Church has paid out at least \$10 million in civil cases involving Harris, who has never been criminally charged.

A \$5.2-million settlement reached in 2001 was believed to be the largest publicly disclosed payment by the Catholic Church to a victim in a sex abuse lawsuit at that time.

Jeff Anderson and Associates represents seven cases involving the former priest, who was laicized in 2003, as well as eight Mater Dei High School cases.

According to court documents, the Archdiocese of

Los Angeles listed Harris in its "Report to the People of God" in 2004. The suit alleges that the report tallied 12 accusers against him between 1972 and 1990.

Attorneys claimed that in the course of working on the Harris case, new details were discovered that were "absolutely shocking."

"By the time he got to Mater Dei High School in 1975, he had already abused nine other students that we are aware of," claimed attorney Neda Lofti. "Harris should have never gotten to Mater Dei High School."

Lofti also claimed that new information was uncovered about other alleged sex abuse perpetrators at Mater Dei, including those hired by Harris himself.

gabriel.sanroman
@latimes.com
Twitter: @gsanroman2

Italian chef perfects a holiday tradition

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

When Chef Marco Criscuolo carefully unwraps a freshly baked loaf of panettone bread at his restaurant, Trattoria Trullo in Aliso Viejo, the first things he does is smell it. When he pulls back the cellophane and brings it to his nose, the strong, sweet scent of vanilla and citrus escape from the wrapper.

"It is an emotional thing," said Criscuolo. Panettone is emotional for many Italians like Criscuolo, who opened his restaurant serving fresh pasta and other Italian dishes earlier this year at 26611 Aliso Creek Road. The name, Trattoria Trullo, refers to a trullo, a stone house with a conical roof similar to the one Criscuolo still owns back home in the region of Puglia in Italy.

In November, the restaurant received a Marchio Q award, a certification that recognizes authentic Italian restaurants, pizzerias and gelato shops globally. Created by the Istituto Nazionale Ricerche Turistiche, the organization awards establishments "developing and promoting the traditions of Italian food products and enhancing the culture of Italian food and wine."

After attending culinary school in Italy, Criscuolo served as chef de partie at Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and eventually found his way to Orange County cooking at Pelican Hill in Newport Coast before becoming executive chef of Andrea Ristorante.

While he isn't a baker by trade, he began working on his panettone recipe about five years ago. Then he found himself toying with bread starters, the fermented culture used to bake bread, during the pandemic. While most were trying their hand at baking sourdough, Criscuolo was perfecting his panettone. "I was calling my friends



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

CHEF MARCO CRISCUOLO shows the delicate center of an Italian panettone at Trattoria Trullo in Aliso Viejo.

that do it, asking how they do, and then I started watching videos on YouTube of a housewife in Italy who makes it and shows how she does it," said Criscuolo.

After many failed attempts and a lot of wasted ingredients, Criscuolo developed a recipe that turned out consistent results he was pleased with.

"In 2021, I finally got it." Unlike American grocery store fruitcakes, lampooned for being dry and unappetizing, true panettone is soft and sweet. It is a holiday tradition in Italy found in cookbooks dating back to the 19th century. It is usually baked from scratch with candied fruit or chocolate using recipes passed down for generations.

"During Christmastime in Italy, you must have panettone. There is family

coming home to visit you, to get coffee and chat. It is a tradition to have a slice of panettone when family, friends and neighbors come to your house," said Criscuolo.

Criscuolo bakes panettone from scratch at his south county restaurant, selling small loaves that serve four for \$30 and larger loaves meant to serve six to eight for \$65.

The arduous process begins with an Italian yeast called *lievito madre* or "mother yeast." The starter sits in a warm area of the kitchen until it triples in size. When the mother yeast has risen, he combines the ingredients in a stand mixer. Sugar and eggs, preferably organic with a bright orange yolk giving the bread its yellow color, are added slowly.

"If the dough goes above 26 degrees Celsius, the



CHEF MARCO CRISCUOLO prepares a special Italian panettone for the holidays at Trattoria Trullo.

dough is going to separate," said Criscuolo, as he pointed an infrared thermometer into the mixing bowl as the dough spun.

Next the dough is left to rise, which is also a careful process.

"The dough is going to tell you when it is ready, you cannot force this, you cannot rush this," said Criscuolo. "If you keep it at a temperature that is too high, the dough will be-

come acidic, and you will have a sour taste in the panettone."

While the dough rises, he starts the process of adding aromatic honey infused with orange zest, lemon zest and vanilla beans. The candied fruit is also made in house, taking an entire day to complete.

Once all the ingredients are combined, the dough is left to proof in a panettone mold. After proofing, the

dough goes into the oven to bake. When it comes back out, Criscuolo quickly skewers the loaf and flips it upside down so it cools vertically, ensuring it keeps its trademark height.

"If the dough is not cooked properly, they will simply collapse," he said. "Then you lose three days of work and all the ingredients."

Criscuolo puts the same care into all the dishes he makes at Trattoria Trullo, like his *orecchiette alle cime di rapa*. The small ear-shaped pasta is made in house, a tedious process the chef believes is worth the effort.

"All the little steps matter. We want guests to enjoy the real deal, the real traditions of Italy," said Criscuolo.

The pasta is served in a dark green broccoli rabe sauce, studded with Italian sausage and sprinkled with pecorino and bread crumbs. Another popular dish is the lasagna classica, made of layers of complex bolognese and smooth Bechamel sauce as well another baked-in-house bread, focaccia used for sandwiches at lunch and served for the table during dinner.

As a special holiday treat during the holiday season, panettone is also on the menu for dessert.

"It is on the seasonal menu for the whole month of December. Guests can enjoy a homemade slice of panettone with *zabaglione marsala* gelato that we make in-house and a dollop of *mascapone* cream," said Criscuolo. "That is a very traditional way to eat it."

Trattoria Trullo is open Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. To order panettone bread, email jill@trattoria-trullo.com. Please allow 72 hours advance notice.

sarah.mosqueda@latimes.com
Twitter: @SarahNMos

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

ACROSS

- 1 Mass of gunk
- 5 Some other time
- 10 Mediterranean fruits
- 14 Caboose's place
- 15 By oneself
- 16 Unoccupied
- 17 "Step _ my office"
- 18 Sort of, slangily
- 19 Blood vessel
- 20 Human soul
- 22 Begg
- 24 Difficult
- 26 Pedicure place
- 27 Go out with
- 28 Strong compulsion
- 31 180-degree turn, for short
- 32 Hair-removal brand
- 33 Allowed by law
- 35 Make a selection
- 38 Movie pro who oversees camera work
- 42 Industrious insect
- 43 In unison: 2 wds.
- 44 A single time
- 45 Tire measurement: Abbr.
- 46 Common sugar
- 49 "Ghosts" network
- 52 Headed up
- 53 Letter-shaped fastener
- 54 Author Jeffrey
- 56 Taunted
- 60 Tolerated
- 61 George of "Star Trek"
- 65 _ and soul
- 66 Perjurer
- 67 Leave out in pronunciation
- 68 Country road
- 69 Shade trees

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
20					21				22	23				
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49	50	51			52			53						
54			55						56		57	58	59	
60						61	62	63	64			65		
66						67						68		
69						70						71		

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.

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

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

- 70 Fender dings
- 71 Taylor Swift's _ Tour
- DOWN**
- 1 Clasp tightly
- 2 Glasses part
- 3 Like Cheerios
- 4 Pamphlet
- 5 LA's NBA team
- 6 Boxer
- Muhammad
- 7 Heavy weight
- 8 Finish
- 9 Pop up again
- 10 Half of ten
- 11 Notions
- 12 Fly smoothly
- 13 Get a feeling
- 21 "2001" computer
- 23 Classic Eric

- Clapton song
- 25 Shoulder muscle
- 26 Recommend
- 28 Cuzco people
- 29 Chief
- 30 16 ounces
- 34 Very, very long time
- 35 "Alas!": 2 wds.
- 36 Chest muscles, for short
- 37 39-Down, for example
- 39 Syrup flavor
- 40 Claimed
- 41 Easy to carry around
- 47 Loosens, as laces
- 48 Actor's signal
- 49 Heavy rope
- 50 Cook with high heat
- 51 "Get out!"
- 55 That lady's
- 57 Fly high
- 58 _ St. Vincent Millay
- 59 Artificial colors
- 62 Bitter beer
- 63 Relatives
- 64 Boston summer hours: Abbr.

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