



WOMEN FIGHT BACK

Mexico's frightening genocide against its own women continues unabated. A nation of fed up women is pushing back.

Read the full story, Special Section

THE SUN

SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE

AN ACP HALL OF FAME NEWSPAPER

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A NATIONAL PACEMAKER AWARD NEWSPAPER

REMEDIAL MATH, ENG CLASSES ARE GONE FOR GOOD

BY EWAN TOLEDO

For decades California community college students who did not test into college-level math and English could take classes to help them catch up.

Starting this summer everyone will be tossed right into the deep end of the pool.

California's state legislature has decided that developmental courses created to prepare students for college coursework may cause many students to take too many extra classes. That, in turn, leads to discouragement and dropouts.

Southwestern College pulled prerequisite developmental courses off its master schedule in 2019, including Intermediate Algebra (Math 35, 45, 60 and 72) and College Composition (English 71, 99 and 114). Two remaining math courses (Math 60 and 72) were available during the spring 2023 semester, but no developmental English offerings.

Math and English faculty say they understand the motive, but insist the new laws hurt the students the state seems to want to help.

Mathematics Department Chair Kimberly Puen Eclar said she is concerned about students affected by the new changes.

"There will be people who want to pursue a STEM career who will not have that path available to them anymore because of this legislation," she said.

The shift began when the

DEVELOPMENTAL • PG 7



NOT FOR CREDIT

Developmental classes — those math, reading and English courses created to help students to catch up — have been eliminated thanks to state laws. Students needing help in those areas will now be required to take them as non-credit classes through continuing education.



Photo Courtesy of Rick Bowmer / AP

LGBTQ STUDENTS BATTERED BY BYU —Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah has been the transfer university of choice for generations of South County Mormon students. Recently BYU has drawn fire for its discriminatory practices against students of the LGBTQ community, including its opposition to LGBTQ organizations on campus. (above) Hundreds of BYU students march on the church headquarters in Salt Lake City to protest anti-LGBTQ practices.

STUDENTS SPEAK OUT AGAINST ANTI-LGBTQ PRACTICES AT BYU

BY DIEGO HIGUERA

Brigham Young University seems so far from Chula Vista. It is 713 miles away, an 11-hour drive through four states.

Culturally, it is a light year from diverse, progressive South San Diego County. BYU is in the heart of red state Utah, a bastion of conservative politics since the late 1840s.

BYU seems like the last place a kid from the South Bay would want to attend, but there is a quiet pipeline from our multiracial blue coastal strip to the "Mormon Harvard." There may be as many as 14,000 Mormons in the South County who have high regard for BYU's deserved reputation as an excellent academic university with an affordable price tag.

Often, though, culture shock consumes BYU's overwhelmed LGBTQ students. Ugliness ensues.

Last semester when campus clubs and student organizations were invited to insert brochures and handouts in a Welcome to BYU bag for incoming freshmen, campus officials removed all materials from LGBTQ organizations.

One of the purged clubs was the BYU Rainbow Collective, an organization whose stated mission is "to create and identify safe spaces for BYU's LGBTQIA+

BYU • PG 6

SPEARHEADING A CALL FOR CHANGE

BYU administrators and Mormon Church leaders have for years quietly hemmed in its LGBTQ students and prevented them from organizing clubs and activities, according to the BYU students and alumni. The community is pushing back and demanding that BYU join other U.S. universities in respecting the rights of LGBTQ Americans. Kaitlynn Wright (l) is one of the emerging voices in the movement to empower LGBTQ Mormon students.



KAITLYNN WRIGHT

Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education

LEAKS, HVAC PROBLEMS PLAGUE NEW BUILDINGS

Malfunctioning air conditioning system briefly threatened a repeat of the 2015 mainframe server meltdown in leaky IT headquarters. Performing Arts Center, Campus Police Station struggle with construction flaws.

BY EMILY INGCO

Goldilocks might not want to major in theater. Southwestern's acclaimed new Performing Arts Center, the showcase edifice of the college's 30 year, \$850 million reconstruction process, has students and staff running hot and cold.

And wet.

PAC is one of at least three brand new buildings with the problems of very old buildings. New facilities for campus police and institutional technology are also suffering from heating and cooling issues as well as leaks some employees say endanger their health.

Also endangered is the health of SC's multimillion dollar mainframe servers and data center which requires constant cooling to prevent overheating. Air conditioning failures and close calls with triple digit temperatures have evoked memories of the notorious July 15, 2015 mainframe meltdown that caused millions of dollars in damages to the IT system and the destruction of thousands of student records.

Angela Cardenas, an administrative assistant in the IT building, said the new \$25.6 million facility has had serious problems since staff moved in last summer. An IT staffer likened it to "10 months of whack-a-mole."

LEAKS • PG 4



Photo Courtesy of SC

WATER SHOW

Southwestern College District taxpayers invested \$64 million in a new Performing Arts Center that opened in August 2021. Theater faculty and staff insist the building was left unfinished by contractors. PAC occupants report at least 40 problems, including leaks over electronic equipment, heating and cooling issues, and unconnected equipment.

FRIENDSHIP PARK CLOSURE DRAWS BINATIONAL IRE

BY ALLAN VARGAS

"I hope there won't be a fence too long here." — First Lady Pat Nixon Dedicating Friendship Park, 1971

"Mr. Biden, tear down this wall!" — Enrique Morones Founder of Gente Unida, 2022

U.S.-MEXICO BORDER NEAR IMPERIAL BEACH —

Friendship Park seems a lot less friendly. Once a happy half acre straddling la frontera near Imperial Beach, the park born of idealism seems doomed to succumb to the latest wave of immigration phobia.

FRIENDSHIP • PG 5

LONG WINTER BRINGS A BLOOM



Borrego Springs region comes alive with a rarely-seen super bloom of exotic flowers. Back Page

ALUMNUS AND FORMER PROFESSOR
PLEDGE TO BRING NEW PERSPECTIVES

HOMEGROWN LEADERSHIP

Former professor and faculty union president Corina Soto and one-time Southwestern College Sun editor Robert Moreno are the first citizens voted in via new district elections.

BY LILIANA ANGUIANO

Corina Soto embarked on her professional career 32 years ago determined to bring more people of color into leadership positions. Now she is one of the leaders.

In November Chula Vista's District 4 voters swept Soto into elective office for the first time after more than three decades as a professor, counselor and union activist. She said it almost feels like coming full circle.

"The majority of people of color who get their Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees get their start in community colleges," she said. "So I (wanted) to go work in the community college system because that's where our *gente* are. Not just our *gente* but all people of color and low-income white people, this where they are."

As an employee Soto was an outspoken member of the Southwestern College community who was a consistent advocate for underdogs and the underrepresented.

"I strive to be a voice that's oriented toward equity and justice as well as transparency and accountability," she said.

She was not afraid to speak truth to power, she said, which frequently got her in hot water with college leadership. She served as a union grievance chair, where she was trained in due process and conflict resolution.

"It's been my commitment that people have due process rights, so when I saw a consistent pattern of the administrators violating the due process rights of campus employees and students I was not going to put up with that," she said. "For our system of democracy to matter we must be guided by rule of law and due process."

Soto earned a Bachelor's degree from UC Riverside in Chicano and Administrative Studies, then a Master's from SDSU in education and with an emphasis in multicultural counseling and social justice. Her education and her professional experiences have given her an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, she said.

Southwestern College has slowly climbed

"Most of the people of color who earn degrees get their start in community colleges. I wanted to work here because that's where our gente are."

— Corina Soto



DISTRICT AREA 4

CORINA SOTO

A UC Riverside and SDSU graduate, Soto taught and served as a counselor for more than 30 years at Southwestern College. She was active in the Academic Senate and is a former president of the Southwestern College Educators Association, the faculty union. She is a strong proponent of learning communities – manageably-sized cohorts of students from underrepresented demographics – and is urging the college to add more sections of programs like Puente, Umoja, Chel and Bayan. While she urges support for developmental students, she also urged college leaders not to ignore gifted and talented students who have a high probability of success with the right resources.

DISTRICT AREA 1

ROBERT MORENO

A proud "National City homeboy" and Sweetwater High School Red Devil, Moreno studied journalism at Southwestern College and served as News Editor of The Sun. He transferred to SDSU where he earned a BA, then embarked on a journalism career at the Chula Vista Star News. Moreno said Southwestern paved the way for his academic success and he would like to help others to achieve their goals by forming more transfer agreements with regional universities. Boosting enrollment and transfer rates are priorities, he said, as are improvements to campus safety for women and members of marginalized communities.

BY LILIANA ANGUIANO

Robert Moreno regretted not filing to run for Southwestern College Governing Board seat #4 last fall. He made the most of a second chance.

Dr. Gonzalo Jesus Quintero, a former National City Councilmember, was originally the only candidate to apply before the deadline. An error in his filing paperwork, however, required the San Diego County Registrar of Voters to reopen the application period for three days.

Moreno said it seemed like providence.

He discussed a run with his wife, Christina, and she gave her blessing.

The rest, as they say, is history. Moreno pulled one of the County's biggest electoral upsets of 2022 by defeating the better funded, heavily endorsed Quintero. Some of Moreno's early endorsers, in fact, switched later to Quintero.

"(Quintero) had a lot of endorsements," Moreno said. "In fact, he had pretty much all the endorsements. That just fueled my desire to work harder at campaigning. Endorsements look great but they do not always translate into votes. I won because I worked very hard."

Moreno is a rare former SC student elected to its governing board. He was a journalism major who transferred to SDSU in 2007 after serving as News Editor of the Southwestern College Sun. He won state and national awards for his articles about the border and immigration. In 2013 Moreno was honored as Southwestern College Journalism Alumnus of the Year for his work covering underserved communities at the Chula Vista Star News.

His first foray into elective politics ended badly. He accepted an offer from newly-elected Chula Vista City Councilmember Jill Galvez to serve as her chief of staff. Moreno said he enjoyed serving the community and using his position to help people.

"It was a great job until it wasn't," he said.

Galvez, who at the time had mayoral ambitions, pulled a political stunt that shocked the council and the community. During a city council discussion of fire fighters she said

SOTO • PG 14

MORENO • PG 7

TURKISH NATIONALS ON FACULTY MOURN QUAKE DEVASTATION

BY EMILY INGCO

Earthquakes do not follow schedules.

A devastating 7.8 temblor struck the Syria-Turkey border area at 4:17 a.m.

At least 15,000 died in bed. About 60,000 are known to have perished.

Aftershocks of the February 6 quake shook as far as Southwestern College, where Turkey natives Bulent Bas and Cem Tont worried about relatives in their shattered homeland.

Geology Professor Bas was in his car when notified of the first earthquake.

"I was driving and I actually saw the notification on my Apple Watch from QuakeFeed," he said. "I glanced at it, saw that there was an earthquake, and then I saw Turkey! When I stopped at the red light I saw it was 7.8. I felt horrible because I knew how awful that (powerful an) earthquake is. (The region it struck) is densely populated, so I immediately realized this was going to be a disaster."

Fear for family members gripped him, he said, until he noticed the quake was far away from loved ones. Bas said his family is safe.

Gaziantep and neighboring cities were not as fortunate. Bas, a survivor of the 1994 magnitude 6.7 Northridge



Photo Courtesy of Ellfaysenurbay / AP

MASS CASUALTIES IN SYRIA AND TURKEY — United Nations estimates say more than 100,000 people perished as a result of a 7.8 earthquake near the Syria-Turkey border. SC Professors Bulent Bas and Cem Tont continue to monitor the situation.

(Los Angeles) earthquake that erupted around 4:30 a.m., said he sympathized with victims of the Turkish disaster.

"My heart just sunk because I saw the devastation and lack of immediate response," he said. "I knew the death toll would be really high, and I honestly don't believe the numbers the government put out. A lot of that rubble hasn't been searched and people put (death counts) at three

times the official number."

Bas is not alone. United Nations estimates range from 100,000 – 150,000 dead.

Turkey is on the East Anatolian Fault zone, a dangerous part of the world for quakes. Bas said the fault had been building up pressure for years and was due for a quake.

"Most people in southeastern Turkey are poor," he said. "The vast

majority didn't know of the earthquake potential there. The government didn't quite do its job of informing citizens and being disaster prepared. I think the biggest failing point is people don't know enough and blindly trust the government because they are desperate for resources."

Poor building standards in southeast and eastern Turkey include buildings not attached to foundations. Bas blamed the Turkish government for not springing into action to support working class citizens and failing to adequately invest in its infrastructure.

"(A disaster) is not a matter of if, but of when," he said.

Tont, the head coach of the men's soccer team, said he is optimistic the Turkish government will help citizens affected by the quakes.

"According to everybody, the president is responsible for the earthquake and everything," he said. "I'm not saying they are out of their minds, but they must be reasonable. To blame the president and the government, in my opinion, is ridiculous and it's time for Turkey to unite and help the wounds heal."

Tont said he was stunned when he heard about the catastrophe on the news.

"This happened in my country that I just (visited)," he said. "I feel sorrow for the people."

Fortunately, Tont's loved ones did not suffer any loss from the earthquakes because they reside in Istanbul, in northwest Turkey. Tont said he feels great sadness for his nation of origin, but is confident Turkey will recover.

"The most it will be is a year to rebuild," he said. "They are very active and quick. That seems reasonable and that's a super quick time to rebuild. In the meantime, there's (support) for people who lost their homes. Money has already been sent out for rent."

Local Syrians and Turks are pitching in, said Tont.

"House of Turkey at Balboa Park is collecting donations," he said. "(Cash) donations can also be made to ICSD (Islamic Center of San Diego)."

Bas said Turkey needs to make adjustments based on what it experienced in the earthquakes.

"We must educate ourselves and learn from others."

To assist the earthquake victims of Syria and Turkey, send contributions to the Islamic Center of San Diego, 7050 Eckstrom Ave., San Diego, CA 92111.

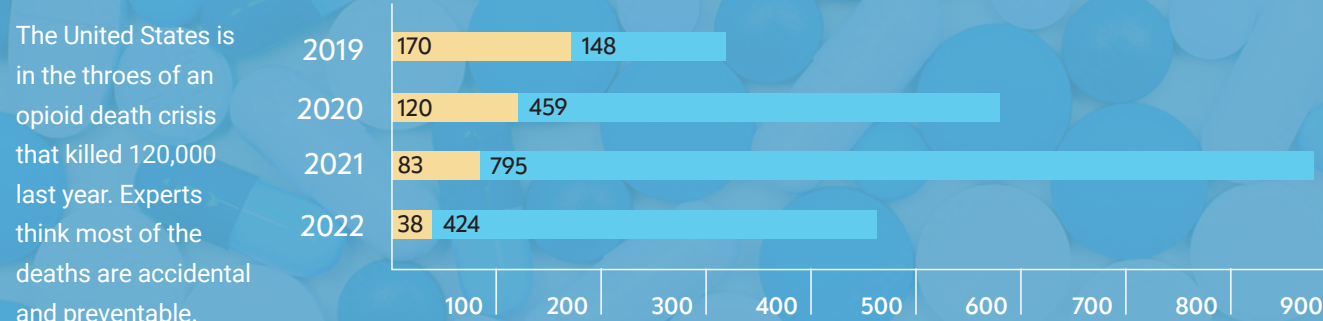
NEW HOPE TO PREVENT OPIOID FATALITIES

Narcan, the nasal spray that delays overdose deaths, is now available at no cost from a Chula Vista vending machine as well as the Chula Vista and National City police stations.



ACCIDENTAL DRUG MEDICATION DEATHS

Accidental Drug-Medication Deaths, Non-Opioid, Opioid, and Fentanyl cases



Source: San Diego County Open Data Portal

GRAPHIC BY RAZYLIN AVENDANO / STAFF

BY RAZYLIN M. AVENDANO

C OVID-19 has killed nearly 1.2 million Americans.

So have opioids.

Naloxone may be the wonder drug that saves tens of thousands of lives. Also known as Narcan, it is a fast acting nasal spray widely available at no cost in San Diego County.

Opioids are a class of drugs that include heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone and morphine that likely killed 120,000 Americans last year alone. Their intended use is to treat pain, but they are highly addictive and are often fatal if used improperly. Fentanyl is the worst of the bunch. It can be 100 times stronger than morphine and was the leading cause of opioid-related deaths in 2021, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

Fentanyl's power to kill is almost incomprehensible. A crystal the size of a baby aspirin can kill a person in minutes. Last month San Diego DEA agents seized a stash of smuggled fentanyl toxic enough to kill every person in the United States and Caribbean.

Free naloxone kits are available in a vending machine at the McAlister Institute South Bay Regional Recovery Center at 1180 Third Avenue, about six miles from the Chula Vista campus. It is San Diego County's first naloxone vending machine. Plans are to install 12 machines throughout the region, according to an NIDA spokesperson.

To access the medication, one needs to scan a barcode, complete a form and watch a short video demonstrating effective administer of naloxone. Naloxone is also available at the Chula Vista and National City police departments, no questions asked.

A New PATH, a Spring Valley rehabilitation organization, will deliver naloxone. The Harm Reduction Coalition of San Diego (HRCSD) reports that it has distributed more than 4,000 naloxone kits through mid-March, with hopes of passing out 33,000 by June.

Naloxone nasal spray is an FDA-approved opioid antidote to temporarily treat an opioid overdose. It works by attaching itself to opioid receptors and inhibiting its effects. There are no negative effects on the body if administered by mistake. Naloxone is fast-acting, but temporary. It lasts for about 30 to 90 minutes, enough time to call 911.

San Diego County's efforts are part of state-wide Naloxone Distribution Project, created by the California Department of Health Care Services in 2018.



FREE NARCAN —

This vending machine at the South Bay Regional Recovery Center, 1180 Third Avenue in Chula Vista, dispenses free doses of Narcan after viewing a short video on the proper administration of the overdose antidote.

PHOTO BY RAZYLIN AVENDANO / STAFF



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LAWMAKERS LIBERATE LOWRIDERS



Photo Courtesy of Rigoberto Reyes

ON THE ROAD AGAIN — After a 31-year absence National City and other Chicano communities may soon see a return of low riders and other modified vehicles cruising the boulevards. Falsely blamed for crime and gang activity by former Governors Ronald Reagan and Pete Wilson, cruising and low riders were banned throughout the state. Chicano activists have argued for three decades that the ban was racist and that low riders are a harmless, enjoyable part of SoCal culture.

CRUISING BAN LIFTED, LOW RIDERS MAY RETURN

BY RAZYLIN M. AVENDANO

NATIONAL CITY —

"Low and slow" is a go.

National City has officially repealed a 31-year ban on cruising that Latinos have argued for decades was racist and demeaning. Now advocates for low riders and Latino car clubs are pushing for a statewide green light for the resumption of cruise nights in Chicano communities.

"Si se pudo!" (Yes it is possible) rang out in the council chambers.

Celebrations continued a few days later on nearby Logan Avenue where nearly 400 lowriders and exotic cars gathered under the bridge for the 53rd celebration of Chicano Park Day. Rafael Perez of the United Lowrider Coalition said the repeal of anti-cruising laws are reminiscent of the original fight for Chicano Park in 1970 and it was proper to celebrate "the community coming together...in such a sacred place."

Legislation born in the South Bay has inspired cities like San Jose and Sacramento to repeal cruising bans. In February Assemblymember David Alvarez introduced Assembly Bill 436, which would amend the California Vehicle Code to allow cruising and the operation of height-adjusted vehicles.

Cruising, as defined by the code, is the "repetitive driving of a motor vehicle past a traffic control point" within a certain span of time. Alvarez's bill would amend it to exclude Section 21100 — which currently gives local authorities the power to enact anti-cruising ordinances.

Alvarez said the time to end the war on lowriders has arrived.

"(AB 436) would allow individuals who want to participate in cruising to do so without the threat of potentially being pulled over by law enforcement," he said. "Currently, under the California Vehicle Code, that activity is banned in several cities throughout California."

Alvarez said his bill would also remove Section 24008 of the code that deems vehicles modified to be lower than the rims as illegal.

"The law currently says that if your vehicle is too low, you are violating state law in the entire state, not just in different cities," he said. "This would make cars that are lower than traditional cars legal. So it is both the car and the act of cruising and bill (addresses)."

National City enacted its cruising ban in 1992 due to stated concerns about traffic congestion and gang activity. Latino leaders including Herman Baca of the National City-based Committee on Chicano Rights scoffed at the notion that middle aged professionals who often invest \$100,000 in a modified car were gang bangers.

"It was anti-Chicano to the core," he said. "No one ever died in a high speed collision involving a lowrider."

CRUISING • PG 11

'AS SOCIAL AS TACOS AND THE BEACH BOYS' —

Chicano car clubs worked hard to overturn the ban on cruising and low riders, including Los Amigos, the venerated organization known for its humanitarian work.



Photo Courtesy of Rigoberto Reyes

LEAKS

• CONT FROM PG 1

New buildings struggle with heating, cooling, leaking and other construction problems

Cardenas said the heating and air conditioning problems were there at the outset.

“When we first moved in, I knew that all the IT technicians (on the other side of the building) were complaining that it was too hot in there and everybody over here was freezing,” she said. “I think the A/C and heat were not working. I put in one (work) request because (the dean’s) office felt really cold.”

MELTDOWN WORRIES RETURN

Summer heat brought cold terror to IT staff, Cardenas said, when the air conditioning failed to keep the mainframe chamber cool enough. A catastrophic meltdown in 2015 was on leadership’s minds during construction of the new building. Another meltdown may have been narrowly averted.

Then there are the water issues.

When Cardenas returned from winter break she said she wondered if she was dreaming when she heard it was “raining indoors.” Leaks were reported in at least two different areas of her department’s half of the building.

“There was one in John (Elder’s) office,” she said. “Same thing with (the office of) Eduardo (Diaz). There was also a leak in the office by the conference room. That one was a big leak because the ceiling tile got very wet and it fell apart. The bulletin board got stained, so they had to purchase a new one.”

She immediately submitted a Service Now work request for these leaks, she said, and received help within a week. Days later, however, the leak in Diaz’s office returned as bad as ever. It was dripping right by his chair.

“For a while there, we kept going back and forth (with Facilities personnel),” he said. “Every time it rained, the leak would reappear the next day. We submitted a report, and someone would come in and work on it.”

Diaz’s ceiling still leaks and the carpet in the office has been dampened. He said it is stressful worrying about the leak, the damage it is doing to the carpet and the health hazards that can accompany wet carpeting.

Besides temperature and moisture issues, the building described as “state of the art” by its head contractor also has problems with its front door alarm going off randomly.

“It’s like a damn car alarm in the parking lot at Walmart,” said an IT employee. “We’ve basically stopped paying attention to it.”

SOGGY, COLD POLICE STATION

A new \$6.8 million Campus Police Station right across the street from IT is having virtually the same problems.

Chief Safety Officer Marco Bareno said when the rains began in late 2022, leaks followed.

“One of the officers discovered a leak in the men’s locker room area,” he said. “Another one was in their workout area and I think the third one was in the conference room.”

SCPD Officer Mark Rensink later reported a leak in a restroom.

“I think we only found it a couple weeks ago,” he said.

Water damage has caused ceiling bubbles to pop out like a rash. Bone white paint has darkened as it absorbs water.

In contrast to the speedy service Cardenas said she received in IT, the leaks in the Campus Police building were not fixed for months after the initial Service Now work request was submitted.

“I remember when they came in to check,” Bareno said. “There was a bubbling on the side of the vents, which was due to condensation on the seal of the air conditioning ducts. The damage of the condensation of the humidity and the fix of the actual physical leak was done a bit sooner. I want to say a couple of months for the fixing of the leaks. They are slowly repairing the bubbling.”

Bareno said the water issues are irritating, but did not interfere with the conduct of police business.

“It is expected when you move into a new building to have issues and kinks like that,” he said. “My only concern is health issues. A leak obviously needs to be fixed quickly because there’s the potential of

CONT • NEXT PAGE

■ PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, POLICE STATION, IT

BUILDINGS

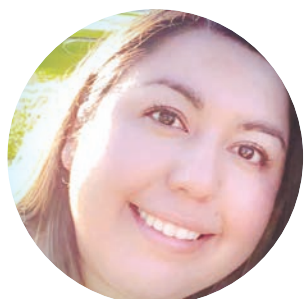
THREE NEW MULTI-MILLION STRUCTURES SPRING LEAKS

HVAC FAILURES TOUGH ON STUDENTS, DANGEROUS FOR TECHNOLOGY



“I was told when the building was first built, ‘Yeah, this will have water standing on top of the skylights, but don’t worry. They’ll be watertight.’ I thought, Really? That doesn’t sound right.”

— MICHAEL BUCKLEY, SC theater professor



“When we first moved in, I knew that all the IT technicians (on the other side of the building) were complaining that it was too hot in there and everybody over here was freezing. I think the A/C and heat were not working. I put in one (work) request because (the dean’s) office felt really cold.”

— ANGELA CARDENAS, SC IT administrative assistant



“One of the officers discovered a leak in the men’s locker room area. Another one was in their workout area and I think the third one was in the conference room.”

— MARCO BARENO, SC Chief Safety Officer



“Two of the instances were covered under warranty — the Performing Arts and the IT. The HVAC issue with the Police Department was not, so the district had to fix it from the back end. Our partners and contractors help us find the solutions for whatever issues we have under warranty as well as whatever else isn’t covered.”

— LILLIAN LEOPOLD, SC Public Information Officer

MICHAEL BUCKLEY PHOTO BY APRIL ABARRONDO / STAFF

Marco Bareno Photo Courtesy of Southwestern College, Lillian Leopold Photo Courtesy of Southwestern College

fungus growing over time and it can create health issues for the employees. For us, the leaks have not impacted our health and were mainly a concern of deterioration over time of the wall and ceiling for the bubbling (as well as) the flooring.”

Like the IT team, campus police officers shivered in low temperatures when the heater stopped working.

“I received an email from one of my employees saying ‘Hey, it’s pretty cold in here,’” Baren said. “I could feel the cold when I came to check. It was noticeably cold in here. The heater wasn’t working and the (outside) temperatures were terribly low at that time. Within two days they had people working here to fix the heater issue.”

THEATER REMAINS ‘UNFINISHED’

Professor of Theater Michael Buckley said his colleagues and students were in the same leaky boat – and then some. Buckley, the chief liaison with builders during construction of the PAC, said the celebrated new building has at least 40 serious issues that remain unresolved.

Leaks in the skylight roof above the tool shop are a terrible problem, Buckley said. It was also a situation he and his colleagues saw coming long before the winter rains began.

“I was told when the building was first built, ‘Yeah, this will have water standing on top of the skylights, but don’t worry. They’ll be watertight,’” Buckley said. “I thought, Really? That doesn’t sound right.”

Theater Operations Technician Brandon Watterson spotted the leaks after a storm and Buckley reported them through an online Service Now request. Facilities personnel fixed it, he said.

Then the real trouble began.

A hazardous leak in the theater’s control room packed with expensive technology and electronics threatened a fortune in damages and shutdown of the PAC.

“We had all the roof tiles out at one point,” he said. “We also had to put plastic sheeting over our stuff because this is worth tens of thousands of dollars and we can’t have water dripping on it. They put in new ducts and replaced the ceiling, so it was all taken care of by the contractors.”

Many serious defects remain unaddressed, Buckley said.

“Bottom line, the building is not finished, even though we’ve been teaching here for three semesters now,” he said. “There’s a whole laundry list – nearly 40 items long – of things that have not been finished and have never been completed. At one point the contractor and proposition team, they all got in their cars and said, ‘If you have any problems give us a call.’ However, whenever we call, we have a very difficult time getting any action. The only times we really have been able to get some action are when we have administration involved. Our requests fall on deaf ears.”

BALKY DISABILITY DOORS

Buckley said the theater may not be safe for people who use wheelchairs. Difficulties with the blue disability door button have left some disabled guests in a lurch, he said, because they were not able to open the very heavy front doors of the PAC. Problems with the front doors could endanger disabled students and patrons in the event of an emergency evacuation, Buckley said. Facilities personnel have not responded to his concerns, he said, nor have contractors.

PAC has also suffered from balmy and frigid temperatures, Buckley said, due to an uncontrollable HVAC system.

“The HVAC system has still not been fine tuned to the point where we have comfortable temperatures in every room,” Buckley said. “We had dance classes up in our (second story) dance studios with 85-degree heat, just sweltering. We did a show last semester called The Frankenstein Project and audience members were bundled up (in winter jackets and blankets) because we still can’t get the temperature right.”

These issues take a physical and emotional toll, Buckley said. He was promised control over the temperatures of the building by campus leaders and architects, he said, but has never had it. Instead, he said, he is continuously told college facilities staff and contractors “are working on it.”



PHOTO BY EMILY INGCO/ STAFF



PHOTO BY EMILY INGCO/ STAFF

BUCKETS OF RAIN – (top) Leaks in the roof of the police station have damaged the ceiling and some carpets. (above) SC’s \$64 million Performing Arts Center has numerous leaks and at least 40 other construction-related problems.

HOT AND COLD TROUBLE IN DRIPS AND DRABS

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Completion Date – August 2021

Cost - \$64 million

Reported Problems:

- 40 reported deficiencies

- Leaks in electrical control room
- Leaks in tool room
- HVAC problems
- Damaged roof tiles
- Unreliable disabled door controls

INSTITUTIONAL TECHNOLOGY BUILDING

Completion Date – July 2022

Cost - \$25.6 million

Reported Problems:

- Leaks in the ceiling
- Insufficient cooling of temperature sensitive mainframes
- HVAC problems
- Malfunctioning front door alarm
- Wet carpets

CAMPUS POLICE STATION

Completion Date – September 2018

Cost - \$6.8 million

Reported Problems:

- Leaks in locker room, workout room, restroom, conference room
- HVAC problems
- Damaged ceiling tiles
- Wet carpets

“It’s difficult when you know that your students are freezing,” Buckley said. “They are sitting there, bundled up, and you’re trying to keep moving to keep warm. It was the opposite problem when we first opened in 2021. It felt like there was no air moving at all and it was difficult trying to speak loudly through a mask. Not having control over the temperature is frustrating and it is difficult for your students to focus when their classroom is too hot or too cold.”

Buckley said he is trying to maintain his sense of humor and perspective. He said he realizes college employees working in less opulent surroundings may not want to hear theater faculty “complaining about the Maserati.”

“This is without a doubt a lovely, wonderful building,” he said. “It’s just the little things that (cause problems). Why can’t we just finish the building? I can point to things in the shop that are still not finished and tools that are not hooked up correctly. They haven’t really buttoned it up and put the finishing touches on the building.”

A highly-regarded professional theatrical designer known throughout Southern California, Buckley has worked in scores of elite performance spaces, including the campuses of the San Diego Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, SD REP, San Diego Opera and many universities. He is part of the “User Group,” a select committee that met with the architects during the building of the PAC. The UCLA-educated artist was an essential part of the design and building of the PAC, but now feels marginalized, he said.

“It is discouraging to me that my voice isn’t being heard when reporting about things that haven’t been finished,” he said. “I’m not just some student or whiny faculty member who came in and said ‘I don’t like this.’ Why do I need a dean or vice president to say the HVAC needs to be fixed? Why can’t my voice as a member of the User Group be respected?”

ADMINISTRATORS DRIVE THE PROCESS

College administrators and Facilities personnel declined requests for comment. Public Information Officer Lillian Leopold acknowledged the frustrations of employees working in hot, cold and damp buildings. Contractual warranties on new buildings dictate the kind of response faculty and staff may receive, she said. Certain infrastructure defects are covered by the warranty, she said, others are not.

“Two of the instances were covered under warranty – the Performing Arts and the IT,” Leopold said. “The HVAC issue with the Police Department was not, so the district had to fix it from the back end. Our partners and contractors help us find the solutions for whatever issues we have under warranty as well as whatever else isn’t covered.”

Leopold said enforcing warranties is a district responsibility that has to involve management.

“With warranties it is not for a particular user or individual faculty member (to directly engage contractors),” she said. “(That is the role of) the district because only (it) can enforce warranties. The district has the contract with the individual contractors. It is best if the user just deals with our Facilities people.”

Leopold said the HVAC systems in the three new buildings are being reevaluated.

“I don’t really have control over the temperature in my office either, but I can tell you that there is a contract to bring in a company that’s going to work on the HVAC system,” she said.

SC’s Facilities team is undersized, Leopold said, but doing its best to handle problems as they arise.

“We have a very small Facilities, Operations and Maintenance Department,” she said. “They are taking care of all of the square footage that exists for the old buildings on all of our campuses (and) are the overseers for the new construction. They are a small, but mighty team. When something comes to them, they prioritize it in accordance to matters of safety and damage to property.”

Buckley said less rainy, more temperate weather in May ought to help keep electronics dry and students from coming to class wrapped in blankets, but multiple issues linger.

The Maserati remains in the shop.

FRIENDSHIP

• CONT FROM PG 1

In January, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials announced resumption of construction of a new 30-foot fence surrounding the park. Advocates for the park say that will essentially end the dream of an international gathering place between a pair of erstwhile allies that more often act like frenemies.

Border Patrol officials argue that increasing pressure on the southern border requires the Trump-era wall be completed. They also claim that a meeting area for friends and family between the border walls would remain untouched, though locked up. New fencing will only allow family members to touch fingertips, according to Mona Kuczynski of Friends of Friendship Park.

“I think everyone who has been to Friendship Park and understands its importance was absolutely horrified by the proposal,” she said.

BINATIONAL BIPARTISANSHIP

In 1971 the idea of a binational park similar to Peace Arch Border Crossing at the Canadian border in Blaine, Washington was about as controversial as Charlie Brown or mustard on hotdogs. Republicans and Democrats loved the idea and conservative president Richard Nixon’s wife Pat inaugurated the park. It was a different border then, said Gente Unida founder Enrique Morones.

“Much of the border was the same in 1971 as it was in 1848,” he said. “A single strand of wire was the border at Playas de Tijuana and Border Field State Park. You could meet family and friends at the border.”

Morones said the days of meandering into Mexico along the beach for tacos or paletas came to an end during Operation Gatekeeper in the mid-1990s.

“That’s really when everything began to change,” he said.

A 14-mile metal wall built with surplus military steel grate platforms vivisected San Diego and Tijuana, forcing migrants into the dangerous eastern mountains and deserts. Friendship Park remained open, but only when the Border Patrol opened it. The walls were closing in.

On September 11, 2001 the gates slammed shut when the border was sealed following terrorist attacks on the East Coast. Militarization of the once-sleepy border was underway.

Daniel Watman of Friends of Friendship Park and manager of the Binational Garden said the hulking 30-foot walls would all but destroy the park’s aura created by the visionaries of the 1970s.

“When people are separated, divided, they become suspicious because they don’t know (the people on the other side),” he said. “The original park created a new narrative as to how people interact. Here, in this place, it was people united.”

Watman said the Friends have not given up.

“We are having community meetings to raise awareness,” he said. “We are talking with (local) legislators who have Friendship Park in their jurisdiction. They are very supportive.”

Kuczynski and Watman said they are now locked in on bigger political targets.

“We are urging Gov. Newsom to tell President Biden to stop building this wall,” said Watman. “This (sealing off of the border) does not align with California values.”

Watman said the Friends of Friendship Park has had success raising awareness, and has made inroads with Newsom and Biden.

Kuczynski said she remains cynical. “(This large wall is) exactly what Donald Trump designed and what Donald Trump built along other portions of the border,” she said. “And the discouraging thing is that Joe Biden is finishing the job for Donald Trump.”

Time is slipping away for the Friends and their allies. Construction on the wall through the park is underway and scheduled for completion in six months. Mrs. Nixon would likely be disappointed.

COMPILED BY EMILY INGCO / STAFF

BYU

• CONT FROM PG 1

LGBTQ students and activists speak out against institutional discrimination

students.” Raynbow Collective organizes back-to-school Pride events, DEI training and a popular art show.

Raynbow Collective PR Manager Haley Malesich said the move was hurtful.

“(BYU administrators) make statements about inclusivity and loving your neighbor,” she said, “but fail to show up for the LGBTQ+ community and give full love only on the condition that you change who you are to fit their mold.”

Malesich said LGBTQ students are starting to push back.

“We want LGBTQ+ students to know that they have a community of people here to encourage them and support them,” she said. “No one deserves to feel excluded or stranded with no life vest. Our goal is to listen, lift and love.”

Raynbow Collective works alongside 14 organizations that support the greater queer community of Utah. Malesich said faculty and students are becoming more vocal in their allyship.

“Alongside our friends at the Cougar Pride Center, USGA, Equality Utah, the Out Foundation, Black Menaces, and so many others, I have seen a surge of support and love within the community and from allies to the community,” she said. “I feel like our organizations bring out the best in people. We’ve been able to create powerful, deep friendships while advocating for a better, more inclusive Utah. I’ve also seen more people stand up for the rights of those being discriminated against. It’s a beautiful thing to see so many people united in purpose.”

Grace (a pseudonym) is a freshman at BYU. She identifies as an LGBTQ Mormon, which they said is often a dichotomy difficult to reconcile.

“I want to talk openly about LGBTQ topics, but I’m scared to,” they said. “None of the organizations made for queer BYU students are school affiliated and none can meet on campus. Within these groups, the LGBTQ community at BYU is very vibrant and supportive. We meet and give each other advice, comfort and resources. We warn each other which professors to avoid and also tell each other which ones are allies.”

Grace said their time at BYU has not been all bad, but they feel LGBTQ students are marginalized.

“(BYU has an) Office of Belonging, but that is the only official (institution encouraging diversity) I know of,” they said.

Grace said the conundrum of LGBTQ students’ attraction to BYU seems illogical, but is driven by pragmatism.

“Why do queer students go to BYU?” they asked. “Why don’t they just go somewhere else? We think it’s going to be different. It’s the best choice financially. Some (students) don’t know they are queer until they’re already at BYU. Financial control by parents. Social pressure to attend.”

Grace is attending BYU for spiritual reasons, they said. Many queer students are still faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but chafe under an “honor code” hostile to LGBTQ students.

“Change is likely to be slow at BYU,” they said. “The honor code stuff is controlled by people very high up (in the church hierarchy), so even if all the staff and students wanted change (to campus culture) it would be unlikely.”

Sydney Mortenson is a freshman at BYU and an LGBTQ ally.

“Most of the people I have talked with seem to be very kind and accepting of everyone,” she said. “I will say, though, that there have been a few times I’ve heard some very homophobic things said by students and people on campus.”

Mortenson said LGBTQ students are subject to the old Christian canard “love the sinner, hate the sin.”



ILLUSTRATION BY LANEY NORMAN / STAFF

“Most of the people I have talked with seem to be very kind and accepting of everyone. I will say, though, that there have been a few times I’ve heard some very homophobic things said by students and people on campus.”

SYDNEY MORTENSON
BYU Freshman, LGBTQ ally

BYU’s surround Provo, Utah community can be rough on LGBTQ students, she said. Once, while riding a city bus, she mentioned to a woman that she was majoring in animation. The woman blurted out her disapproval of a same sex kiss in the Disney film “Lightyear.”

“She said she thought it was terrible how early kids are being exposed to LGBTQ relationships and how Disney should not pretend those relationships are normal,” Mortenson said. “Even though many of the people I’ve met on campus are amazing and accepting of everyone, I absolutely understand how (members) of the LGBTQ community can feel unwelcome and unsafe at BYU. The university needs to encourage its students and faculty to be more inclusive.”

Student are modeling the way forward, she said.

“BYU teaches students to love everyone, but I feel like there are definitely times at school where that value is not kept,” she said. “I absolutely love groups like the Raynbow Collective and the Black Menaces and everything they’ve done for the school, but I think more should be done by BYU itself.”

Mortenson cited the BYU honor code, strictly held behavioral mores that ban “homosexual behavior.” Under the honor code, LGBTQ couples are not to hold hands, hug, kiss or date in public.

Mortenson said the honor code encourages straight students to rat out LGBTQ classmates.

“I think the biggest issue with the honor code is that most people don’t even bother reading it, so they are just reporting whatever they deem inappropriate,” she said. “The honor code is very outdated.”

BYU alumnus Julian Orr went viral with more than 1.6 million views when they sowed a rainbow flag into their graduation gown and flashed it on BYU’s Marriot Center Jumbo Tron after receiving their diploma. It was a violation of the honor code and could have cost Orr their degree.

“I knew there could be consequences for what I did and I was ready to face whatever it was,” they said. “When I was making this decision I remembered something that had happened this year. On Rainbow Day there were students that went up to the Y for BYU on the mountain and they took lights and made the Y a rainbow. To be recognized! BYU made it very, very clear rules against this. (The students) did that knowing they could be arrested and knowing they could be charged.”

Despite the prejudicial treatment, South County LGBTQ students still go to BYU. Pat (a pseudonym), who identifies as queer, said pragmatism weighs in.

“BYU has the program I wanted

and every year it ranks Top 10 in the country for \$3,000 a semester,” they said. “Look me in the eyes and tell me that’s not an option you might take. I was a teenager when I decided to go to BYU. I was deeply entrenched in my religion and I knew I would be in a community of likeminded people at BYU.”

Pat rejects the “you knew what you were getting into” rhetoric they often hear.

“I did not know (about the anti-LGBTQ culture),” they said. “Nobody knows what BYU is like until you’re actually on campus and seeing what’s going on.”

Pat said he made a sound fiscal decision.

“If I had chosen my major at a different university or a different state, I would be paying student loans akin to medical school,” they said.

Mortenson said BYU is a great academic university, but it needs to evolve. There should be room for Mormon LGBTQ students fighting for a better BYU. The university’s motto, “Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve,” remains aspirational, she said.

“The university needs to learn from its minority populations,” she said. “LGBTQ students deserve a chance to pursue a better education and feel comfortable while doing so. They deserve the chance to go forth and serve their community.”

DEVELOPMENTAL

• CONT FROM PG 1

Faculty divided over elimination of remedial math and English classes

California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 705 in 2017. It pushes students directly into transfer-level courses with the option to take developmental courses only after their performance suggests a high likelihood of not passing. Last year Assembly Bill 1705 completely eliminated remedial options. It requires community colleges to place all students into transfer-level courses, regardless of their educational background and academic achievement.

SC English Department Chair John Rieder said a majority of English faculty have embraced the law, something English and Reading faculty dispute. Rieder said a creative new approach is working for English students.

"My inbox is not filled with students asking me to bring back developmental English," he said. "I haven't received one in three years."

Students who seek extra help may enroll in English 115 support classes that use the Power Study Program which includes in-class tutors, he said.

"The Power Study Program is so great because both the Power Study leader and the teacher can circulate through the groups and give more support right there where students need it in real-time," he said.

Not all reading and English faculty agree. Several argued that "the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction" by eliminating remedial classes and reclassifying them as non-credit offerings. Research by Promise Neighborhood warns that SC will very soon enroll legions of students entering at below college level in reading and writing.

"We are setting lots of students up for failure," warned a reading educator. "We have pulled the rug out from under students who are coming to us for help."

Pathways in the mathematics department face similar challenges, according to faculty. SC students who started in transfer-level math after the passing of AB 705 saw a triple increase in completion counts, according to the California Community Colleges website. At the same time, the completion rates for Latino and Black populations have fallen, according to college data.

Dr. Silvia Nadalet, dean of the School of Math, Science and Engineering, said the college is offering corequisite support classes that teach the fundamentals of math, along with noncredit algebra courses.

"Depending on your placement, we might require you to take a two-unit co-requisite support (class), so that some of this prerequisite material can be covered," she said.

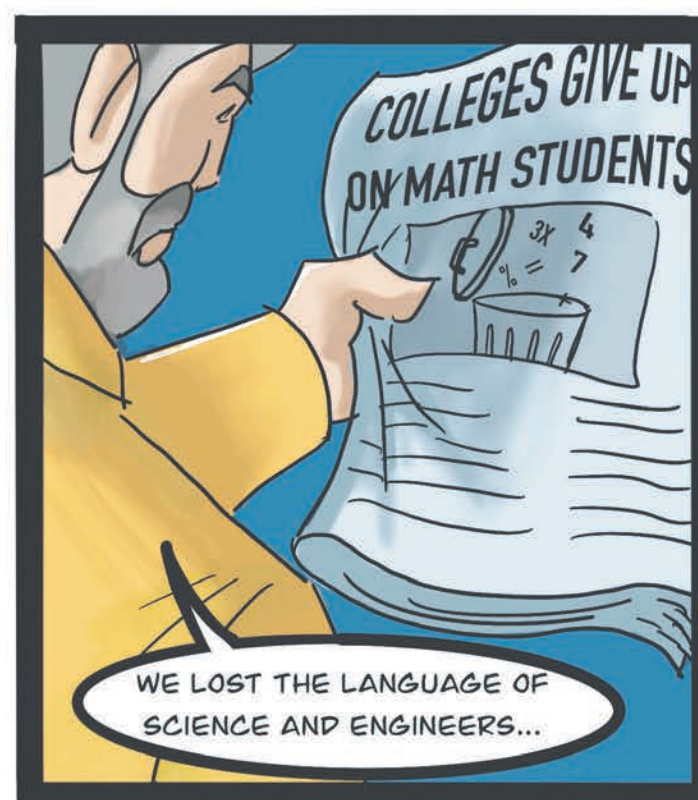
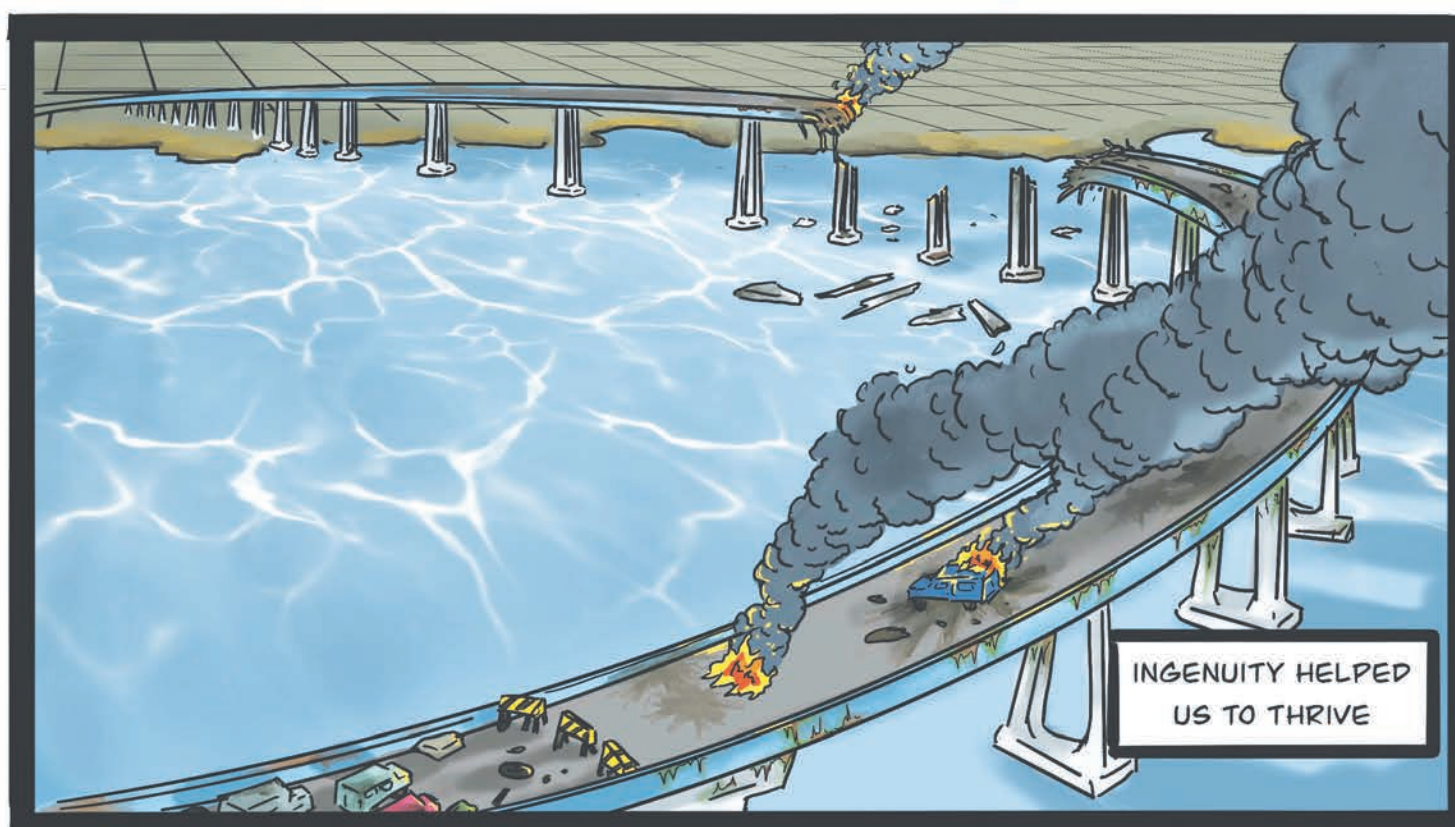
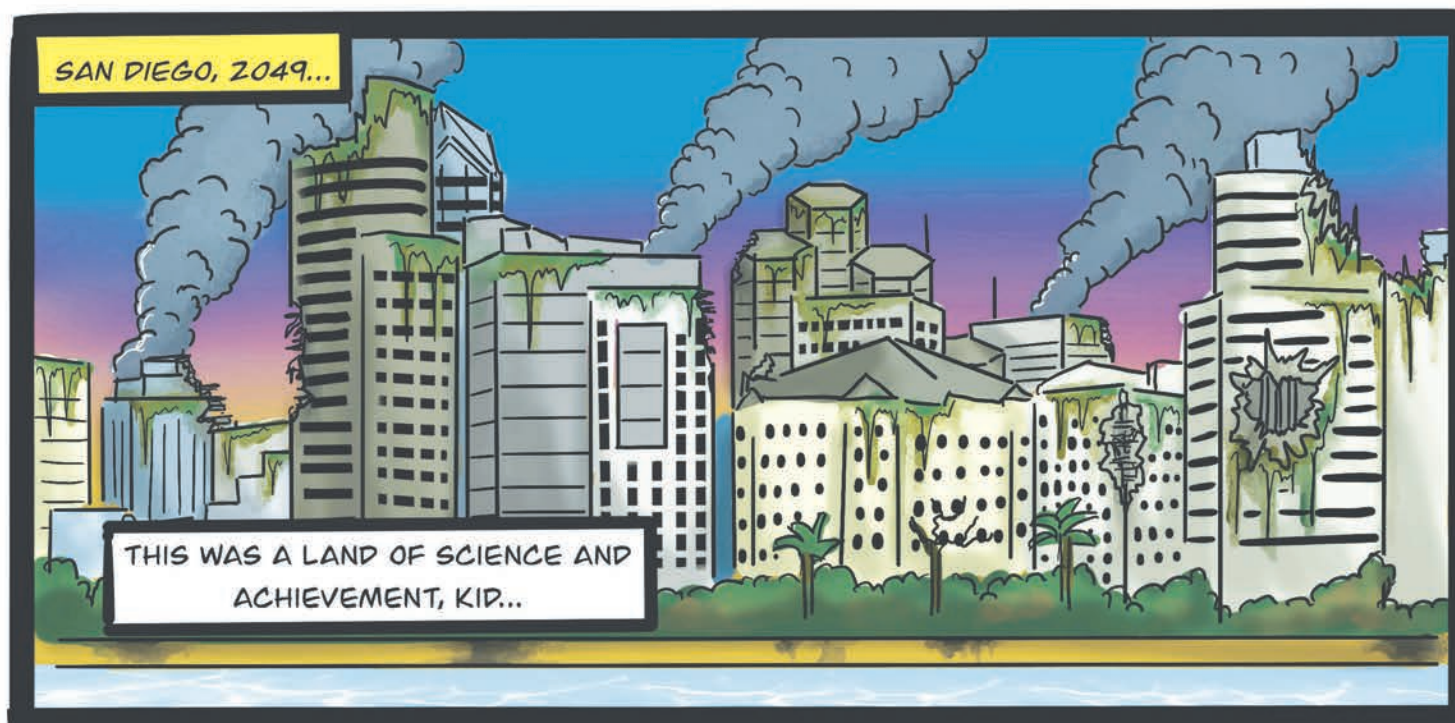
Math faculty are working on "self-guided" Canvas modules, she said. Students who want to review a specific concept can find help in the form of worksheets, she said.

Placement exams are no longer offered at any community college, according to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's office. Class placement is now determined exclusively by high school transcripts.

SC President Dr. Mark Sanchez said the change is not about eliminating courses but redesigning the STEM pathway. He advises the faculty to set up a strong curriculum to meet the financial goals of the students.

"So (the students are) doing this, they're taking courses with the intent of trying to get through as quickly as possible," he said. "The longer we keep them in these sequences, the more they get frustrated."

San Diego State University is working with SC to improve gateway transfer-level mathematics with a project called Mathematics Persistence through Inquiry and Equity. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the project is a work in progress. Sanchez said it may take three to five years to determine the effectiveness of



Silvia Nadalet Photo Courtesy of Esmeralda Orozco

ILLUSTRATION BY EDMUNDO GODINEZ / STAFF



"Depending on your placement, we might require you to take a two-unit co-requisite support (class), so that some of this prerequisite material can be covered."

DR. SILVIA NADALET
SC Dean of the School of Math,
Science and Engineering



"The longer we keep students in these sequences, the more they get frustrated."

DR. MARK SANCHEZ
SC President

the curriculum.

Mathematics Department Chair Kimberly Puen Eclar is leading the project as a principal investigator. The goal, she said, is to improve equity in the classroom by elevating the skills of faculty and monitoring student success rates.

"We're tracking the longevity of the student and how they did in math," she said. "We (do not) have any answers (yet) because we are in the process of collecting data and doing the research."

Not all students are ready to jump into transfer-level courses if they enter college without passing intermediate algebra, said Eclar. Students should have the option to take classes based on their different needs, she said, but the state has taken that away.

"The state has said it would be better for the students to take pre-calculus, fail and attempt precalculus a second time than to take intermediate algebra to get to precalculus," she said.

Eclar said students need to learn math sequentially. Teaching the pre-calculus class with co-requisite support simultaneously will not address the learning gaps many students face, she said.

Another concern is the prospect of community colleges no longer offering precalculus classes by 2025, according to Eclar. Calculus is the first transfer-level mathematics course listed on the SC catalog. She said the new legislation will not require prerequisite courses as part of the major's requirements, placing students directly in calculus from the very beginning of the STEM pathway.

"Students should only be allowed into calculus if their foundation (is) good," she said, "but now it's just trying to do all three levels at the same time, which I think is a horrible, horrible idea."

UCSD junior Ricky Suarez, a former SC student, attributes his success to taking developmental math. He said passing intermediate algebra led to a full scholarship to UCSD.

Suarez said the current support system is insufficient. The fast pace of the refresher courses cannot replace a semester's worth of learning, he said, making it difficult for students to catch up on their own time.

"I don't want students to feel like they can't do (STEM classes)," he said. "If you can't learn (basic math) in community college, where can you learn it?"

Math Professor Peter Herrera said he has seen students enroll in pre-calculus with no algebra experience. He advises them to step back and take developmental classes first. Herrera said students are facing a disadvantage the choices are taken away in the name of equity.

"We need that extra chance to let the students go to a lower level to give them the knowledge and confidence that they can do it," he said.

Herrera said he tries to help students build self-esteem through math.

"I believe all students can succeed, regardless of the level, if we give them the equitable support that they need and meet them at their level," he said. "(We must) provide what they need to reach a common level of success. But we need the proper support to do that."

MORENO

• CONT FROM PG 2

New trustee a rare former SC student, National City and SUHI 'homeboy'

in open session that she was then and there firing her staff member and giving his salary to the city to hire a fire fighter. Besides that fact that Moreno's salary would not pay for fire fighter, a single council member cannot hire anyone.

"It was a cheap piece of political theater," Moreno said. "She did that without ever speaking to me. Everyone in the room gasped when she did it. I was fired publicly for a political purpose. When that happened, I thought I was done with politics."

Public condemnation rained down on Galvez who flamed out in her bid to become mayor.

Moreno was born in Chula Vista and raised in National City. He graduated from Sweetwater High School unsure about his goals.

"I was a kid from National City raised by my grandparents, low income," he said. "I didn't know what I wanted in life. Coming to Southwestern changed my life."

Moreno discovered journalism and became more aware of social issues in the South Bay. He found

"Go where the road leads you and keep your foot on the gas. And during your journey keep believing in yourself. If you do that and stick with it, you will get where you want to go."

ROBERT MORENO
SC governing board member

his voice, he said, and grew fond of telling the stories of underserved people in the community.

"Southwestern gave me a lot," he said. "Now I want to help the students like me who go there today. When I was a student at Southwestern (the college) had the reputation (for taking) a long time to get through, not the 2-3 years we are told when we started. Back then, students could be here for six, seven or eight years. I was surprised this (situation) still exists. It was one of the reasons I ran for the governing board."

Moreno said he would also work to boost enrollment, raise the university graduation rates of Southwestern College transfer students, provide secure housing for low-income students and make the campus a safe space for students and employees.

"I also think we need more partnerships with universities to increase transfers," he said. "Programs like TAG (that guarantee transfers from SC to SDSU) work and benefit our community."

None of this will happen overnight, he said, and will require working cooperatively with his board colleagues and college administrators. He acknowledged that he has much to learn about community college leadership.

"Southwestern College taught me a lot when I was a student and it will teach me again," he said. "My background in journalism and community work will help."

Moreno said he wants to help to encourage new generations of SC students to reach for their dreams.

"Go where the road leads you and keep your foot on the gas," he said. "And during your journey keep believing in yourself. If you do that and stick with it, you will get where you want to go."

VIEWPOINTS

Editorials • Opinions • Letters to the Editor



The mission of the Southwestern College Sun is to serve its campuses and their communities by providing information, insights and stimulating discussions of news, activities and topics relevant to our readers. The staff strives to produce a newspaper that is timely, accurate, fair, interesting, visual and accessible to readers. Though The Sun is a student publication, staff members ascribe to the ethical and moral guidelines of professional journalists.

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Student Press Law Center National College Press Freedom Award 2011, 2018	Student Newspaper General Excellence 2002-23
National Newspaper Association National College Newspaper of the Year 2004-2022	Society of Professional Journalists National Mark of Excellence 2001-22 First Amendment Award 2002, 2005
Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker Awards 2003-06, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012-2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022	San Diego Press Club Excellence in Journalism 1999-2022 Directors Award for Defense of Free Speech 2012
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Columbia University Scholastic Press Association Gold Medal for Journalism Excellence 2001-23	American Scholastic Press Association Community College Newspaper of the Year
College Media Association National College Newspaper of the Year 2020, 22	
California College Media Association Outstanding College/University Newspaper	



ONGOING CORRUPTION POISONS OUR COLLEGE

Southwestern College never seems to learn its lesson. Crime doesn't pay nor does covering up crime. When a crime is committed, the perpetrator must be brought to justice, not protected, even if that person is an administrator. Especially if the person is an administrator. Yet our college's never-ending cycle of corruption tromps on, crushing our reputation under its jackboots.

This institution's woeful history of unethical and often criminal behavior in its top ranks is sickening. The ATM scandal is not an anomaly. It is business as usual, the latest in a long series of sleazy activity that seems to be handed down from administration to administration.

The brazen theft of an ATM machine by three employees of the SC Grounds Department – including manager Juan Chavez – is the kind of jaw dropping story no one would believe if it was not real. Chavez, Efrain Correa and Abdon Hernandez-Jimenez used a fork lift to pry an ATM machine loaded with money for FAFSA students from the floor of the Student Center building. It was carted to the Grounds shop, forced open and emptied of \$9,600.

Hernandez-Jimenez, the expendable hourly employee, was immediately terminated, the sacrificial lamb of the trio. The penalty for Correa, a full-time college employee, was five months paid leave and his resignation.

The penalty for Chavez? A free pass to a full retirement. Seriously.

It gets worse. College administrators kept the ATM incident tightly under wraps since September and might have gotten away with it had it not been for a laudatory governing board proclamation honoring the disgraced manager.

"...BE IT PROCLAIMED, that Juan Chavez is deserving of recognition for their dedicated years and services, and deserves the commendation of the Governing Board, administrators, faculty, staff and students of the Southwestern Community College District..."

A pat on the back to Chavez and a slap in the face to Southwestern's faculty and staff.

Sadly, reading through past issues of The Sun is a virtual crime log of venality and corruption. Southwestern College is a publically-funded feeding trough for piggish vagabond college administrators hired willy-nilly with scant (or no) background checks. A few examples:

1999: College President Tom Conte is forced to fire his friend, the VP of Academic Affairs, after the VP swats a female student on the butt at a meeting. It was not his first example of hands-on management. Conte secretly paid the VP a \$450,000 "severance package" equal to three years pay. Conte almost got away with this gift of taxpayer funds until The Sun broke the story. He was forced to retire early.

2002: President Serafin Zasueta faced 20 years in prison and a \$1 million fine for spending college funds on a political campaign. He was forced to resign.

2006: The college president and two administrator pals are fired or forced to resign for sexual harassment, a case that cost the taxpayers a small future.

2013: In a case the San Diego County District Attorney called the "worst corruption scandal in San Diego County history," 12 SC administrators, governing board members and contractors they were taking "gifts" from were charged with 165 felonies for corruption, bribery, extortion, perjury and blackmail. All pleaded guilty to avoid prison. Former college president Raj Kumar Chopra and VP of Fiscal Services Nicholas Alioto led the way. Both had been charged with criminal activity at prior jobs. Eventually 22 SC administrators were fired or forced to resign.

2011-22: A series of administrators in the Human Resources department are charged with criminal or unethical behavior and fired or forced to resign.

We could go on and on and on, but the question is, when does it stop?

Southwestern College has a corruption problem that is baked into the culture. It simmers like flickering embers and bursts periodically into a raging inferno. It may subside, but it never goes away. It cannot be extinguished. It decays our reputation and our spirit. It diminishes us.

Corruption at our college reinforces the reputation we minorities face every day in the South County. Corruption and dishonesty is a social stigma we seem to drag from our countries of origin and cannot shake off no matter how honest and ethically we try to lead our lives. It is not a good look for those who look up to us south of our border and it is certainly not a good look for those who already look down on the South County region.

College President Mark Sanchez and former VP of HR Janene McIntyre failed us big time and so did any governing board members and administrators who went along with the disgraceful ATM episode. Heads would roll at a more ethical college.

Good leaders are supposed to make us feel safe to be ethical, contributing members of the organization. While reporting this story we have had more than a dozen employees share other stories of theft and malfeasance, but all declined to go on the record out of fear. When employees fear retaliation for speaking the truth that is clear evidence of poor leadership and a toxic culture. College employees should not be forced to protect corrupt co-workers. We remain hopeful that a few brave employees will bring forth their evidence for the record so we can see once and for all how deeply this problem goes.

We are hopeful new trustees Robert Moreno and Corina Soto will raise the ethical standards of our college leadership. It is time to end the quarter century of wagon circling by college administrators who protect each other no matter what. It is time to fiercely stamp out corruption at Southwestern College and it has to start from the top.

Our community deserves better. Voters in the Southwestern Community College District have passed a series of construction bonds to tax themselves nearly \$1 billion so far in the 21st century. Our community loves us and needs us, but our leadership routinely betrays and defiles us with cheap venality and sleaziness.

Our leaders are supposed to be role models and people we can look up to. Our leaders are supposed to be people who show us the way forward. Right now, though, we are ashamed of our college leaders for allowing this kind of low grade corruption to roll on.

Our leadership is officially on notice. We are watching and so is our community.

Norma Hernandez in 2011 famously declared "the pay for play days at Southwestern College are over!" It is time for a new leader to declare that corruption in all of its ugly forms is over at Southwestern College and to really mean it.

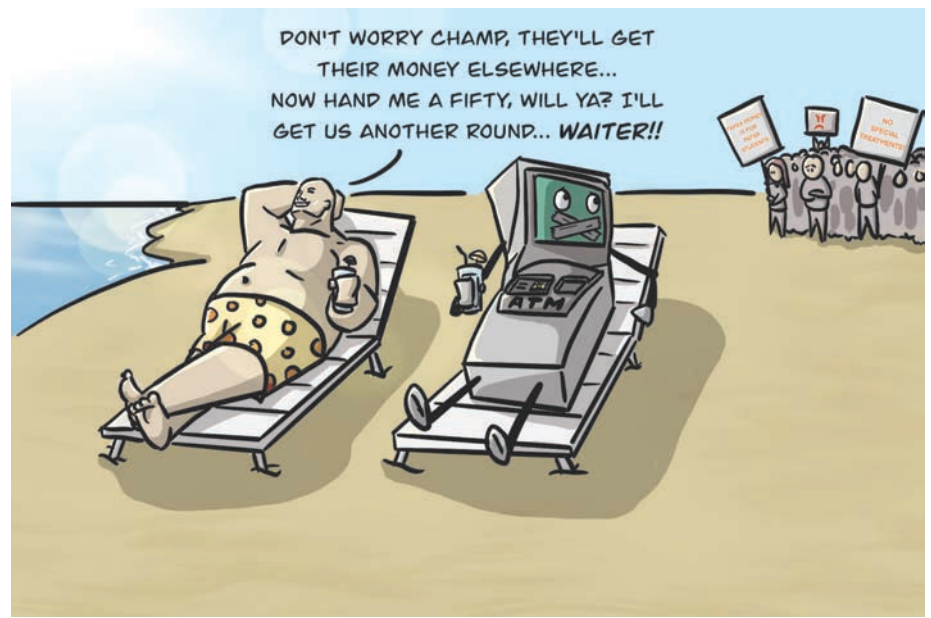


ILLUSTRATION BY EDMUNDO GODINEZ / STAFF

A Perspective

NO COMMUNITY AT
COMMUNITY COLLEGEIYARIE B.
MURGUIA

Returning to in-person classes in August was underwhelming and disappointing. Students walked in with bright eyes, fresh outfits and hopes for new friends only to realize that every campus social center was shut down due to looming construction. Our cafeteria and ASO were largely intact, but locked up and vacant.

COVID, construction have obliterated the once-welcoming socializing areas of Southwestern, spawning student isolation

BY IYARIE B. MURGUIA

We are the lost generation of Southwestern College. We are the COVID cohort, the Zoom Zoners and masked marauders. We are the online loners, bedroom book club and the keyboard crusaders.

In other words, we have been cut off from each other.

So when we were finally able to bring our socially-starved selves back to campus in the fall we were bubbling with hope for new friends, collaborating classmates and possibly some romantic entanglements.

Nope.

The dictum that community colleges have no social life is true at boarded up, fenced out Southwestern.

Returning to in-person classes in August was underwhelming and disappointing. Students walked in with bright eyes, fresh outfits and hopes for new friends only to realize that every campus social center was shut down due to looming construction. Our cafeteria and ASO were largely intact, but locked up and vacant. We could peer in longingly at ivory hockey tables and tangerine couches, but yellow caution tape wrapped the building like an enormous malevolent Christmas present to warn us that we could not actually use them.

Thankfully we were left with dusty tables and chairs right outside the ruins of the cafeteria, like worn stones adjacent a crumbling pyramid. They offered hope for some sort of blessed interaction, perched as they were next to our doomed temples of socialization.

For a little while all was good, at least good enough. When midday classes let out the tables were draped with unwinding students and buzzing with conversation.

Then everything changed – again.

At the onset of the second semester buildings and paths were sealed off by six-foot high fences, causing confused students to stumble around like hungry

rats in a maze without cheese.

Southwestern had its center gouged out. Our campus heart that once swarmed with chatty friends, budding romances, and guitarists strumming their new chords is now an acre of annihilation. Southwestern's center is evocative of WWII Dresden or Hiroshima, a bombed out crater where once a thriving culture hummed.

Our once-bucolic campus is no longer a pretty site. Nor a friendly place.

Gone are the gritty but welcoming chairs and tables. We are left with one Spartan café of limited seating for 22,971 registered students.

Our ASO was obliterated. Some members of student government gave up, but others have fought on, working hard to stay relevant and make the best of a tough situation. Hats off to them because they were dealt a tough hand. Our ASO and our designated student gathering spot are wedged into a remote campus byway between the bookstore and the STEM building. There are a few stone tables dropped in there, but it is not the teaming hub of social interaction we knew prior to the demolition of our beautiful Student Center.

Construction will continue for 2-3 more years – at least. Our brief time as Southwestern College students is doomed to dust, grit, noise and isolation. Unless...

A great deal of thought has gone into construction, but not enough into its impact on student mental health. Our college is a collection of smart and creative people. Let's all get busy thinking of smart and creative ways to nourish a social culture. Students need gathering places that allow conversations and comfort. We need time and space to reflect on what we are learning.

We are supposed to make lifelong friends in college, but that is not happening. That is sad and unnecessary. It also puts us at a disadvantage. Our future colleagues, business partners, teammates, husbands and wives pass in the gritty walkways like ships in the broad daylight.

COVID + Construction = Social Death.

Time for a new formula.

THINKING
OUT LOUD

COMPILED BY HAN PSALMA

How many hours do you work each week? How do you balance school and work?

MIGUEL ZURITA
(Business Marketing)

"I'd say at the moment around 30. I work weekends and Fridays because I don't have school on Fridays. It is pretty easy for me to be able to do that."

CIERA FLETCHER
(Education)

"I work 35 hours a week. I balance school and work by using my free time wisely, getting assignments done promptly and making my work schedule fit my school schedule."

SANDRA RODRIGUEZ VIERA
(Education)

"I work around 25 hours a week. I cram most of my school work during the week because I mostly work weekends and Mondays."

ZHANAЕ CHAMBERS
(Arts and Animation)

"Depends, I work at a concert venue. I probably work 5-10 hours on average since there are not that many shows during (April)."

SEXUAL ASSAULT LOOMS ON CAMPUSES

BY ANAHY J. GUTIERREZ

A Perspective

Sexual assault happens far too often in a nation that considers itself advanced and civilized.

- Almost 20 percent of first year American college women are raped
- About 13 percent of female high school students experience rape or sexual assault
- Only 20 percent of rape or sexual assault victims aged 18-24 report to law enforcement

Then there are the headlines -- "San Diego 'Teacher of the Year' Arrested on Suspicion of Child Sex Abuse," "Lincoln HS Students Protest Amid Sexual Assault Allegations," "No Charges to be Filed in Alleged 2021 SDSU Rape Case." Search "sexual assault in San Diego schools" and there are many, many more.

Data from the Association of American Universities (AAU) is chilling, but not shocking. Rape and sexual assault figures in the U.S. have been sky high for decades. Women are more willing than ever in our nation's history to report sexual crimes, but one-in-five is still way too low. The low reporting rate only encourages more sexual violence.

There are five main reasons why victims do not report the



ILLUSTRATION BY AILYN PARADA

people who sexually assaulted them, according to a study by Dr. Courtney E. Ahrens published in the "American Journal of Community Psychology."

She cited 1) lack of options, 2) fears of negative reactions or consequences, 3) ineffectiveness of support, 4) self-blame or embarrassment and 5) did not qualify for support."

Ahrens said victims fear "insensitive reactions" and "ineffective support." Often the negative or unhelpful reactions can trigger the same responses as the assault, including depression, panic attacks, flashbacks, isolation and shame.

Clinical Psychologist Dr.

Azmaira Maker said we must continue to support victims, but also put much more attention into prevention.

"My motto is prevention is always better than intervention," she said. "So if we can find out how often it's happening and how it's happening, we want to really put a lot of resources in prevention work. Educating students, boys and girls, young men and women, faculty and admin staff about inappropriate sexual behavior, any kind of inappropriate sexual behavior right."

Maker said training related to inappropriate sexual behavior be integrated within every classroom activity as well as lunch and recess.

Students also need a safe and easy mechanism to report sexual assault, she said.

"Not Anymore" is a sexual assault program available through Southwestern College developed to "help (students) better understand how vitally important these issues are and what you can do to help make your campus safer and more welcoming."

It is a hot mess.

"Not Anymore" is more of the same old rhetoric that places sexual safety on former or likely victims rather than perpetrators and law enforcement. It spends more verbiage talking about consequences for false claims than for consequences for sexual criminals.

Long term, society needs to develop young men as allies of women. Programs like "Men Against Rape" created by Dr. Jeffrey Bucholtz speak directly to young males about things that make women feel demeaned and unsafe. They can also provide strategies to aid prevention and intervention.

Rape and sexual assault numbers in this nation are terrifying, but even worse when we put faces to the data. Victims are our sisters, mothers, brothers, children, friends and any people we know and love.

America must do better to stem this epidemic.

CAMPUS

Campus News • Student News • Profiles

COLLEGE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR: DR. CYNTHIA MCGREGOR

TALENTED LEADER

FORMER MUSIC PROFESSOR FINDS HARMONIC BLEND in the impossibly diverse School of Arts, Communication and Social Services by working hard to support innovative faculty and students

BY LILIANA ANGUIANO

Dr. Cynthia McGregor is not one to blow her own horn. Well, actually, that is not true. Southwestern's dean of the School of Arts, Communication and Social Sciences is an elite classical French horn player who once performed with the legendary rock band The Who.

It is more accurate to say that she is remarkably humble in a profession known for some outsized egos. She never told anyone on campus that she was named Administrator of the Year recently – by three organizations.

CALLING DR. YES

"When people say 'Cynthia, I want to do this. How can we make it happen?' my attitude is that I want to get as close to yes as we can."

McGregor, dean of the School of Arts, Communication and Social Sciences, was named, in short order, Outstanding Administrator by the California Music Educators Association and the recipient of the Arts Empowerment Ovation Award for Creative Leadership in San Diego County Region 1. Oh, and Southwestern College Administrator of the Year by her peers.

Time management, energy and a passion for her work fuel her, she said. "We all have the same number of minutes in a day," she said. "We all have seven days a week, 24 hours. How we choose to spend our time is what makes us all different and I pack it in. I love the challenge of trying to support as many things as I can."

A constant challenge she has faced since becoming dean in July 2018 is finding

MCGREGOR • PG 11



Photo Courtesy of Cynthia McGregor

MUSIC OF THE NIGHT – McGregor juggles her daytime job and family while maintaining her love for the French horn, which she plays at an elite level for the La Jolla Symphony. She once performed with the legendary rock band The Who, playing many of John Entwistle's iconic French horn lines.

CAMPUS LEADERS URGE PATIENCE DURING CONSTRUCTION

BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ

Construction requires steel, concrete, wood, nails, dry wall ... and truckloads of patience.

That is the message from campus leaders as Southwestern College undergoes an unprecedented transformation and suffers unprecedented challenges.

Aurora Ayala insists the dust, mud, fencing, detours and noise will all be worth it someday soon.

"With construction comes disruption," she said. "We ask our students and everyone in our community to be patient during construction."

Ayala, the director of facilities, is managing the multi-pronged, decades-long remake of Southwestern College.

"We are making generational impacts with our projects," said Ayala. "It may be an inconvenience for about a year and a half, but the long-term, 20-year benefit outweighs the one-year inconvenience."

Ayala said the work is long overdue. "A lot of the buildings are from the 1960s," she said. "If we continue to expand and offer the most competitive educational experience to our students, we must continue to innovate our facilities. Everything we do we do it with (students) in mind."

College President Dr. Mark Sanchez said he had a memorable first week on the job when faculty in the 85-music building reported issues with excrement and sewage spewing from the restrooms.

"Construction should have been

READY TO MOVE TO NEXT PHASE

The 2022 SC Facilities Plan concluded that construction is slowly exiting Phase One. This includes:

- Performing Arts Center
- Campus Police Station
- Institutional Technology
- Landscape and Nursery Technology
- Instructional Complex 1
- Student Union
- Tennis facility

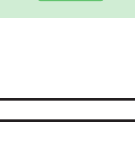
- Facilities operations, maintenance and grounds.
- Phase Two includes:
- Remodel of the Cesar E. Chavez One-Stop Center
- Studio Arts Complex
- Instructional Complexes 2 and 3
- Track and athletic support
- Parking, Ring Road and Ring Walk
- Possibly student and faculty housing

done a long time ago," he said. "The pipeline (was) the same pipeline from when the college opened in 1961. It should have been replaced back in 2005. When you have toilets overflowing with waste, I think about the message it sends to the students, faculty and staff. They should have patience because this should have been done a long time ago and it was not."

Governing Board Member Robert Moreno said he is excited for students and what is to come. He sympathizes with students who must navigate pathways that evoke labyrinths.

"I have seen how much of a distraction and inconvenience the construction is," he said. "I have gotten lost myself. I understand, but patience is all we have. It will all be worth it."

COMPILED BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ



SD COUNTY LEADER SEEKS 10,000 NEW TREES

BY LANEY NORMAN

San Diego County Supervisor has gone out on a limb.

"There's one program I'm super excited about," she said. "It is super nerdy, I know. It's our Comprehensive Tree Program."

Vargas announced the County's plan to plant 5,000 new trees this year and encouraging citizens to plant 5,000 more. She said trees promote human health, and all citizens have the right to clean air and pleasing surroundings.

"I believe in my heart that your zip code should not determine how long you live or whether you have access to clean air," she said. "When we plant trees, we are doing our part to ensure that we have healthy, clean air for all of our children and all of our families."

This tree planting initiative is part of the 2018 San Diego County Climate Action Plan to help reduce greenhouse gasses, clean the air in urban areas impacted by environmental racism and increase the tree canopy in the local biome. San Diego County will fund 5,000 trees and Vargas challenged the community to fund another 5,000.

Long term, the Climate Plan spells out goals to plant 3,500 trees each year and 49,000 by 2030. By 2050 the plan envisions 110,000 new trees.

In 2022, the County exceeded its goal with 4,113 trees of different size and maturity in 50 park locations across the region.

"The County includes mature, 10-year-old trees in its tree-planting program to maintain and restore a mature stock of trees and to help speed up the carbon sequestration process," read the Climate Action Plan.

The City of San Diego is also turning its gaze to trees. "Mature trees help to cool and freshen the air we

breathe," read the city plan. "Not only do they moderate the air temperature, but through photosynthesis, their leaves take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen for us to breathe. A single, fully grown sycamore tree can transform 26 pounds of carbon dioxide into life-giving oxygen every year."

Vargas said the new trees will help capture automobile and industrial emissions, particularly in areas affected by poor air quality. Urban areas without trees can be up to 11 degrees hotter during the peak of than neighborhoods with mature trees, she said.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has a geography-based prioritization of what trees would be most beneficial to different areas of planting.

"DPR tracks tree plantings and removals using the Tree Plotter Inventory System," according to its annual report. "Tree Plotter allows us to map where trees have been planted, what species they are and how they support a full tree canopy."

Coast Live Oak, a native species, was the most planted tree last year with 1,931. Native trees help preserve the local plants, animals and ecosystem of this region, according to the report.

Strategic tree planting can help to slow the effects of tree loss from prolonged drought and invasive species like the Goldspotted Oak Borer, a type of beetle that attacks oak trees. Native to Arizona the bug is responsible for considerable devastation in County parks. The tree maintenance program has taken this into account.

"For every tree that falls or is lost to disease or fire, the County replaces it at a 3 to 1 ratio to ensure a flourishing tree canopy over time."

Vargas said raising trees take a community. It also takes time.

"No time like the present to get started," she said. "Our kids are counting on us."

COLLEGE'S URBAN FOREST TAKES A BEATING DUE TO DEMOLITION, CHANGES TO LANDSCAPE

BY EMMA MALY

For almost half a century Southwestern College was an island of greenery in fast transforming eastern Chula Vista.

Construction has wreaked havoc with the urban forest of the Bonita Mesa. Demolition crews have removed hundreds of trees and old growth shrubs and plants, including virtually everything in the craterous core of the campus.

"The district has over 1,300 trees and 151 unique plant species pruned and maintained," reads an undated page on the college website. "All landscape and turf areas are irrigated to maintain adequate growth, health, and appearance regardless of plant type or soil conditions."

Not anymore.

Palm trees, pines, oak ... gone.

Students have noticed.

"I just like to get in and out of campus quickly nowadays because there are way more eyesores than beauty," said Bella Fuentes.

Facilities Director Aurora Ayala acknowledged that the landscaping is taking a beating during construction.

"The district hires a demolition contractor, part of (its) responsibility is the removal of trees that are in conflict with new infrastructure and buildings," she said. "Impacts on trees vary from project to project. We aim to eventually create a welcoming environment for our students and community."

Ayala said the plan is to highlight native species and drought tolerant trees. Western Sycamores, Crepe Myrtle and Chinese Elm figure prominently in the plans, she said.

"We want to keep our campus green all year long," she said. "We are trying to plant drought tolerant plants and trees. We also want to avoid trees that have deep roots that damage sidewalks and underground utilities."

Student Aaliyah Leilani admitted nostalgia for the greener times.

"I remember the days when I'd lay on the lawn and look at the sky, and all I'd hear was quiet," she said. "Hopefully the new plants and trees will bring back the charm that this campus had when I first toured it."

GRAPHIC BY HAN PSALMA / STAFF

McGREGOR

• CONT FROM PG 10

Empowering dean is also an elite French horn player

the resources for so many worthy ACSS projects.

"Resourcefulness is huge for (Southwestern) because we don't have a lot of money lying around," she said. "So if we want to do something, how do we get the resources? How do we get people to get excited about it?"

Unlike the James Bond villain Dr. No, McGregor said she tries to be "Dr. Yes" – or at least "Dr. Let's See What We Can Do."

"When people come to me and say 'Cynthia, I want to do this. How do we make it happen?' my attitude is that I want to get as close to yes as we can," she said.

When McGregor finds her way to "yes" she often continues to support projects the best she can, even if it is a less-than-glamorous task. At a recent high school band pageant hosted at Southwestern, McGregor rocked a highlighter orange vest and tackled traffic control.

"I spent like an hour standing in a parking lot making sure nobody parked behind the cones because that's where all the school buses go for the evening band pageant," she said. "And I was on my phone, so I was still doing emails and all the things I would be doing in my office, but I was in the parking lot with an orange security vest."

A Ph.D. in music, McGregor is also the principal French horn of the La Jolla Symphony. Keeping her musical chops up requires some time.

"That adds another layer of complexity to my schedule because I have to actually get some time in to play my instrument," she said. "So sometimes that happens at six in the morning. I'm blowing through my French horn, which is 16 feet of piping, just so I that I exercise those muscles for 20 minutes before I walk the dogs and take my daughter to school."

Much of the credit for the success of the frantic ACSS school belongs to her staff, she said.

"At Southwestern we serve so many different parts of the student," she said. "We have to make sure they meet requirements. We want to challenge their critical thinking. We want them to question and to take ownership of how they can do their part to make this world better, and we have to feed their souls. We want them to be happy."

Dr. Gerard Rios, who created the Chicana and Chicano Studies program and updated the curriculum in Latin American and Latino American history, said McGregor is forever supportive of worthwhile projects.

"She handles a humongous workload as dean of an array of disciplines, many of which are very different thematically and methodologically," he said. "In my case, she was dean through my entire tenure-track process and was very supportive. Now that I am a tenured professor, I appreciate the value of her stewardship and counsel."

College President Dr. Mark Sanchez said McGregor is a champion for her faculty and their students.

"Dr. McGregor brings exceptional commitment to the work of serving students and our community at Southwestern College," he said. "She is a consummate professional and exemplifies Southwestern College pride."

McGregor said it was hard to stop teaching music at Southwestern, but she has kept her hand in it by volunteering at Sunnyside Elementary School. When she learned the campus had no band program, she started one. The Sunnyside School Mighty Bulldog Band is a five-time winner of the Bonitafest Twilight Parade Musical Excellence Award.

A former Girl Scout, McGregor is a troop leader and the area's source for cookies. Thin Mints are her fave, she confessed.

Seven days in a week, 24 hours in a day does not seem like enough time, but McGregor, more than most, has found a way to make it work.

CRUISING

• CONT FROM PG 3

Push to legalize lowriders enjoys statewide support

National City Councilmember Jose Rodriguez agreed.

"As long as the vehicle has the proper California tags and the individual driving has a license, they should be able to drive their car and cruise down Highland (Avenue)," he said. "It is a public road. I fundamentally believe that anybody with a vehicle has the right to drive down a public road."

Lowrider cruising and car culture developed in Latino communities

of the Southwest in the late 1940s and early 1950s during a national economic boom following World War II. Smithsonian Magazine noted that it was a stark contrast to the "hot rods" (cars modified for increased speed and acceleration) that were popular with many white Americans at the time. Many Latinos took to modifying their cars in a contrasting manner, creating the "low and slow" lowrider vehicles.

Rigoberto Reyes, founder of Los Amigos Car Club of San Diego and a vocal advocate for the lowrider cruising community, said he has been low riding for nearly 50 years. He was introduced to the culture as a young boy living in San Ysidro when he saw his first lowrider — a 1957 Chevy.

"The first time I saw that car, hitting the ground with the hydraulics, I was sold," he said. "It was kind of

like an automatic love affair. I was mesmerized by what I saw. I told myself when I am of age the first thing I'll do is get one of those lowriders."

Low riding and cruising increased in popularity during the Chicano Movement in the 1970s. It was considered a mobile form of art and a pushback against the traditional standards of white America.

In the Reagan-era 1980s California began enacting bans on cruising, blaming concerns over traffic and violence. Reyes said lowriders drive slowly, but the form of expression is entirely peaceful. Low riding is a unique element of Chicano creativity, he said, not to mention California culture. Cruising is as California as surfing, taco shops, skateboards and the Beach Boys, said Baca.

Reyes said the repeal of cruising bans lets a beloved part of Chicano

culture out of the penalty box and back into the California sun.

"We need to document our own history," he said. "If we don't, somebody from the outside is going to do it for us. And it's not going to (be) from the same perspective that we lived it."

Rodriguez said he hopes the bill will lead to the recognition of the cultural significance of cruising and encourage inclusivity in the diverse borderlands community.

"Let's not push people away because they are different...let's accept people for who they are," he said. "Let's embrace them because they're my neighbors, they're my friends. They're my family. We all know each other and we're all connected in such a small city like National City. I think we should embrace each other and each other's passions."

ARTS

Campus Arts • Reviews • Community Culture

■ REVIEW

GLASS ART REFLECTS HUMANITY'S BEAUTY, FRAGILITY

BY KAI GRAY

Glass, explained sculptor M. R. Hernandez, is fragile like relationships. Once broken, it is almost impossible to repair.

Hernandez's provocative "Taken to Heart" is an exhibit of glass art blown, baked and sculpted into lovely abstract works that delight and challenge viewers.

Good 3-D art is much like a performance, Hernandez said. An artist in the act of creation is akin to a performer artist on stage. Heat, tension and movement fuel the performance as the artist works. A goal of Hernandez is to examine the relationship between the artist, the art and the viewer.

"As you go about viewing something that you really have to examine (you must decide) where your eyes first go and then how you move through the piece," he said. "And as you do that you slowly start to become part of the piece."

"Clock of the Heart," the large and ambitious centerpiece of the exhibition, evoked images of life that started chaotic and tangled like a flickering red neon light or tangled mass of rope. Like the page of a book, it draws your gaze from left to right before the eyes settle on a large suspended glass teardrop. It conjured the creation of life as well as the tragedies life forms experience. Only in the end bright verdigris neon lights suggest love and tranquility.

"Blue Genes" lures viewers into a quiet dark place in the room which accentuates glowing rings of azure and milky Argonne and neon gasses. Shading these rings are inverted wicker baskets which create a shining bubble of contentment.

"Washed Away" features a unique technique produced by melting the glass in a kiln rather than blowing it. This creates a shimmering ripple effect on the glass that resonated across this piece. A dark figure in resin seemed slowly washed away by a Plexiglas rainbow in the corner of this haunting puddle of glass.

"Honey BB's" conjures warm feelings of home with its crochet flower pattern littered with inverted neon hearts of sunny yellow. It is Midwestern in origin, but universal in emotion.

"Nice Gestures" is meant to imitate the token social actions polite people seem compelled to act out in certain situations. Courteous people feel the need to applaud a performance no matter how atrocious or console someone grieving even if you are not actually close with them. These blown glass bulbous flowers are collected in a pile of 4-5 on a small blue pedestal, politely arranged without the inconvenience of emotional attachment.

Signature piece "So Happy for You" is a circular metal frame face that has refuse and glass creating its nose and smile, with baskets again to represent eyes. A Denver mesh gives the appearance of both a haircut and a single tear. It is the face of a faker, the kind we put on to congratulate someone whose life really has no impact on our own. Its emoji-like construction and wan glass smile suggest the push button emotional blasts on our keypads that look the same whether sincere or not.

"Taken to the Heart" has plenty of heart and a peppering of soul to do what good art does – get us out of our self-contained glass bubbles into a broader world.



MAGICAL FRUIT — A sweet performance by Annabelle Ramos anchored a charming production of the oddball Roald Dahl classic "James and the Giant Peach" in the Southwestern College PAC.

■ REVIEW

PEACHY KEEN

Uncensored, unedited "Peach" bucks a disturbing trend of red state conservative culture warriors who re-write and sanitize performing arts with social messages

BY EMMA MALY

"James and the Giant Peach" is a show that can leave a pit in your stomach. Roald Dahl's darkly humorous nightmarish escape fantasy has managed to remain as wickedly relevant – and controversial – as when it was first published in 1961.

A Southwestern College production was sweet and juicy, transcending the peach fuzzy logic of the original book. Led by the always wonderful Annabelle Ramos as James, a team of singer/actors wormed into the hearts of the audience as anthropomorphic bugs and creepy crawlies.

An improbable story even for a children's fantasy, "James and the Giant Peach" features an orphaned boy whose parents were eaten by the world's first known carnivorous rhinoceros. He moved in with two wicked aunts but was liberated by a giant peach and his new bug buddies when the peach rolls into the ocean and charts a course for New York. After fruit-loving sharks start chomping at the peach, threatening to sink it, the bugs devise a plan to trick seagulls into flying them to the Empire State Building.

Time for Oreos, verdad? Choreography by Kevin "Blax" Burroughs kept the

cast on its toes and musical directors Tracy Burklund and Imahni King squeezed the nectar from some odd but melodic songs of friendship, loss, new beginnings, trials and redemption.

Ruff Yeager has grown into his job as the theater program's go-to director. He is comfortable producing the uncomfortable and excels at plumbing deeper meaning from source material. Dahl has been a lightning rod in post-reasonable America for some un-PC language. "Peach" has been edited and censored like "Huckleberry Fin" and "Fifty Shades of Grey," and recent productions have been boycotted for allegedly being "pro drag."

Yeager's unapologetic "Peach" was a sign of sanity during a time of rising rightwing reactionism and cultural warfare in the United States.

Dahl made a ladybug, earthworm, spider, grasshopper and centipede the best companions of a troubled little boy when all the humans failed him. Cannot help but love the wicked commentary that some kids find better allies under rocks than in their families.

"James and the Giant Peach" had great heart. Southwestern's theater program continues to bring excellent productions of provocative work to our community without traveling to New York via jetliner – or flying peach.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY AILYN PARADA / STAFF

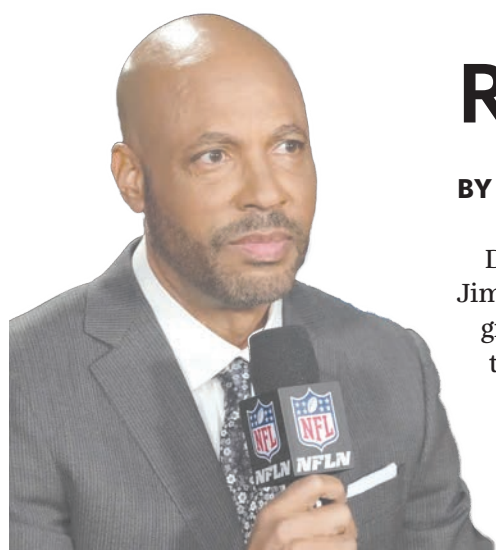
SPORTS

Campus Sports • Features • Alternative Sports

Tennis program's promised land

After fighting for years to keep the women's tennis team alive, Coach Susan Reasons is thrilled about plans for a new Tennis Center.

Story Page 14



RESPECTED WRITER AXED FOR CALLING OUT NFL

BY JULIO RODRIGUEZ

Decorated author and NFL journalist Jim Trotter was fired by the NFL Media group for speaking truth to power one too many times.

Trotter, the former Sports Illustrated NFL writer and San Diego Union-Tribune football columnist,

challenged NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on the lack of diversity in the NFL Newsroom at the State of the League address prior to the Super Bowl. It was the second consecutive year Trotter had raised the issue.

In March Trotter was informed that his contract was not being renewed.

"Some personal news: This will be my

final week with the NFL Media Group." Trotter tweeted. "I was informed over the weekend that my contract is not being renewed. I thank NFL Network and NFL.com for the lessons learned and affirmed over the last five years."

Trotter asked Goodell about the lack of Black professionals in senior positions and full time news desk

positions within NFL Media. Goodell's response was rather vague, as he tried to deflect responsibility and make the case the diversity has improved in The League.

TROTTER • PG 14

Image Courtesy of Kirby Lee / USA Today Sports



REACHING FOR THE POST-SEASON
— After slow starts, SC's baseball and softball teams have picked up momentum and are pushing for the playoffs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ABE PHOTOGRAPHY

FULL PLATE

TWO-WAY STAR MADISON MENDEZ IS SOFTBALL'S SHOHEI OHTANI, A SLUGGING STRIKEOUT PITCHER.

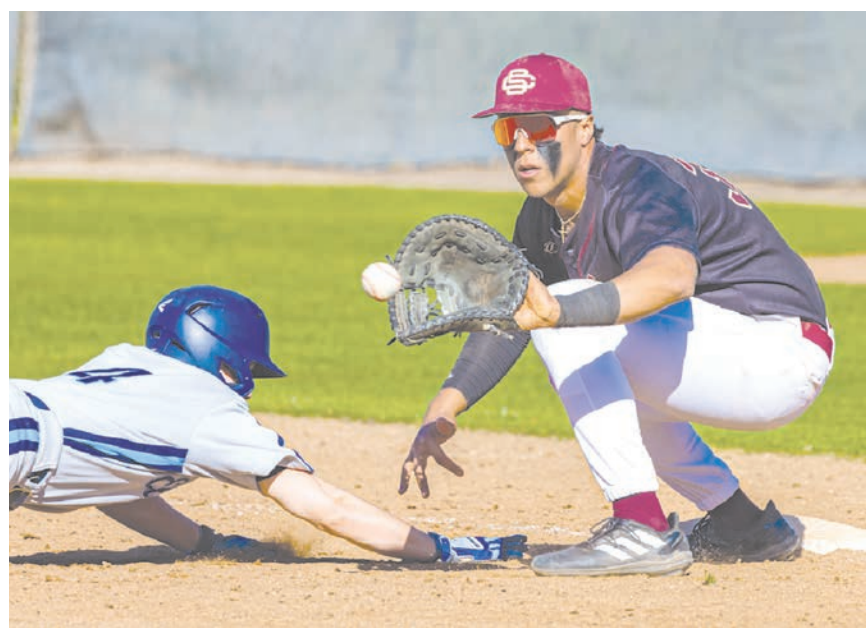


Photo Courtesy of Abe Photography



Photo Courtesy of Abe Photography

BY JUAN HERRERA

Southwestern College's venerable Jaguar Junction is Jerry Bartow's hand-made stadium and pitcher's paradise thanks to cool, damp spring weather and MLB dimensions. The House That Bartow Built has unexpectedly become a hitter's haven, at least for the free-swinging Jaguars of 2022-23.

Hitting a lofty .291 into late April, the Jaguars have ridden their hot hitting and just-enough pitching to craft a 21-15 record (15-7 in conference) on their way to a likely playoff spot in May.

SC's recent 11-5 win against San Diego Mesa College was another bats-bests-bullpen game, the kind that has kept the scoreboard operators on their toes.

James Taylor, Benji Solano, Adrian Hinojosa and Andres Contreras led a balanced offense that scored in every inning but the first. Contreras, the brawny DH, doubled and hit a long homerun to cap the scoring against Mesa's blown out bullpen.

BASEBALL • PG 15

MARCH 31, 2023 (AWAY)	SOUTHWESTERN 9	IMPERIAL VALLEY 6
APRIL 1, 2023	SOUTHWESTERN 13	IMPERIAL VALLEY 2
APRIL 4, 2023 (AWAY)	SOUTHWESTERN 9	SAN DIEGO MESA 0
APRIL 6, 2023	SOUTHWESTERN 11	SAN DIEGO MESA 5
APRIL 7, 2023 (AWAY)	SAN DIEGO MESA 11	SOUTHWESTERN 7
APRIL 11, 2023	SOUTHWESTERN 7	SAN DIEGO CITY 4

BY JUAN HERRERA

Softball, the most poorly named of all sports, is anything but soft on the fields of Southwestern College. The Lady Jaguars have repeatedly shown that the sport his fast, daring, athletic, thrilling and, well, hard.

SC has been hard on its opponents this spring as it swung, pitched and picked its way toward the playoffs. A deep and talented squad has a long lineup and an array of pitchers backed by slick defenders.

Madison Mendez is a South County Shohei Ohtani with a blazing fastball on the mound and power to all fields at the plate. When she is on the mound anything can happen.

FEATURED GAMES
SOUTHWESTERN 4, SAN BERNARDINO 3

Bella Hurtado's seventh inning sacrifice fly and a stellar complete game by Madison Mendez propelled SC to a 4-3 victory over San Bernardino in front of a boisterous home

SOFTBALL • PG 14

SOFTBALL

• CONT FROM PG 13

Lady Jaguars bring it, swing it during wild push toward playoffs

crowd.

SC threatened in the bottom of the first when Haley Ocegüera milked a two-out walk and Mendez lined a 3-1 pitch past the diving third baseman for a single. The table was set for Cassidy Harper, who lofted a soft fly ball along the first base line. Ocegüera thought about attempting to score from second base, but had a change of heart when the right fielder unleashed a perfect throw to the plate. Ocegüera stopped and scampered back toward third but was cut down by a great throw from the catcher.

Jags leftfielder Madi Villacusa returned the favor in the 2nd by racing across the expansive outfield to make a breathtaking catch and rob SBVC of a run.

The Jaguars broke through in the bottom of the third when Beatty singled and Daniela Sanchez beat out a bunt single. Ocegüera hammered a single to center scoring Beatty. Mendez followed with a line single. Harper lashed a single to center, scoring two and giving the Jags a 3-2 lead.

The Wolverines tied the score in the 4th, but SC countered in the 5th when Angela Allen led off with a single up the middle and red-hot Mendez was intentionally walked. Nayeli Martinez came into run for the pitcher Mendez at first base. A passed ball moved Allen and Martinez into scoring position with no outs.

Hurtado fell behind 0-2 before lofting a deep sacrifice fly to score Allen from third for a 4-3 lead.

That was all Mendez needed. She set down the Wolverines in the 6th and 7th for another complete game victory.



MADISON MENDEZ

SOUTHWESTERN 9,
SANTA ANA 1

Madison Mendez showed some Shohei, pitching a masterful 79-pitch complete game and going 3-for-3 with 3 RBI.

SC's do-it-all star doubled in the Lady Jaguars first run in the bottom of the 1st, then retired the Dons on eight pitches in the 3rd and six pitches in the 4th.

SC took the lead in the 5th on a sacrifice fly by Haley Ocegüera.

After Mendez reached on an error, Cassidy Harper blasted a long 3-run homer over the left-center field wall, sending the Jaguars crowd into a frenzy.

Mendez gave herself an insurance run in the 6th with another RBI double. Angela Allen came in as the designated pitcher's runner. Harper was intentionally walked. Elyssa Garcia drove in Allen and Hurtado followed with a single to load the bases.

On a 3-1 count Munoz swung hard but topped a dribbler barely 10 feet down the line as Harper broke for the plate. She scored, essentially ending the Dons' day and starting a blowout. Mendez, with a large lead, threw strike after strike, mowing down Lady Dons like a weed whacker clearing spring oats. Two-way Lady K was unhittable and indefensible in a 9-1 romp.

RESILIENT TENNIS TEAM LAUDS NEW CENTER

BY ALEXA LIMA

Armed with just a tennis racquet and an outsized love for her students, Susan Reasons has fought a tightly strung 20-year battle for the survival of Southwestern's women's tennis team.

She will soon ride into the sunset victorious – game, set, match.

Reasons said she is thrilled with the plans for a new tennis facility.

She predicts the community will be happy, too.

"The new tennis court will be really nice," she said. "The courts we have right now are really, really old from the sixties. They are literally falling apart."

Reasons assured she meant the 1960s, though the tennis courts, in the right light, look like they could be from the Civil War era. There are cracks, holes and uneven spots that seem neglected as a backcountry road.

Construction of the new Tennis Center began last month. It will include 10 new courts with a support building with restrooms, showers, locker rooms and open grassy areas with shaded seating for viewers. It will be used for tennis classes, team practice, matches and pickle ball classes – at least as long as the fad lasts. Crews are clearing parking lots E and G as well as the old Grounds building 48 C.

College officials said the center will take about 10 months to complete. Reasons said she hopes it is ready for the 2024 women's tennis season.

Head tennis coach for nearly 30 years, Reasons said the new center is a



Image Courtesy of Southwestern College

COURTING A BRIGHT FUTURE – Southwestern's cracked and worn tennis courts will soon be replaced with a comprehensive facility for the women's team and the community.



Image Courtesy of Southwestern College

gratifying development after spending most of her career fighting for tennis and women's athletics. Women's tennis was eliminated by a previous college president for a year before Reasons successfully fought to bring it back.

Men's tennis was not as fortunate, sacrificed at the altar of a redeveloped football stadium.

"We should write a movie, no one would believe it!" Reasons said. "At least our film has a happy ending."

Evelyn Potter, a first-year tennis player on the women's team, said she and her teammates are excited about the project.

"I think it is wonderful to have new tennis courts," she said. "We really need them due to how uneven the ground is. It really does change the game and the direction of the ball."

Team captain Anna Ilusorio agreed. "I feel thrilled to have new tennis courts to practice and play on," she said. "We probably would not have lasted another year with the old courts we have now."

Director of Facilities Aurora Ayala said the original tennis courts will become a parking lot and perhaps future student housing.

"We needed to build the Grounds office first to move it to its new facility in order for us to (use) the area for tennis courts," she said.

Reasons said the investment in the Tennis Center shows that it values women athletes.

"Maybe I can finally stop worrying about the women's team getting cut," she said. "A new era is about to begin."

TROTTER

• CONT FROM PG 13

"Jim, I am not in charge of the newsroom," Goodell said. "We did go back, and we have reviewed everything across the league to vendors that we're working with, to partners that we're working with, to ownership, where we've seen significant changes in diversity just this year."

Goodell was referring to the hiring of new Houston Texans Head Coach Demeco Ryans and new Tennessee Titans General Manager Ran Carthon.

In an interview with Peter King of "Football Morning in America," Trotter said he declined a severance package that would include three months pay because the NFL wanted him to sign

a Non-Disclosure Agreement. Trotter has left the NFL with dignity and class, but my not go quietly.

His issues are not money, he said, but underrepresentation of Black journalists and communications professionals in a league that makes billions of dollars off the labors of Black Americans. He has consistently exposed the NFL's shortcomings related to race and hiring practices.

The NFL and three of its teams currently face a lawsuit from former Miami Dolphins Head Coach Brian Flores which claims the league is guilty of racist hiring practices.

Trotter graduated from Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington D.C. He was the first in his family to attend college. He has held positions at the Muskegon Chronicle in Michigan and

the Morning News Tribune in Tacoma, Washington. In 1989 he moved to San Diego to work at the U-T as an East County prep writer. During his 18-years at the U-T he worked his way up to the Chargers beat writer position, then as an expert NFL columnist. He was a senior writer at Sports Illustrated who frequently wrote its cover stories. He worked briefly at ESPN before being hired away by NFL Media.

He has written two books about former Chargers superstar linebacker Junior Seau, which led him to investigate Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), the ailment that stems from repeated blows to the head. CTE brain damage is considered to be the cause of Seau's shocking suicide in May 2012.

Trotter is an active member of the San Diego Association of Black

Journalists and 2020 Grand Marshal of the Bonifest. He has visited Southwestern College on several occasions to mentor students at "Pro for a Day" with the SDABJ. His workshops draw swarms of aspiring sportswriters.

Trotter's legal options remain open, though he has declined to answer questions about litigation.

Here is hoping he goes for it. The NFL has improved its diversity practices, but has a long, long way to go. Football has a team of slick lawyers, but they would face a formidable opponent in Trotter, a brilliant man in his own right who knows a lot of things the NFL is likely not proud of. Trotter, like Harry Belafonte and John Lewis, knows that principle always outweighs issues.

And he is never afraid to lose a job to make a point.

SOTO

• CONT FROM PG 2

Former professor wants to scale up effective learning communities

on the EDI train, she said, and has much more work to do to become a productive institution of higher education that honors and elevates its students and community. Soto said she would like to see the college combine personal development classes with ethnic studies and history classes.

"The ethnic studies and history classes are to learn about who we are in a society and what contributions our peoples have made and what contributions others have made," she said. "(When we understand) others we can be more respectful and we can value other people more," she said. "That's how we create a more inclusive society."

Soto represents Southwestern Community College District Area 4, the largest of the five. It includes most of eastern Chula Vista, parts of San Ysidro and borderlands San Diego. It is the district in which the main campus resides. She said the new district elections made it possible for a

person on a teacher's salary to consider elective office.

"District elections made running for the board more plausible and more affordable," she said. "I don't think I could have been competitive in the district-wide elections we used to have. It was just too big and too hard to get your message to enough voters."

SC is an important hub of the South Bay that does great work for the community, Soto said, but she also said the college should not rest on its laurels.

"One of the things I want to do is educate the community (about) the things that we are doing and more of the things we are capable of doing because Southwestern is capable of doing more," she said.

Soto said the college has "secret gems" called learning communities that are very successful at elevating students, but too small to reach enough students. SC's best known learning communities are Puente, which supports Latinos, Bayan, tailored for Filipinos, Umoja, created to help Black students and CHEL, for students who identify as LGBTQ. Although each of these support communities have demonstrated great success over the years, SC administrators have in the past dismissed them as "boutique programs" that are too expensive to expand or clone. Soto said she rejects those excuses.

"We need more learning communities because those have the highest rate of students graduating and transferring," Soto said. "That's our mission, verdad? If we have a program that works and we cannot offer to every student, we need to look at ways to replicate their success."

SC's shuttered Women's Resource Center needs to be reestablished, Soto said, because it was effective and there is great need.

"Women are about 57 percent of all college and university students now, but they face many of the same problems they did 20-30 years ago," she said. "Once upon a time we had an outstanding Women's Resource Center that helped a lot of women and their families. We seem to have plenty of money for other projects and for more administrators, but we need to reinvest in our students."

A demographic SC ignores are gifted students and high achieving students in the community who have vast promise but lack the resources to attend tony universities right out of high school. Soto said she would like to see SC court students who have taken AP and IB classes at feeder high schools.

"We do a lot for other students, but we don't necessarily do anything for those gifted students," she said. "A lot of our community's best students are underserved and do not live up to their potential. We need to capture

more students (who have taken AP classes) because they have the highest likelihood of going on to get that Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees," she said. "Nothing succeeds like success."

Students stay at SC for too long, Soto said. Programs designed for two years frequently take 4-6 years because students have to work or struggle with basic skills. She would like to help more students to transfer in two years by taking 15 units a semester instead of 9-12.

One of SC's most troubling problems, Soto said, is its treatment of part-time adjunct teaching staff.

"The majority of the (adjunct) faculty, around 700 of them, have Master's degrees and some even have Doctorates but they are lucky to make \$24,000 a year at Southwestern College," she said. "I think that's inappropriate. Adjuncts teach most of our classes. We could not run the college without them."

Soto said colleges should be bastions of free speech and critical thinking that encourage creativity, problem solving and the advancement of humanity.

"That's why we're here, right?" she said. "We should think big and have lofty, audacious dreams and visions. That's what will make Southwestern College an even better place for our community. I am eager to do my part to help get us there."

BASEBALL

• CONT FROM PG 13

Jaguars overcome 7-run deficit with fierce 10-run rally

SC's pitching once again did enough to win. Starter Jaden Wilcox pitched into the 5th inning, but surrendered the lead as he showed signs of fatigue.

Adrian Sanchez was ready to take the baton. The crafty reliever stemmed the threat and closed out the game.

SC's half century rivalry with the Grossmont Griffins was a twin win for Mother Nature, who forced a doubleheader following rainouts. It was a long but productive day for the hitters on both teams, each of which scored 19 runs in the doubleheader split.

The Jags looked soggy most of the way until an inspired rally turned what could have been a disastrous day into an inspiring victory in the nightcap. After losing the first game 7-3, SC fell behind 7-0 in Game Two, looking sluggish as the snails outside the stadium that were slowly heading off in a variety of directions, seemingly without purpose.

Pinch hitter Nico Vallarelli was the unexpected hero in the bottom of the 4th in a wacky turnabout when he whacked a single. He scored when a second pinch hitter, Jesus Villegas, doubled to leftfield, giving the Jaguars their first run and a pulse.

Aiden Miller, the third pinch hitter of the inning, singled to put runners on the corners. Gio Armas then scorched a double to left for another run.

After a pitching change, the Jaguars continued to feast on the exhausted Grossmont bullpen. Benji Solano singled in a pair of runs and an infield grounder by Adrian Hinojosa scored yet another.

Vallarelli came to the plate a second time as SC batted around and achieved a baseball rarity – two pinch hits in an inning. This time Vallarelli smoked a triple and cleared the bases.

Grossmont made another pitching change, but could not staunch the bleeding. Taylor greeted the new pitcher with an RBI single, followed by a Nakano walk to reload the bases.

A third Grossmont pitching change worked about as well as

When the Furious Fourth finally ended the Jaguars had sent 15 batters to the plate and racked up 10 runs against four pitchers.

the first two. Millan singled for the second time in the inning and drove in a pair.

When the Furious Fourth finally ended the Jaguars had sent 15 batters to the plate and racked up 10 runs against four pitchers.

SC scored three more in the 6th inning off two more Grossmont pitchers, but not enough to breathe easy. Jaguar arms were not much better the Griffins on this day. Both team's bullpens were like staggered boxers stumbling around the ring in the 15th round trying to stay on their feet.

With the score 16-12 and Grossmont roaring back with the bases loaded in the bottom of the 8th, Southwestern deployed its secret weapon.

Right hander Jonan Stepper promptly struck out two to end the threat, then breezed through the bottom of the 9th by striking out the side. His five straight Ks ended a marathon day that both teams were ready to wrap.

Q & A WITH JOHNNY JAGUAR

A ROARING SUCCESS

Southwestern's popular Mesoamerican mascot is 'the strong, silent type' and a fierce fan favorite

BY CHERI-ANN INOUIYE

As a young kitten growing up on the Yucatan Peninsula, Johnny Jaguar could not imagine he would one day be the popular mascot of Southwestern College, the coolest cat on the West Coast.

"When I was a kid prowling around the jungles and climbing on the old pyramids, my Tio Goyo was the mascot for the UNAM Pumas (professional soccer team) in Mexico City," he said. "That's how I became interested in mascot. He's still got the gig. He's a legend. Maybe it's in my genes."

Juan Pablo "Juanito" Jaguar spent countless hours stalking the sidelines of Liga Mexico soccer pitches learning at the paws of his famous uncle. His big break, though, came when a highly-regarded college professor went to Mesoamerica to study Mayan culture and spotted Juanito ambling up the side of Chichen Itza. A long, strange adventure was about to unfold.

The Sun was granted an exclusive tongue-in-cheek April 1 interview with Johnny Jaguar following a Southwestern College women's tennis match. This interview was lightly edited for space and clarity.

THE SUN: Thanks for carving some time out of your busy schedule to meet with us, Johnny.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: No problema, folks. I read The Sun cover to cover every time you come out.

THE SUN: Good to know, thank you. Please tell us how it is you came to Southwestern College.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Happy to. Crazy story. I was a juvenile jag climbing around on a pyramid back home when this Southwestern College art professor named Mark Van Stone approached like someone out of a Bob Dylan song or Indiana Jones movie. He had beef jerky, so I thought I'd make an introduction. Great guy. We hung out for a while and he drew a few sketches of me.

THE SUN: When did you see him next?

JOHNNY JAGUAR: He came back a few months later with an even bigger stash of beef jerky and a big grin on his face. He told me he'd shown the sketches to his college president, this dude named Serafin Zasueta. Serafin, you know, like an angel. Anyway, Dr. Zasueta wanted to get rid of Southwestern's old mascot, the Apache, and Dr. Van Stone suggested the jaguar. Z dug the idea and sent Dr. Van Stone back to make an offer. I pounced at the chance and signed with Southwestern College in 2000. Been here ever since.

THE SUN: Gotta say we knew we had a badass black jaguar as our mascot, but we didn't know you had a name.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Well, yeah. Like everyone's got a name, right? But it's understandable because I'm not supposed to talk when I'm giffin'. It wrecks the illusion. There's lots of times I wanted to blurt out, hey, name's Johnny Jag! That's not mascot protocol, though, so I have to be cool and remain the strong, silent type.

THE SUN: Makes sense. What's in your mascot job description?

JOHNNY JAGUAR: I'm a little bit cheerleader, a little bit dancer. I rep our school mostly, so I have to make sure I'm looking sharp and sending out the right message. The vibe is important, dudes, so I'm also doing my best to make my homies proud.

THE SUN: What's the best part of your job?

JOHNNY JAGUAR: That's easy, bro. All the people who smile and laugh and want selfies. Sometimes I feel like, I dunno know, like, sometimes I feel I'm kind of this positive force on campus who can make people's day a little brighter. Does that sound corny?

THE SUN: No, not at all. We've seen you have that effect on people.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Yeah, it's pretty cool. I get paid to be nice and to cheer people up.

THE SUN: Any downsides?

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Well, you know, the usual mascot stuff. Some grumpy kid pulls my tail or the time someone spilled a Juice Adventure smoothie on my foot while we were getting our pictures taken. Every once in a while I scare a baby or small kid. That's a bummer, never mean to do that.

THE SUN: Tell us, please, about your role models, those heroic mascots you look up to.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: I'm always watching YouTube video of the greats, you know, like the San Diego Chicken, the Philly Phanatic, Silver the Wonder Pony from Bonitafest, Mr. Met, Bennie the Bull. The Padres Swinging Friar is underrated. I love his work. I really admire some of the old guard, too, like Tony the Tiger and the Cuckoo for Coco Puffs bird. That guy is hilarious and a great athlete.

THE SUN: Tell us about some of your career highlights.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Highlights. Wow, there are so many. I mean I loved being there when the women's soccer team won the league championship in the fall. So cool. The football bowl games. I remember when our cheerleaders

were national champions a few years ago. We always have great cheerleaders and they are so underrated. Opening Day after COVID was awesome. It was great to see actual people back on campus after so long. It was fun to be in your newsroom during Mardi Gras with the flying beads and everything.

THE SUN: Well you know what they say, right? What goes on in the newsroom, stays in the newsroom.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Check. Mum's the word, amigos.

THE SUN: We know you've had offers from other schools and even the NFL. You've turned them all down. Do you ever think there will be a day you leave Southwestern?

JOHNNY JAGUAR: Oh hell no, dudes. I'm an apex predator and this is an apex gig. I mean, I'm the face of the only college in the South County and the most diverse college in America. This is such an interesting place we live in, you know, with Mexico so close by and the Pacific Rim thing going on. There are so many interesting people here from every corner of the world. I mean, yeah, maybe I'd make more scratch moving to Utah or Missouri or, I don't know, North Dakota, but why would I leave here? Plus ain't no surfing in Utah, not to mention Lolita's or MJ's.

THE SUN: True that. What advice would you give a young person, or animal or ..whatever that thinks maybe they would like to be a mascot.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: I say go for it! If you have the commitment and are willing to put in the time and energy to learn the profession, you can do it. It's not easy. I mean, you have to work up your shtick, something that fits with the culture of your community. There's studying to do, for sure, but a lot of it is intuition, that gut feeling. Great mascots make thousands of decisions at every appearance. Is this a time to be crazy like at a football game, or should I dial it back a little, like at commencement. Can't really be clownin' during "Pomp and Circumstance," verdad? Respect the profession and pay your dues. Your time will come. Have a little faith in yourself and you can be a success.

THE SUN: A roaring success.

JOHNNY JAGUAR: (groan) Dude, you had to go there.

THE SUN: Sorry, you get that a lot?

JOHNNY JAGUAR: All the time.



SELFIE SWAGGER – Johnny Jaguar poses for scores of selfies with his fans at virtually every campus event. He said he enjoys 'making people's days a little brighter.'

Photo Courtesy of SC Instagram

BACK PAGE

Voices In Our Communities

PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF

SUPER BLOOM PAINTS DESERTS

BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ

"A flower blooming in the desert proves to the world that adversity, no matter how great, can be overcome." — Matshona Dhliwayo

ANZA BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK —

Super blooms — the improbable blanketing of vibrant, brittle flowers over the unforgiving expanse of harsh desert — seem more rumor than real.

This month they are real.

From the sky scratching Grapevine mountain pass at Fort Tejon, to the high deserts of Lancaster, to the alluvial lowlands of Borrego Springs, flowers have shown themselves in planes of peach, valleys of vermilion and washes of wisteria.

Southern California's record rains painted

rainbows in the sky and the desert floor of Anza Borrego Desert State Park. Nature lovers, Instagram models, locals and flower tourists often wait years between super blooms, but the wait is over. This year's bloom may be one of the greatest ever seen.

Anza Borrego is only about 90 miles from Chula Vista, but it is a long and winding road. Bloomers should be prepared for heat and cold as Anza Borrego is fickle as a sleepy toddler. Local merchants get rich selling interlopers sun screen, hats, water, sports drinks, jackets and snacks in addition to scorpion pops, chocolate rocks and local delicacies.

Galleta Meadows on County Highway S 22, with its towering sculptures of rusty dragons, eagles, elephants, scorpions and other animal figures, is a beauty and the beasts visage straight out of "Lord of the Rings." It is a triple digit Land of Oz with plenty of safe places to park that requires very little walking.

Sturdy hikers ought to enjoy the Cactus Loop Trail on Yaqui Pass Road, home to barrel cactus and devil chollas bursting forth with blooms the color of frozen Gatorade.

Southern California's magnificent flowers can hide away for decades at a time, so procrastination is unwise. Mother Nature's festival of flowers must close soon.



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF



PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF

COMING OUT PARTY — Cactus and other desert plants that might stay semi-dormant for years staged an epic bloom this spring. Biologists say steady winter rains with just enough periods of sunshine provided perfect conditions for a rare 'super bloom' up and down Southwestern California, including its often-roasting lowland deserts.

Special Section

MURDER EPIDEMIC



A MEXICAN GENOCIDE CONTINUES

MEXICO'S WOMEN FIGHT FEMICIDE

Women gather in Tijuana to protest Mexico's unchecked femicide crisis that is killing about 4,000 women, teens and little girls every year.

BY AILYN DUMAS AND
NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA

TIJUANA —

Mexico's women are fighting mad and fighting back.

There is so much to fight against.

International human rights organizations and law enforcement estimate that between 80,000 and 100,000 Mexican women and girls are missing. Amnesty International investigators say at least 10 women

and girls are killed every day in Mexico, about 3,650 every year. The Mexican government, after years of denial, says the number may be as high as 4,000 a year.

Mexico's war on its own women has gone unabated for nearly a quarter of a century since mass graves were discovered on the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez. Tijuana is also an epicenter of femicide, according to Amnesty International. Victims include grandmothers, pregnant women, teenagers and even young children.

More than 1,000 vocal women and teens marched on the mayor's residence in Tijuana on

International Women's Day to demand an end to Mexico's cancerous femicide epidemic. Men were not allowed. Male party crashers were chased away.

Women warriors gathered at a Tijuana monument called "Las Tijeras" (the scissors) to share their personal stories of violence. Nearly 70 percent of Mexican women 15 and older report they have been victims of violence by men.

Speakers streamed to the microphone to recount horrifying episodes of violence suffered by themselves or members of their families.

MARCH • PG B3



PHOTO BY AILYN DUMAS / STAFF

'THIS IS HOW GIRLS FIGHT' — As victims of the Mexican femicide are younger and younger, so are the protesters. This year's Tijuana Women's March included more children and teenagers than ever before.



POINTED MESSAGES FOR RAPISTS AND MURDERS — (l) 'Abandon your Eve and liberate your Lilith,' 'I will not grow up with fear!' 'Just like your fucking monuments,' 'For my mother who went to work for me. A policeman took her from me. I was only 8 months old.'



SIGNS OF FURY — (l-r from top) 'It is not normal to have a history of abuse,' 'Not one more death,' 'I was only eight years old, sick bastard!' 'I am not your hot mama. If I was I would have aborted you fucking asshole coward,' 'When my sisters come back I will clean your wall.'

Mexico's war on its own women has gone unabated for nearly a quarter of a century since mass graves were discovered on the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez. Tijuana is also an epicenter of femicide, according to Amnesty International.

More than 1,000 vocal women and teens marched on the mayor's residence in Tijuana on International Women's Day to demand an end to Mexico's cancerous femicide epidemic.

"Yo te creo! No estas sola!" (I believe you! You are not alone!) was the response from the crowd after each testimonial.

Emotion was palpable. The throng was absolutely silent as the speakers shared their stories of abuse and pain.

"We are not your playthings! We are not disposable!" declared one of the speakers.

Protesters blamed Mexico's hyper-machismo culture for the chronic abuse of its female population. It begins at birth, said a marcher, when many baby

boys are treated like entitled princes and little girls are treated as lesser-thans whose purpose in life is the please the males, even if that includes abuse, rape and murder. Stir in the hyper-violence of drug cartels, corrupt police and dishonest elected officials, and Mexico is a recipe for disaster for its women and girls.

"The irony is that our own mothers are often part of the problem, teaching boys to devalue women," said Maestra (a pseudonym). "Fathers, sons and uncles often treat women like servants and sex objects, even their own daughters and sisters. We need to break this cycle of dysfunction and violence. It's only getting worse."

A speaker underscored these words as she told the sordid tale of an uncle that forced her to have sex with him for years, starting when she was a little girl.

"The rest of my own family didn't believe me," she said. "They believed him and took his side every time."

Tijuana's protesters said they were the lucky ones — they are still alive. "Las Tijeras" was soon festooned with Day of the Dead-style altars to commemorate the dead and the missing. Posters with photographs of dead and missing women covered the area and a clothesline became a string of photographs, handmade art and posters that proclaimed "No Olvidades!" (You are not forgotten.)

At 4 p.m. the rally became a march as the women took to the crumbling streets of Tijuana. Then a surprise— police who in previous years had stood aside and watched the marchers took a more aggressive approach. They began to cordon off streets and roadways in an attempt to box in the crowd. One police officer even backed his car recklessly right into the crowd in an attempt to turn the women around.

It did not work.

Marchers refused to retreat and instead marched upon the Tijuana mayor's residence for a spirited series of chants and some spray painted demands. Police behaved aggressively toward the women, but none backed down. The crowd sealed off the "Palacio Municipal" for about two hours before returning to "Las Tijeras" for a final call to action.

"Ni una mas! Ni una mas matanza!" ("Not one more! Not one more murder!") shouted the marchers as the throng snaked its way through the houses and buildings caked in primary colors on the bloody streets of Tijuana.

Mexico's women are tired of being pushed around. Now they are pushing back.



RAISED FISTS, RAISED VOICES — (top r) 'Return to me my daughter!' Featured colors of the march were purple and red, representing bruises and blood. International human rights organizations and law enforcement estimate that between 80,000 and 100,000 Mexican women and girls are missing.