

Nicolette Monique Luna
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EDUCATION

Southwestern College, Chula Vista, CA
June 2021 – present (duel enrolled student)

- Journalism Courses, 19 units
- GPA 4.0

Bonita Vista High School, Chula Vista, CA

- International Baccalaureate Candidate
- Advanced Placement Classes
- Moot Court, GTP Dance Company
- GPA 4.38
- Expected graduation date, June 2024

EXPERIENCE

El Sol Magazine, Southwestern College, Chula Vista – Editor-in-Chief

- Issue XII, Published spring 2022 (ACP Pacemaker recipient, Columbia Scholastic Press Association Gold Crown, ASPA National Two-Year Magazine of the Year)
- Issue XIII, Anticipated publication spring 2023

Southwestern College Sun newspaper, Chula Vista – Associate Editor-in-Chief

- August 2021 – present (ACP Pacemaker recipient, SPJ National College Newspaper of the Year, CSPA Silver Crown, ASPA National Two-Year Newspaper of the Year)
- Planning and story assignments
- Editing and design
- Writing, photography

Southwestern College President's Speakers Series, Holocaust Day of Remembrance – Lead Interviewer

- 30-minute one-on-one interview with Holocaust survivor, Performing Arts Center, May 5, 2023
- Introduction of Southwestern College Honorary Degree Recipient

Bonitafest Planning Committee (51-year-old community celebration Bonita/Chula Vista, CA)

- 2022 Youth Committee Chair (led committee of seven)
- 2023 Twilight Trail Parade Chair (lead committee of 20)

RECOGNITION

- RUTH: Remember Us the Holocaust Scholarship, Outstanding Coverage of Current Issues, 2023
- San Diego County 25 Most Remarkable Teenagers, 2022
- 25 national and state awards for writing and editorial leadership, 2022-23
- Bonitafest Youth Ambassador Scholarship for Community Leadership, 2022

FORMER PROFESSOR, STUDENT ELECTED



ROBERT MORENO



CORINA SOTO

■ *Corina Soto and Robert Moreno are first elected to area board seats*

BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ
Editor-in-Chief

An appointed incumbent and two political newcomers all won their first attempts at elective office when they were voted on

to the Southwestern College Governing Board.

Don Dumas, Corina Soto and Robert Moreno will be sworn into the board in December for four-year terms following strong performances their first time on the ballot. They are also the first board members ever elected to one of five new area seats after 60 years of districtwide elections.

As of press time Dumas had received 65 percent of the vote in Area 5, dispatching challenger Rosemarie Ballard. He was appointed to the board two years ago when former trustee Nora Vargas was elected to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors and Tim Nader was

ELECTIONS PG 6

SOUTH COUNTY ANTI-SEMITISM

Area anti-Semitic incidents on the rise

Local schools, Holocaust educator and SC student magazines are attacked

BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA
News Editor

Sandra Scheller feels something dark and unnerving bubbling up in America.

Her Jewish family has felt it before. Scheller, a human rights activist and the daughter of Holocaust survivors, said it feels to her like anti-Semitism is roaring back in the United States. Even the usually placid vibe of diverse and disproportionately Jewish Chula Vista has taken a nasty turn, she said.

Anti-Semitic episodes in the Chula Vista area preceded the latest rants of Kanye West and his ilk, Scheller said. Some examples:

- Swastikas spray painted on Bonita Vista High School and BV Middle School.
- A swastika painted on the fence of First United Methodist Preschool near Southwestern College.
- Hundreds of copies of Southwestern College El Sol Magazine featuring Holocaust survivors vandalized or stolen at SC and nearby circulation points.
- Swastikas scrawled in the dust of car windows of a Jewish teenager near L Street.
- Photos of Adolph Hitler left at a Chula Vista trolley stop.

San Diego County's Jewish community suffered 38 recorded incidents of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish hate in 2021, according to the Anti-Defamation League. It is a dubious new record that may be broken in 2022, said ADL's Regional former Director Tammy Gillies. The figures represent "just the tip of the iceberg," she said. ADL officials said they expect 2022 to be far worse.

ANTI-SEMITISM PG 4

WATCHDOG REPORT

COLLEGE POLICE CRIME RECORDS, CLERY ACT DOCS UP TO DATE – FINALLY

BY JANINE RIVERA
Staff Writer

College police departments at public institutions across America are required to keep accurate campus crime records. Colleges that accept federal funding must also have records readily available for journalists and members of the public who ask to see them.

From 2016 to the early days of the pandemic in 2020 the Southwestern College Police Department was badly out of compliance. Former SCPD Chief Michael Cash could not produce federal Jeanne Clery Act crime statistics and presented faulty data to journalists that showed no violent crime or sexual assaults.

His successors seem to have turned things around.



MARCO BARENO

CRIME DOCS PG 6

CHAMPIONS!

■ *Women's soccer team romps undefeated to conference title*

BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA
News Editor

Goloso! The Southwestern College has achieved its "sweet goal" by netting the Pacific Coast Athletic Conference with a 3-0 win over against Grossmont College.

Undefeated in conference, undeterred by early season setbacks and unmatched on the pitch, the Lady Jaguars have put SC back in the champion's column after a long drought that spanned pandemic, panic and pandemonium ending in panacea.

Captains Raelyn Arredondo and Stacy Ziramba almost knocked over head coach Carolina Soto who opened her arms wide at the whistle the receive the airborne players in a hopping, spinning hug. In an instant the entire team was an undulating, shrieking mass of unrestrained joy.

Arredondo recalled the emotion of the moment.

"When it happened I cried," she said. "It was amazing. We had clinched it one day before the conference ended and that was just amazing."

SC finished 12-0-2 in conference and 15-3-3 overall. They grabbed the title with room to spare. Led by a group of three female coaches, the team built on unity and generous play was creative scoring goals and stubborn about surrendering them.

SOCCER PG 15



Photo Courtesy of SC Athletics

REACHING A GOAL — (l-r) Raelyn Arredondo, Alexa Madera, Norma Kacsinta and Stacy Ziramba celebrate their women's soccer championship following an undefeated season in the Pacific Coast Conference. SC finished 12-0-2 to win the title going away.

Precocious SC student editor is honored as SD County 'Remarkable Teenager'



A 'REMARKABLE' YOUNG JOURNALIST — Nicolette Monique Luna, the 16-year-old Editor in Chief of Southwestern College's El Sol Magazine and News Editor of The Sun, was honored as one of the 25 Most Remarkable Teens in San Diego County this month by the San Diego Public Defender's Office. Luna was a 15-year-old Bonita Vista High School sophomore when she was selected by her peers and journalism faculty to helm El Sol Magazine XII published in July. The publication was named Best College Magazine by the San Diego Press Club and Society of Professional Journalists. It received second place in the nation by the Associated Collegiate Press at its recent convention in Washington D.C. Luna is currently EIC of El Sol XIII, which is scheduled for publication in June or July 2023. She is a junior at BVHS cross enrolled at Southwestern. Her goal is to study journalism at Columbia University.

Photo Courtesy of Nicolette Monique Luna

CONTINUED FROM PG. 1

ANTI-SEMITISM: Recent increases in hateful activities in South Bay and across America has Jewish community, rights activists alarmed

It has been for Scheller.

On a warm August afternoon she and a friend had an ugly encounter at the Chula Vista Public Library near City Hall.

Scheller and historian Harry Orgovan were at the library packing up Scheller's critically-acclaimed exhibit "RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust" when they were approached by a middle aged man with dark hair and eyes. Scheller recounted the episode.

"What are you doing?" he snarled. "What is this?"

"We're taking down (our) Holocaust exhibit," she recalled telling the man. "There is a new exhibit coming in."

Scheller said the man seemed unhappy to hear that, but not for the reason she expected.

"You need to keep this up," she recalled the man saying. "Everybody needs to see this wall. Everybody needs to see Auschwitz. Everybody needs to know that Jews lie, Jews steal, Jews kill animals. Jews have their own language no one understands. They cry like babies and ask 'Where is God?' Don't they realize that God created Auschwitz so every Jew could get killed? You need to keep that wall up."

Scheller said she stood before the man silently and in shock when she realized that he considered the exhibit to be a celebration of Auschwitz and the Holocaust rather than a condemnation.

"It was a real wake up call," she said.

Call for Permanent Museum

The diatribe sparked a realization, Scheller said. There is a great need for a permanent Holocaust museum in the South Bay.

"We need to continue to work hard to teach younger generations about what happened to Jews and other marginalized people in the 1930s and '40s," she said. "We have so much more work to do."

Holocaust survivors are rapidly disappearing due to old age, Scheller said. The work of her mother, Holocaust educator Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax who died in 2018, must be handed off to younger Americans.

A museum would be the center of Holocaust education for schools and the community, she said, and a repository of artifacts from the pogrom, Kristallnacht, the Holocaust and other attacks on Judaism. Scheller envisions a museum that also educates about genocides committed against Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and peoples in Africa, North America and South America.

Bob Lehman, Executive Director of the San Diego Museum Council, supports Scheller's vision.

"Museums are really about the community telling its story," he said. "It's about remembering what happened and being able to tell that story."

Orgovan, president of the South Bay Historical Society and the Chula Vista Heritage Museum, partnered with Scheller on the Holocaust exhibit in the library.

"It really expanded my view of what the Holocaust was and why it is so important that we not judge people by race, religion, country of origin, or anything that we think defines them," he said.

Now Orgovan hopes to help Scheller continue educating others.

Scheller said "it's all about baby steps" as she presses for a Holocaust and human rights museum. She said she would love to build the museum at Southwestern College.

"Southwestern is our community's center of learning and personal growth," she said. "Chula Vista has a rich heritage of community-minded Jewish people who served others with selflessness and a spirit of generosity.



Photo Courtesy of Sandra Scheller



Photo Courtesy of Sandra Scheller



Photo Courtesy of Sandra Scheller



Photo By The Sun Staff



Photo By The Sun Staff

What a perfect place for a museum that reminds us that we must love and respect each other."

Magazines Destroyed

Scheller's encounter was a prelude to other anti-Semitic episodes in the community.

In late October SC journalism students and faculty were shocked to find that someone had vandalized or stolen thousands of copies of the Southwestern College Sun and El Sol Magazine at campus news stands as well as distribution points in Chula Vista, Bonita and Sunnyside. Nearly 200 copies of El Sol Magazine featuring three Holocaust survivors had their covers torn off. Some had

been stomped or torn up.

Perpetrators had combed the campus and attacked at least a dozen circulation sites. Publications advisor Dr. Max Branscomb reported the vandalism to the Chula Vista Police Department as well as the campus police. He also briefed college president Dr. Mark Sanchez. He estimated the value of the stolen and damaged publications to be \$2,000 - \$2,500.

"This was a calculated act," Branscomb said. "It took someone a long time to crisscross our campus, find all the newsstands and destroy so many newspapers and magazines."

Campus Police Chief Marco Bareno said SCPD officers would

ERA OF HATE — (from top) A swastika painted on the fence of a preschool on E. H Street near Southwestern College. Photos from the RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust exhibit at the Chula Vista Library. Copies of The Sun and El Sol Magazine vandalized by Trump supporters. Nearly a third of the entire run of El Sol Magazine VIII featuring SC's Muslim ASO President were ruined in 2016. More than \$8,000 worth of the student magazines were destroyed or stolen.

Photo Courtesy of Sandra Scheller



Tammy Gillies Image Courtesy of KPBS

San Diego County's Jewish community suffered 38 recorded incidents of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish hate in 2021, according to the Anti-Defamation League. The figures represent "just the tip of the iceberg." — Tammy Gillies, former Anti-Defamation League director



review video from blue pole security cameras to see if the perpetrators could be identified. Branscomb said he would prosecute any suspects identified by the police. Collegiate publications have special federal legislation designed to protect the speech rights of students and the work of young journalists. Theft, destruction and damage of college newspapers to prevent others from reading them is a federal offense and a felony, Branscomb said.

"Stealing and vandalizing student publications are despicable acts and efforts to thwart the First Amendment rights of college journalists," he said. "I won't have it on my watch. The perpetrators better pray we never catch them because if we do there will be severe consequences for them."

The vandalism could also generate hate crime charges, Bareno said, if the college could show that the motive was anti-Semitism. Bareno said he and the campus police support Southwestern's journalism students and would step up patrols around circulation points.

Camila Gonzalez, Editor in Chief of The Sun, had several of her articles published in the 2022 edition of El Sol Magazine. She said the attacks on student publications featuring courageous Holocaust survivors were "profoundly disappointing."

"I was in shock because the intention of this magazine was to create empowering and profound stories that were meant to impact the community in a positive way," she said. "These stories are more than just assignments to me. They give individuals a chance to speak their truths, which has always moved me."

Recent anti-Semitic activity and Holocaust deniers underscore the need for more reporting by young journalists on these topics, Gonzalez said.

"The Holocaust destroyed the lives of mothers, fathers, children and many other people," she said. "I cannot fathom why they continue to be met with anti-Semitism."

Gonzalez said SC journalism students are not intimidated by "hometown haters" and will continue to tell the stories of marginalized and underrepresented members of the San Diego County-Tijuana community.

Student Publications Targeted Before

Branscomb said The Sun and El Sol Magazine have been targets of hate crimes before, including:

2003. Islamophobic vandals destroyed hundreds of copies of The Sun and left singed piles near the journalism building protesting an article about an Iraqi refugee attending Southwestern College.

2005. A militant anarchist group burned copies of The Sun, vandal-



Photo By The Sun Staff



Photo By The Sun Staff



Photo Courtesy of Sandra Scheller



Photo Courtesy of Sandra Scheller

HATE OLD AND NEW — (clockwise from top) A large display of the Auschwitz concentration camp at the CVPL. Curator Sandra Scheller was verbally assaulted by an anti-Semite while taking down the exhibit. Former ASO President Mona Dibas was targeted by Islamophobic Trump supporters. A photo of South Bay Holocaust survivors from the RUTH exhibit. A swastika scratched into the dust of a Jewish teenager's car. Piles of ruined newspapers and magazines on the CV campus. Vandals crisscrossed the campus and vandalized student publications at 12 circulation sites. Copies of El Sol Magazine featuring three Holocaust survivors had covers ripped off or defaced.

ized the journalism building, and threatened to kill the advisor and a student journalist. Campus police had to guard the faculty member and student until the end of the school year after the group bused members of extremist organizations to campus. Their actions attracted white supremacists from the Ku Klux Klan, Minuteman Project and American Nazi Party to campus to protest The

Sun's coverage of immigration and students of color.

2010. Supporters of former college president Raj Chopra stole thousands of copies of The Sun with articles critical of Chopra and his vice president Nicholas Alioto. Chopra later ordered The Sun to cease publication, a directive the faculty advisor refused to follow. Students, staff and faculty countered by raising money to print

the edition that broke open the South Bay Corruption Scandal of 2010-12. Dozens of volunteers met the delivery truck and delivered a September 2010 issue by hand classroom-to-classroom so that students and staff would have the opportunity to read it. Chopra resigned shortly thereafter. Alioto was terminated.

Spring 2016. Islamophobics and supporters of then-presidential can-

didate Donald Trump vandalized and destroyed hundreds of copies of The Sun with a front page photo of newly-elected ASO President Mona Dibas, a hijabi Muslim woman. Vandals use felt pens to write "Trump 2016" across Dibas' face.

"There are a lot of crummy things going on in the world, but there are even more wonderful things. That and our young people should give all of us hope."

Sandra Scheller
HOLOCAUST EDUCATOR

Summer 2016. Nearly a third of the entire print run of El Sol Magazine VIII was destroyed by Trump supporters who objected to the cover photo of SC's Muslim ASO President Mona Dibas. They scrawled "Trump 2016" across Dibas' face or tore off the covers. About \$8,000 worth of the magazines were destroyed. The issue was later named National College Magazine of the Year and received the collegiate Pulitzer Prize.

Fall 2016. Issues of The Sun with a front page photo of African-American students protesting the shooting death of an unarmed Black man by police in El Cajon were destroyed by Trump supporters and racists who wrote "Trump 2016" or "Fuck Blacks" across the images of the Black student protesters.

"None of those attempts to silence Southwestern College journalism students were successful, and none ever will be," Branscomb said.

The Work Continues

Holocaust educators like Scheller and Rose Schindler, Benjamin Midler and Gerhard Maschkowski – the trio of elderly survivors featured on the cover of El Sol XII – have much the same attitude. Their work continues.

"Silence is complicity," Scheller said. "As long as there are people speaking up and sharing the truth there is hope. There are a lot of crummy things going on in the world, but there are even more wonderful things. That and our young people should give all of us hope."

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JAZZ: Disney songs get a sophisticated makeover by vocal music students

complicated, technical and not always for the musically feign of heart. Dissonant chords stab the brushy tempo and singers must navigate tricky phrasing, twitchy melodies and vocal pyrotechnics. Lopez showed guts and artistry in her stirring performance. Her voice was at times soft and soothing like crashing waves in the night, and at times taunt as a clothesline in the wind. It was Jazz Café's jazziest performance.

Burklund worked her own magic by guiding her experience-diverse group through some challenging numbers. She did what a talented director can do, making beginner, intermediate and advanced singers feel comfortable and look good. Some performers betrayed nerves, but they pushed through and won over the audience with their moments of courage in the spotlight.

Snaps and claps to the marvelous backing trio of pianist David Castel de Oro, bassist Alex Vargas and drummer Niccolas Nordfelt. Castel de Oro is a Southwestern College institution who has helped to make generations of singers shine with his spot on accompaniment. Vargas and Nordfelt are Jaguars-for-Life who came to the college as young musicians who are now supporting the next generation.

"Lilo and Stitch" did not get a number in Jazz Café, but the evening felt like *ohana*, family in every way. The *esprit de corps* was palpable among the performers and that covered the audience like a soft Hawaiian quilt. Jazz Café is Southwestern College performing arts at its multicultural best – inclusive, explorative and comfortable in each other's company.

CONTINUED FROM PG. 11

ADDAMS: Campy musical is quirky, smirky fun from a talented cast

drove the show. Her years of dance experience showed in a steamy and elegant tango that would have exposed a less talented actress.

Rio Moreno as Uncle Fester was an audience favorite thanks to an enthralling turn that was altogether ooky, but sentimental and lovable. He was the jolly pale giant and the crazy uncle in the attic who toggled from macabre to infatuated. Moreno had true insight into a character that seems so random. He understood that Fester was an overgrown child, capable of stubborn fixations and the willy nilly sillies.

Rachel Herrera as conflicted Wednesday and Kevin Stevens as the groaning butler Lurch earned double snaps for breathing life into underwritten characters and making them their own.

Yeager's staging was energetic and crisp, though there were moments that felt like the cast was too big for the space. He coaxed distinctive performances out of his young actors. Their confidence and grounding was a product of sound fundamentals and a solid rehearsal process.

Music directors Tracy Burklund and Ernest Quarles whipped the vocalists into shape, particularly the leads. Dana Maue provided sure-footed choreography and a dash of class to the movement. Designer Michael Buckley contributed his usual sublime set and lighting designs. SC performing arts students are fortunate to learn from such a talented team.

"The Addams Family" was a worthy musical debut in SC's new \$66 million performing arts complex. Coronavirus be damned, theater is back and a new generation is having its time in the spotlight.

ENTERING A NEW FIELD

■ Former farmworker Erica Alfaro transcended abject poverty, domestic violence to earn a Master's degree and became an author

BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA | News Editor

Erica Alfaro's life would be a great screenplay except for one problem. ● No one would believe it. ● She was a 15-year-old mother born to immigrant farmer workers in a violent relationship who was rescued by her brother, dropped out of school twice before earning a Master's degree, breaking the Internet and becoming a successful author. ● And that's just Act I.

ACCIDENTAL INTERNET STAR

Alfaro had a brush with fame in 2019 shortly after earning a Master's in education from SDSU. Grateful for her noble and hard-working parents who always supported her, she posed in her Master's graduation regalia flanked by her beaming mother and father in the same North County strawberry field her family toiled in when she was younger. The photo was an Internet sensation that has been emulated by graduating children of migrants ever since.

Earning a Master's hood was never on the mind of 15-year-old Erica as she gave birth to her son, Luis. The child's father was violent and abusive to the young mother and baby. Abuse rained down incessantly until Alfaro's brother intervened. He convinced his beleaguered sister that she did not deserve the malicious treatment and urged her to exit the relationship. He also said he would personally protect her, no matter what.

Her brother's devotion gave Alfaro the courage to escape a dangerous situation. Even though she was fleeing for her life, she could not outrun the guilt she felt. Like many victims of domestic abuse, she felt guilty that her son would grow up without a father. She said she also felt guilty for not leaving sooner and allowing her son to see her being abused.

Susy Alfaro, her sister, said

domestic abuse can be very complicated and Erica needed time to sort out what had happened to her.

"The hardest part (of Erica) going through domestic violence was my nephew being a witness," she said. "He was very young and he was trying to defend his mom."

Alfaro was free from her violent abuser and supported by her family, but had little else going for her. She was a high school dropout with a young child and no way to earn a living other than picking crops.

Her moment of enlightenment came in a dusty San Ysidro tomato field one afternoon thanks to her wise, weary mother. Alfaro said the words are forever etched in her memory.

"This is our life," she recalled her mother telling her. "We did not have any other options than to pick crops. If you want a better life, you need to get a good education."

Alfaro dusted herself off and applied for a GED program. It was a struggle, she said, but she eventually earned a high school diploma.

Success in education was intoxicating and Alfaro came to realize that she was as bright and capable as any of the other students surrounding her. She enrolled at Mira Costa College and earned an Associate's degree in psychology. More important, she transferred to CSU San Marcos to pursue a Bachelor's degree in psychology.



ERICA ALFARO

After a strong start, a setback. Luis developed a medical condition that required more and more of her time. Alfaro said she started feeling exhausted and overwhelmed caring for her young son and taking upper division classes. Her grades plunged and she was ruled academically disqualified.

When Luis began to stabilize she returned to Mira Costa College, discouraged but not defeated. Her husband Jose Esquivel said Alfaro was relentless.

"I learned from her not to give up and not to take no for an answer," he said.

San Marcos re-admitted Alfaro after she clawed her way through classes she had retaken at Mira Costa. She earned her BA in psychology and decided to keep climbing. She was accepted into the Master's program by the Education Department at SDSU and completed her MA in May 2019.

STRAWBERRY FIELDS NOT FOREVER

Shortly after earning her Master's hood, Alfaro hired a photographer and drove with her parents to a strawberry field where they had once labored. Strawberries are among the most difficult foods to harvest because they require farmworkers to crawl on their hands and knees through the dirt rows for hours on end. There are often unpleasant

ALFARO PG 13



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ALFARO: Strawberry fields produce multi-talented scholar

surprises beneath the leafy vines, including venomous spiders and rattlesnakes.

Her radiant parents had realized one of their dreams when they stood in the late spring sunshine, feet planted in the soil where they had scratched out a living.

“*Los sueños se hacen realidad*,” she said. (“Dreams become reality.”)

This was more than metaphysical greeting card sentiment for Alfaro, she explained. Dreams and goals need to be clearly defined before there is any hope of achieving them. When a person can visualize what awaits at the end of the journey, the

bumps and setbacks become just part of the trail.

“You can use your adversities as an excuse to stop or you can use them as motivation to keep moving forward,” she said.

Esquivel, her proud husband, she Alfaro’s decision to write her book, “Harvesting Dreams (*Cosechando Sueños*)” was driven by a desire to inspire others. The process was very emotional, he said.

“When she would write the book she poured her soul (into it), she poured her heart out,” he said. “I got to see those tears and that happy face when she completed a chapter.”

Inspiration and encouragement are gifts Alfaro likes to share, Esquivel said.

“Young Erica didn’t know if someone else in her position could be successful,” he said. “The mission of older Erica is to share with others what is possible. No matter the obstacles, no matter the background, no matter what happened, there is always a way to succeed.”

As her book tour winds down, her speaking engagements have heated up. Alfaro is a popular keynote speaker at high schools and colleges. And, in a sweet irony, she is now a

human resources manager at the same tomato field where her parents once worked.

“Somehow, I completed a full circle,” she said.

Act I is complete and the curtain has risen on Act II of the Life of Erica Alfaro, farmer worker turned scholar turned professional. She sees strawberries and tomatoes from a different point of view, but swears never to forget where she came from or the sacrifice of her parents. Like the hero in any story, she knows it is now her obligation to share her new powers with others back home.

Her journey continues.



FELICIDADES MAMÁ! — Alfaro and her son, Luis, celebrate her graduation from CSU San Marcos. Alfaro and Luis escaped a violent relationship and persevered through illness and poverty. She is now a human resources professional with a Master’s degree and an author. Photo courtesy of Erica Alfaro

CONTINUED FROM PG. 10

CAVADA: Beloved photographer used his artistic gifts to capture and celebrate South Bay culture

nature photographer Ansel Adams.

Cavada said he was amazed by Adams’ vision and determination to create great art. The pair camped on frigid plateaus to capture predawn moonrises, sat quietly for hours waiting for wildlife to drink from mountain streams and hiked through triple digits to be in perfect position for a desert sunset Adams imagined might await them.

Adams chuckled when Cavada once told him how amazed he was by the work Adams put in to capture landscapes at the perfect moment.

“Ain’t half as hard as capturing people at the perfect moment,” Adams told him.

Whenever he had time and money, Cavada would head to a remote or seldom documented part of Mexico to capture its rich, but eroding culture. His stunning catalogue of photographs includes rarely-photographed Tarahumara Indians, religious rituals, performing artists, laborers, food vendors and wildlife — all in vivid, life-affirming color. He had not completed his “The Spirit of Mexico” book before he died.

“Spirit of Mexico” was presented as an exhibit in the brand new Southwestern College Library and was one of the most popular, best attended exhibitions in college history, according to his nomination.

“Asked which was his favorite photograph, he pointed to a panoramic shot of a score of glorious monarch butterflies lined up on a taut rope almost like soldiers anticipating inspection. He said he loved the monarchs because they represent hope and are messengers that travel between Heaven and Earth.”

His friends say Cavada loved teenagers and young adults like a good teacher or coach. He was both. For decades he was a regular guest speaker at Southwestern College in photography, art and Spanish classes. He never forgot his start at a California community college and the *profe* who brought him to his mentor Ansel Adams.

A pair of prominent muralists made sure “Mr. National City” is remembered. In December Guillermo Aranda and Salvador Barajas unveiled a 10’ x 22’ mural of Cavada on the wall of the Chamber of Commerce building, steps away from his former home on fabled Brick Row, where for 30 years he photographed Sweetwater High School prom goers, thespians,

Photo courtesy of National City Chamber Foundation



PICTURE OF GRACE — For more than 50 years Memo Cavada chronicled Chicano activism, Latino theater, South Bay history and seminal moments for Sweetwater High School students. He was honored with a mural painted by legendary artists Guillermo Aranda and Salvador Barajas on the wall of the National City Chamber of Commerce.

“Someone needs to create a record of our history. Besides, it’s fun and I meet a lot of nice people doing things they are passionate about.”

MEMO CAVADA
2022 SC HONORARY
DEGREE RECIPIENT

athletes and graduates.

Actor Macedonio Artega said Cavada seemed to be everywhere he was needed.

“When you are involved in the community you see him at all the events,” said Artega. “You would get to know who he is and he starts getting to know who you are because he takes pictures of you performing or speaking. It is a relationship where he has this really unique opportunity to photograph people, but he also starts to form friendships through photography.”

Aranda said Cavada was tough and resilient, but always cheerful and optimistic.

“He was like a lot of us who had it rough when he was young,” Aranda said. “He managed to make something good out of his life.”

Cavada’s mural was commissioned by the National City Chamber Foundation, and the National City Arts and Culture Collaborative. Artists Barajas and Aranda — two of the nation’s greatest muralists — counted Cavada as a dear friend.

Jacqueline Luna Reynoso, former CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, said it was a confluence of good fortune.

“(We wanted) an artist that would do justice bringing Memo to life and be able to share this gift with the community,” she said. “We are so blessed to have found Guillermo Aranda and Sal Barajas.”

Former MAAC Project Director Roger Cazares said the mural has much in common with Cavada’s enriching photos.

“I think it is going to be a lasting message to our *gente*,” he said. “You work hard, you persevere, you fight against all the odds and all the barriers that have been put up against us, but you knock them down. That’s what *mi hermano* Memo always did.”



STORYTELLER, PHILOSOPHER — Jessie Lark enjoys writing on both the guitar and piano, and also enjoys collaborating with other to gain new perspectives.

CONTINUED FROM PG. 10

LARK: Gifted South County singer-songwriter releases bright new EP

of songbirds. She was nominated for a San Diego Music Award in the category of Best Singer-Songwriter and has performed throughout the region.

Inspiration for her lyrical songs comes from love, heartbreak and betrayal, but also everyday experiences that make humans human. Her music is emotionally transparent.

“If it’s a song you really poured your heart into, it’s all there,” she said. “You’ve told the story so fully there is nothing else to say and no need for additional context.”

Songwriters are storytellers, philosophers and even sources of wisdom, Lark said, so the lyrics deserve attention. Good songs are those that resonate with large swaths of listeners.

“You want to be specific, but you don’t want to be so specific that people who listen to the song can’t hear themselves in it,” she said.

Artists crave inspiration, Lark said, but discipline is important, too. Like John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Lark likes to schedule writing time. Sometimes inspiration follows.

“You need to be able to write even when there isn’t a perfect inspirational moment,” she said.

It helps to be a fan of a wide array of musical forms, she said, and to constantly listen to good music by other artists. Songwriters never want to copy others and be derivative, but they do need to learn constantly and develop a broad musical vocabulary. She also said it is good to be a critic.

“If you feel kind of ho hum and you can’t hold a conversation about music, you really need to dive into the work of other people,” she said. “Enjoy it. Dissect it. Argue with your friends. (Be a) creator and a consumer.”

Quiet and thoughtful by nature, Lark said the idea of standing on a stage with a microphone and a guitar strapped over your shoulder can be exhilarating and terrifying at the same time.

“It’s hard to perform and put yourself out there,” she said. “(What helps me) is remembering that it’s not about you up there. It’s about the song and it’s about the message you’re about to share. It’s the same when you’re just talking to

somebody. If we got nervous before going to talk to somebody like I’m talking to you right now (you cannot worry about) ‘I hope she likes me, I hope I say the right thing, I hope I come off okay.’ That would cause me to be in my head instead of focusing on messages.”

A transparent singer is vulnerable, she said. A great performance can happen when an artist is in “the flow,” a place of comfort and concentration where nerves subside and creativity pours forth.

“Your brain and your body are just vehicles to perform that message for other people,” she said. “When you (are communicating) it makes you art more sincere, it makes you perform better and more vulnerable. That’s what people are there for. People pay to go see a show because they want to have an emotional connection with the music and songs.”

COVID-19 and the ensuing chaos slowed Lark’s momentum as a live performer, but may have been a blessing in disguise. Like many great artists throughout history, she turned away from a locked door and opened another. Lark adapted and learned new skills. She began sharing music and performing live on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube from home. Twitch enabled her to perform globally and interact with her audience in a more intimate way. Her Twitchcasts, “JessieLarkMusic,” run every Tuesday from noon – 3 p.m. and Thursdays at 9 a.m.

“After (H)ours” is a COVID labor of love, she said, a “Rona rose growing from the rubble. Tracks include, “Love Don’t Change,” “Come on,” “Go Slow,” “Under These Sheets” and “Fly Away.”

Like Sir Elton John and Dave Grohl, Lark enjoys collaborating with other musicians. She writes with the band The Rogue Pilots and performs in their upcoming video. She is featured on the new Joe Dreamz music video “Phase.” She also enjoys doing charity gigs, including her favorite, the San Diego Blood Bank.

Cancelled gigs could not cancel Lark’s enthusiasm for music or the bright future awaiting her.

“Music never goes away,” she said. “It is always around because we need it.”

CONTINUED FROM PG. 8

DISORDERS: Eating issues most common in younger women

“I do not think I have an eating disorder,” she said. “I only eat one meal a day. I do not consider it a bad thing. I feel comfortable.”

Ortiz said she frequently feels she does not have time to eat, but tries to remember to squeeze in meals. She said she thinks she has healthier eating habits than some of her peers.

“I have friends who eat once a day or nothing at all,” she said.

“My friend has a really bad eating disorder and I ask her if she wants to go out or have breakfast, but I can’t really force her to do anything she doesn’t want to do.”

Although treatment is the best course of action, it is out of most people’s reach. Treatment programs can range from \$500 to \$2,000 a day. Monthly in-patient treatment often costs \$30,000 and individuals

need an average of six months of care. Most health insurance does not cover eating disorders.

My eating disorder always hovers nearby, but for now I feel like I am making much healthier choices. I eat regular, healthy meals and carry a couple healthy snacks with me when I come to campus. I want to be healthy and happy. I have goals fueled by dreams and food.

BACK PAGE

Voices In Our Communities

MESSENGERS OF HEAVEN

Gente Unida volunteers walk along the U.S.-Mexico border in a solemn remembrance of refugees around the globe.

BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA

It was actually pretty quiet at the border on a sunny but brisk winter morning. Not a riot or humanitarian crisis in sight.

There were foxes, but no FOX, open fields but no open border. Indeed, a hulking metal wall was a rusty slice of nationalism vivisectioning a binational hillside festooned with blocky concrete houses on the developed south and fragrant chaparral mixed with a touch of salty sea breeze on the still natural north.

There were no teeming swarms of immigrants, just a swarm of gnats and a team of human rights activists in running shoes and hiking boots trudging along a sandy path threading a riparian oasis between Tijuana's

MARCH • CONT ON PG 4



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA



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PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA

WING AND A PRAYER — Franciscan Friar Dermot Rogers leads marchers through Border Field State Park, stopping periodically to remember migrants who died in transit. Activists released monarch butterflies to inspire hope and encouragement.

MARCH

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Human rights activists honor lost migrants

2.3 million people and San Diego County's 3.3 million souls.

"Beautiful, *verdad?*" offered Enrique Morones, the Gente Unida founder who organized Walk for Migrants. "We are so blessed to be able to enjoy a morning like this when so many other people can't."

Morones picked a perfect December morning in Border Field State Park – warm in the sun, cool in the shade, capped by an azure dome spotted by an occasional tumbling cloud. He and his fellow walkers were there to remember the suffering and tragedy of migrants around the world, including near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Padre Dermot Rodgers, in his traditional brown Franciscan friar's robe and sandals, reminded the line of the reason for the season. It was two weeks before Christmas on *el Dia de la Virgen de Guadalupe*, but Father Rodgers stopped and gathered the pack every few minutes like an Easter Station of the Cross procession.

Instead of the suffering of Christ, Father Rodgers shared stories of suffering by immigrants from Haiti, Syria, Somalia, Ukraine, Venezuela, China and other corners of the world beset by poverty and violence.

"We ask for basic and simple justice," he said in his light Irish brogue, a vestige of his native Belfast, Northern Ireland. Rosary beads dangling from his weathered fingers and a serious countenance crossed his otherwise welcoming face.

Justice, however, is rarely basic or simple, he said. Inequity, war and corruption have pushed tens of millions out of their native countries and on to the migrant trail, an invisible highway of desperation crisscrossing the planet. Like the earnest walkers in the bottom left corner of America, as many as 1.3 million migrants are on the move this very day, said Rodgers.

Many of them never reach their destination, he said, struck down by heat, cold, robbers, rapists, accidents and hunger. More than 1,000 migrants died along the southern border in 2022 alone, according to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Rodgers gathered marchers to pray a portion of the rosary for Joselyn Quinteras of El Salvador, a migrant who died of dehydration and heat exhaustion in the desiccated southern Arizona desert near Tumacacari.

"She was abandoned in the wilderness by the *coyotes* she had paid to guide her across the border," he said. "They found her body three weeks later."

Quinteras, like the other migrants remembered along the way, was honored with a tangerine butterfly released into the cyan sky.

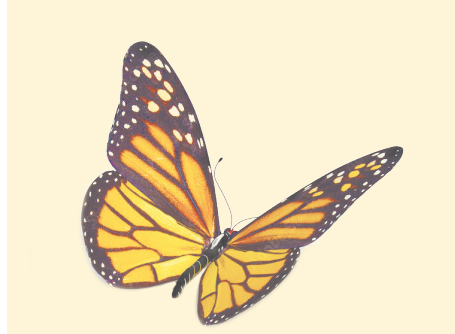
"Butterflies are symbols of hope in many cultures," said Rodgers. "They are revered in Latino cultures as messengers to heaven. Butterflies remind us that we are never alone and always connected to the spiritual world."

Transfronterizo human rights activist Hugo Castro is a man known for his remarkable courage while helping Central American migrants traverse the perilous journey through Mexico where they are preyed upon by cartels and petty criminals alike. Castro was severely beaten and left for dead in a rural roadside ditch a few years ago while accompanying migrants. Morones said it is a miracle he survived.

Castro is a diminutive and soft spoken man, which betrays his reputation as a fierce defender of the weak and vulnerable. He said it was fitting that a Franciscan monk



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF



MONARCH MESSENGERS

Franciscan Padre Dermot Rodgers said butterflies are a symbol of hope in many cultures and have a special place in the hearts of Latinos. "They are revered in Latino cultures as messengers to heaven," he said. "Butterflies remind us that we are never alone and always connected to the spiritual world." Monarch butterflies, which undertake long migrations between California and Mexico, are symbols of immigrants and DREAMERS. Gente Unida activist Frank Modic, a hospice chaplain, raises butterflies to be released at ceremonies and funerals. The sleeping butterfly awakens and becomes active in the warm sunlit hands of participants. After a few moments, they test their wings and take flight.

and a team of activists clutching rosaries gathered on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe to fight for the rights of migrants.

"It helps us to recognize the necessity of fighting for human rights, which is really a spiritual quest," he said. "Some of us do it for spiritual reasons to light a flame of hope and love."

Marching along the border to honor migrants "*es muy importante*," Castro said, but the event is even more important for the activists walking together in the comforting sun. Caring for others



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF

MARIPOSAS AND MEMORIALS — Gente Unida activists walked along the U.S.-Mexican border in memory of migrants from around the world who died while trying to reach for a better life. (from top) Frank Modic hands a slumbering butterfly to Cecelia di Mino. Padre Dermot Rodgers helps a young Monarch walk to a native plant. A marcher reads a passage from Catholic scripture.

requires people of good will to also care for themselves, he said, and to be periodically recharged with inspiration.

"*Hay un gran crisis humanitaria en todo el mundo*," he said. "We need to remember that God is on their side and our side. Walking today with *el padre y los mariposas* helps me to remember that and gives me encouragement to do more work."

Cecelia di Mino was a teenager adrift when she landed at Southwestern College and found herself, she said. Today she is a Harvard graduate who remembers

her humble South County roots. She traveled from Las Vegas to participate in the walk, which she felt called to.

"I was blessed with opportunity so many other people do not have," she said. "Sometimes as people find success and run toward their goals they forget their past, they forget about those they left behind. Migrants are so often the people left behind. They are criminalized and victimized."

Looking down the path, Di Mino said she saw reasons for optimism. "The people (here) have great

intention and energy," she said. "Releasing the butterflies...was really beautiful. There is a lot of love. (We need) people to pay attention (to migrants) and treat them with dignity and respect."

Retiree Dr. Christauria Welland is far from retired. The former educator now helps run the Oaxaca Education Fund that provides schooling and food to indigenous people in Mexico's southern states. One part of her organization's mission is to help people thrive

MARCH • CONT NEXT PG



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF



“I was blessed with opportunity so many other people do not have. Sometimes as people find success and run toward their goals they forget their past, they forget about those they left behind. Migrants are so often the people left behind. They are criminalized and victimized.”

CECELIA DI MINO
SC alumnae, Harvard graduate



PHOTO BY NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA / STAFF

MEMORIAL MARCH — Gente Unida volunteers annual Walk for Migrants serves as a memorial for deceased migrants as well as a day of reflection about their activism and their lives. Padre Dermot Rogers stops to share a story of a migrant from the Middle East. Walkers prayed for peace in the world and more humane treatment of refugees.



“A little support can go a long way, but the need is great. Mexico is a wonderful but complicated society. Doing humanitarian work there can be difficult because there are so many barriers and challenges.”

DR. CHRISTA WELAND
Director of the Oaxaca Education Fund

where they are so they do not become displaced refugees.

“A little support can go a long way,” she said, “but the need is great. Mexico is a wonderful but complicated society. Doing humanitarian work there can be difficult because there are so many barriers and challenges.”

Hope gives her the power to push on, she said.

“Education is a force multiplier,” she said. “One transformed person can transform others. That is how it has always been since the beginning of time.”

Morones and company had planned to march all the way to the beach at the international border, but recent downpours had flooded the path. Padre Rodgers said the God-sent rain was a blessing for the plants and animals of the park, including the squadron of butterflies launched by the marchers that morning.

“The butterflies were born in the desert southwest of Southern California and will later migrate to the Columbia River Gorge around Portland, Oregon,” he said. “Our butterflies represent our migrants who are also undertaking a great trek. May God protect them as they make their journeys.”

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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MOREH ROSE SCHINDLER BENT DARKNESS TO LIGHT

From the last time she saw her father at Auschwitz until the day she died, Rose Schindler's mission in life was to tell the world what happened during the Holocaust. Her father's last words to the 14-year-old dwelled within her until she died this month at 93.

"Whatever you do, stay alive so that you can tell the world what they are doing to us."

Mrs. Schindler fulfilled her mission and became one of America's greatest Holocaust educators and one of our nation's greatest citizens. The last 45 years of her life were dedicated to keeping the sacred promise she made to her father. There are no exact figures to tabulate how many people she reached, but it would be safe to say it was in the hundreds of thousands. She became one of our nation's leading *Moreh*, the Hebrew word for teacher. In Judaism they is no more honored title.

Moreh Schindler required superhuman stamina and enormous inner strength to travel the land and share her family's horrific experiences of fear, suffering and death at the hands of one of history's most barbarous regimes. Her parents and most of her immediate family were among the 6 million Jews exterminated by German Nazis during World War II. Her family members were killed in the notorious Auschwitz gas chamber. A tattoo etched on her forearm by the Nazis was a daily reminder.

Miraculously teenage Rose and her sister survived, once by sneaking out of the line of teens and children heading for the same gas chambers her parents perished in. She later dodged death by lying about her age and going to a labor camp with able bodied adults. Her courage, cunning and desire to live propelled her through unspeakable depravation and epic cruelty.

Then, on one surprising morning, the Germans fled and she realized she could keep her promise to her father. She met fellow Holocaust survivor Max Schindler in England, immigrated to San Diego County and raised a family.

In her late 40s she launched into her life's third act. She was a charismatic presence, a gifted storyteller and a brilliant witness to history. When the world's collective memory of the Holocaust began to fade, she was the right woman at the right moment. Her message to "pick up the torch and carry it forward" resonated with youth. She visited hundreds of schools, sat for countless interviews and wrote a book, "Two Who Survived: Keeping Hope Alive While Surviving the Holocaust."

Among the campuses she visited recently was Bonita Vista High School, our neighbor across the street. Moreh Schindler was compelled to go to BVH in late April of 2022 following darkly ugly acts of anti-Semitic vandalism there and at BV Middle School.

It was a seminal event for the high school. Her electrifying presentation transformed the BVH student body. When she began to speak it was if the whole world froze to listen. Students were shocked, outraged and pained to hear what the Schindler girls were put through. She spoke of her happy childhood that turned horrific after her entire family was arrested and sent to Auschwitz where she was tortured and enslaved. Tears flowed when she told the teenagers in the high school gym that she and her sister were the only two of the nine members of her family to survive the concentration camp. They were also teens.

Somehow the terrible things Moreh Schindler faced could not ruin her radiant spirit. She was a Holocaust survivor who inexplicably remained update and optimistic. She was one of the liveliest and most loving people anyone could hope to meet.

Faith made her that way, she said. It was her faith in young people that fueled her optimism and her mission.

Rose Schindler was a warrior for peace right to the end. She spoke to enthralled audiences just a fortnight before she died.

Now the torch has passed to us. We honor her and other great Holocaust *Moreh* like Ben Midler, Gerhard Maschkowski and the late SC honorary degree recipient Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax by continuing their work to reject evil and promote peace. It is now our turn to say "never again" and keep alive the spirits of Holocaust victims and survivors.

History has a disconcerting habit of repeating itself, but people of good will and intention can prevent humanity from replicating its darkest mistakes. In the spirit of Rose Schindler, we accept the challenge.

Moreh Schindler required superhuman stamina and enormous inner strength to travel the land and share her family's horrific experiences of fear, suffering and death at the hands of one of history's most barbarous regimes.

Her parents and most of her immediate family were among the 6 million Jews exterminated by German Nazis during World War II.



ILLUSTRATION BY EDMUNDO GODINEZ / STAFF

Her family members were killed in the notorious Auschwitz gas chamber.

A tattoo etched on her forearm by the Nazis was a daily reminder.

Rose Schindler was a warrior for peace right to the end. She spoke to enthralled audiences just a fortnight before she died.

Regional Holocaust survivors continue to share their stories of horror, survival and joyfulness with younger generations



ECHOES OF THE SHOAH





‘WE MUST NEVER FORGET’

An intrepid group of 80- and 90-year-old Holocaust survivors continue their tireless efforts to teach tolerance and peace.

By NICOLETTE MONIQUE LUNA

On January 27, 1945 allied troops liberated Auschwitz, the notorious Nazi concentration camp where at least 1.1 million Jews were killed. Shocked citizens of the world cried “Never again!”

On October 31, 2021 persons unknown spray painted Nazi swastikas, anti-Semitic messages and

PERMANENT REMINDER



(l-r) Holocaust survivors Rose Schindler, Benjamin Midler and Gerhard Maschkowski show the tattoos they were given by the Nazis at the Auschwitz and Birkenau extermination camps.

The trio, gathered for Maschkowski’s 97th birthday, remain active speaking at schools and gatherings about the *shoah* (the Hebrew word for Holocaust).

anti-LGBTQ screeds on the walls of Bonita Vista High School and Middle School just across the street from Southwestern College. Citizens of the community cried “It’s happened again!”

Holocaust survivor Rose Schindler had seen it all before ... in Czechoslovakia in 1943.

“That is often how it starts,” the 93-year-old told assemblies of BVH students days after the vandalism. “We also had messages on the walls. They told people we were criminals and sinners. At one time (Jewish people) were the leaders of (our home) city. Then, because of the Nazis, people in our community began to look down on us. Suddenly they did not like what we were doing. They began telling us we had no rights.”

Schindler and most of the dwindling family of



“So many (survivors) are soldiering on, but the time will come when we will not have their voices to remind us about the horrors of the Holocaust.”

SANDRA SCHELLER

PHOTOS COURTESY
OF SANDRA SCHELLER

Holocaust survivors tend to be, against all odds, cheerfully optimistic people. They profess to being worried, however, about young Americans who, as time marches on, are distant from the Holocaust and unaware of that savage time in history when German Nazis exterminated more than 6 million Jews.

Planet Earth’s “never again” generation is running out of time. A quintet of determined Holocaust survivors relentlessly continue their work as messengers from the dark times of the *shoah*. Schindler is joined by 94-year-old Ben Midler, 86-year-old Ursula Israelski, 88-year-old Louis Peschi and Gerhard Maschkowski, who turned 97 this month.

Sandra Scheller, a Chula Vista Holocaust scholar and human rights activist, said the world is nearing a time when no Holocaust witnesses remain.

“We are steadily losing our last Holocaust survivors,” she said. “Our Holocaust survivors are all in their eighties, nineties and one hundreds. It is essential that we help them teach younger generations about what happened to the people who suffered through the Holocaust and those who were killed. So many (survivors) are soldiering on, but the time will come when we will not have their voices to remind us about the horrors of the Holocaust.”

Scheller, the daughter of Holocaust survivors Kurt Sax and Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax, is working tirelessly to amplify the voices of the region’s remaining survivors – particularly with children and teenagers. She spent years shepherding her mother to hundreds of school assemblies, television appearances and recording sessions. Ruth Sax was a 2018 Southwestern College Honorary Degree recipient. She died in December 2018, but not before enjoying her Bat Mitzvah at age 89.

Inspired by her mother, Scheller curated an exhibit at the Chula Vista Public Library Civic Center Branch called RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust. It opened in March 2020 and has been extended through August 2022 due to pandemic-related closures.

RUTH tells the stories of local Holocaust survivors and has a rich collection of artifacts from World War II. Scheller said her mission is to tell the stories of Holocaust survivors and to eventually establish a



Ruth's Work Carries Forward



A cutout of Holocaust survivor Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax is on display at the Chula Vista Library next to the actual dress worn by her mother in a Nazi concentration camp. Mrs. Sax received an Honorary Degree from Southwestern College and was Grand Marshal of the Bonitafest. She died in 2018 at the age of 90 shortly after enjoying her long-delayed Bat Mitzvah.

permanent museum in the South Bay.


“This exhibit is a seed, a gift to my city,” she said. “Like any seed, it takes people to water it and nurture it. I am hopeful it will find a new home.”

Chula Vista has an unusual number of Holocaust survivors, Scheller said, as an active community coalesced in the 1950s and 1960s.

“Chula Vista should be home to a Holocaust Center,” she said. “This loving community gave Holocaust survivors a chance and in return the survivors gave their love and best efforts to their community.”



LOSING MY RELIGION

 Some members of the Peschi family converted from Judaism to Catholicism so they could travel in Yugoslavia to escape the Nazis. Louis Peschi was captured anyway and would have been shipped to Auschwitz were it not for the fast thinking of a clever uncle.

Scheller has been actively seeking out Holocaust survivors and interviewing them on video to preserve their experiences for future generations. She has a YouTube channel with interviews of her mother, Ruth Sax, as well Schindler, Midler, Israelski, Peschi, Maschkowski and other Holocaust witnesses.

“They are amazing stories,” Scheller said. “These people endured so much brutality, yet they are such loving and generous souls. They are all determined not to let the Holocaust be forgotten.”

Scheller urged the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors to carry on their work.

“I hate to say it, but in five years there will be many fewer survivors still with us,” she said. “We, as the second generation, need to stay on top of things to keep the message going forward.”


Louis Peschi, 88

LOUIS PESCHI WAS BORN IN 1934 IN ZAGREB, Yugoslavia (now part of Croatia). His mother and father were Jewish, he said, though not particularly religious.


On Easter Sunday 1941, Peschi

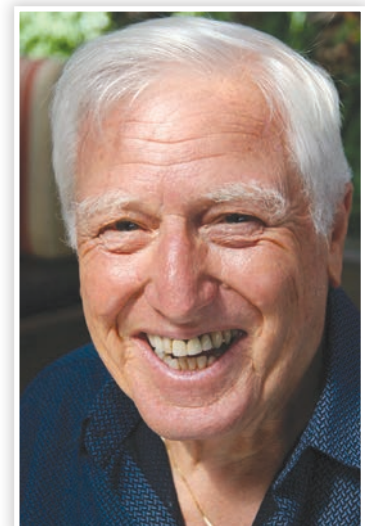


A PIONEERING ISRAELI

 Louis Peschi grew up confused about his religious beliefs and his Jewish heritage because his parents told him to pretend he was Catholic in hopes that he would survive Nazism. As a teenager in 1948 Peschi went with his father to the brand new nation of Israel, where he lived for seven years before immigrating to the United States.

A BIG FAN OF THE YANKEES

 Louis Peschi with a trio of American soldiers during the liberation of Italy, where he moved with his parents to avoid the worst of the Nazis’ ethnic cleansing of Jews.



and his mother traveled to Belgrade, Serbia to visit his grandfather and uncle. They were unexpectedly caught up in the Bombing of Belgrade, which killed an estimated 70,000 people. Trying to return to Zagreb by train they came to a screeching halt. A railway bridge had been destroyed in the bombing. They made a perilous journey home only to discover German officers staying in their house. The Nazis left in the morning and the Peschis thought they would be okay.

Soon, however, Peschi's father was informed by his German business partners that the next time he encountered Nazis the soldiers would kill his family. Only Catholics could travel, so they converted and were baptized.

"We converted just so we could live, survive," said Peschi.

His parents sent him to live in a small provincial town with his Catholic aunt and uncle. He hid in plain sight and played the role of a Catholic boy.

"I had to hide my name, I had to hide who I was, I had to hide everything," he said.

Somehow the authorities caught on. When Peschi was in the second grade he was arrested and jailed by the police. His aunt stayed with him. His uncle was able to negotiate with the chief of police for the boy's freedom. He was spared a terrible fate.

"I got out at six in the evening," he said. "At midnight all the people in the jail were put on a transport and ended up in Auschwitz."

Most of them were never seen again.

His resourceful uncle found a woman to take Peschi to Italy where he was reunited with his parents.

After the 1945 liberation of Italy, Peschi's parents divorced. He returned with his father to Yugoslavia, but three years later they moved to Israel where he lived for seven years. In 1955 he joined his mother in the United States after she managed to get him a Visa.

Rose Schindler, 93

"YOUNG PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT PEACE AND justice need to pick up the torch and carry it forward," Schindler said. "The Holocaust ended more than 75 years ago. Most of the survivors are gone. There are fewer and fewer left to pass on their stories."

Research by social scientists verifies Schindler's concerns. A 2020 Pew Research Center study reported that half of American teens and young adults do not know much about the Holocaust, the concentration camps or the Nazis' mass



'A Seed' for a Permanent Museum



Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax's daughter, Sandra Scheller, curated the critically acclaimed exhibit "RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust" on display until August. Scheller is working on establishing a permanent Holocaust museum in Chula Vista. 'RUTH' was one of the most visited exhibits in the history of the Chula Vista Public Library.

extermination of Jews.

"It's not your fault," Schindler told her young audience. "It's the passage of time. As time goes by people tend to forget. We cannot let that happen. We need you to help."



Born in 1929 in Czechoslovakia, Schindler called herself a "happy child" until she and her family were arrested by Nazis and shipped by train to Auschwitz, the notorious death camp in a corner of Nazi-occupied Poland.

Days after she arrived, a haggard but kindly man she did not recognize approached her. It was her father, an orthodox Jew who she

had always seen with a beard, suit and tie. He was clean shaven and dressed in drab prison garb. She told him her two sisters were with her.

"Stay together," her father implored Rose. "Survive and tell the world what they're doing to us."

Her father and brother died in a slave labor camp. Rose and her two sisters miraculously survived the

Jews are a small but mighty minority who have contributed much to America

Jewish people are a small minority of Americans, according to the 2020 census, representing 2.4 percent of the United States population. It can be argued, however, that Jewish Americans have had an outsized influence on our nation and culture. Bob Dylan, Steven Spielberg, Natalie Portman, Harrison Ford, Barbra Streisand and Daveed Diggs are Jewish as are sports giants Aly Raisman, Sandy Koufax, Rod Carew, Theo Epstein and Hank Greenberg. The great Albert Einstein was Jewish as is Bernie Sanders.

California is about 3 percent Jewish and so is San Diego County. There are no reliable measures of the Jewish population in the South Bay, but Jewish leaders and demographers have estimated that its percentage is higher than the state or nation. One possible reason is the thriving Jewish community in Mexico, which American Jewish scholars say is concentrated in Mexico City and Tijuana.

JEWS IN MEXICO

Jewish-Mexican-American filmmaker Isaac Artenstein said Jews have thrived in Mexico for about 500 years, but particularly since about 1910 when turmoil in Russia compelled Jewish people to immigrate to North America. World War I caused more Jews to leave Europe for the United States, but untold numbers were not allowed entrance. His documentary “Tijuana Jews” concluded that a wave of immigrating Jews settled in Mexico instead.

“In the early 1900s many European Jewish immigrants hoping to enter the United States were blocked, so they ended up entering Mexico through the port of Veracruz,” according to the film.

Jews entering Mexico came from Russia, Poland, Turkey and other parts of Europe where anti-Semitism was swelling.

“Mexico basically welcomed European Jews with open arms,” said Artenstein.

Thousands of Jews still hoping to enter the U.S. came to Tijuana. After World War II others joined them, including a wave of Holocaust survivors. Many of Tijuana’s iconic businesses and restaurants, including Dorian’s, were started by Jewish-Mexicans.

“I grew up eating lox and bagels,

chilaquiles, and rice and beans,” Artenstein said. “It is also wonderful that vodka and tequila are both kosher!”

JEWS IN CHULA VISTA

Historians Steven Schoenherr and Susan Walters researched the influence of Jews in Chula Vista for their 2011 book “Chula Vista Centennial.” Much of that research did not make the final version of the book, but was published online by the South Bay Historical Society. Schoenherr and Walters zeroed in on a few notable Jewish Chula Vistans who made substantial contributions to the community.

Dr. Alvin May

An optometrist, Dr. May moved to Chula Vista in 1943 and opened a practice. He became president of Tifereth Israel Synagogue and helped attract other medical doctors to the city, include fellow ophthalmologist Dr. Robert Penner.

Dr. Robert Penner

A founder of the venerable Temple Beth Shalom, Penner served as a member of the San Diego Port Commission.



He may be best known as the husband of legendary KPBS journalist Gloria Penner.

Sam Vener

A Chula Vista Harbor Commissioner, Vener owned vast tomato and cucumber fields at the foot of E Street and south along the waterfront. He was active in the Chula Vista sister city initiative with Argentina city General Roca, for which the park on the northern end of Fifth Avenue is named. In 1975 Vener famously quit the tomato business by throwing open his fields and giving away his final crop. He said labor costs made it unprofitable to continue.

Lowell Blankfort

Arguably one of Chula Vista's most important citizens of the second half of the 20th century, Blankfort purchased the "Chula Vista Star News" newspaper and built it into one of the best community papers in the nation. Under Blankfort's stewardship, the "Star News" had a staff of about 12 reporters, four full-time photographers and a staff artist. He was progressive ahead of his time, advocating for equal pay for women, passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, environmental protections, the decriminalization of marijuana and humane immigration policies. Many of his young journalists went on to notable careers in the news media, politics, education and business. Blankfort was a fierce defender of student free speech rights.



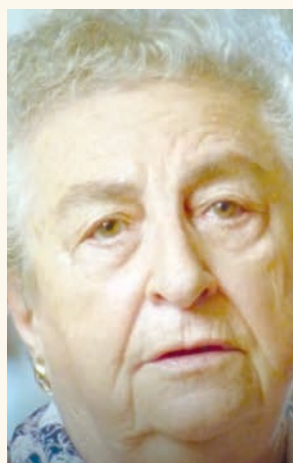
Dr. Leonard Servetter

Dr. Servetter became principal of Rosebank Elementary School in 1963 and by 1975 was superintendent of the Chula Vista Elementary School District. He famously

told a "Star News" reporter, "My religion doesn't enter into my job, but it does affect my philosophy. My religion teaches how to conduct myself, to be concerned, to help those less fortunate and not to embarrass anyone in public." Servetter was universally respected by younger South Bay educational leaders and was a mentor to many.

Helen Waterford

A Holocaust survivor, Waterford joined forces with former Hitler Youth Alfons Heck and the pair made presentations about the destructiveness of fascism and anti-Semitism during World War II and beyond. Their depictions of the mistreatment of Jews from their very different vantage points were compelling and life changing for thousands of students and community members who attended their talks.



Anne and William Hedenkamp

The education and civic activists had a Chula Vista Elementary School District campus named in their honor in 2003. Anne Hedenkamp was a Congregation Beth Israel "Woman of Valor," a labor union activist and co-founded the sister city relationship with General Roca, Argentina.

Steve Kowit

One of Southwestern College's best known and most loved professors, Professor Kowit was

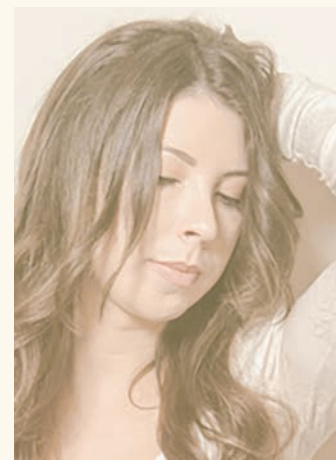


a nationally-revered poet, editor and critic who was friends with Bob Dylan, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Kerouac. He was a peace activist and animal rights advocate who used his facility with language to inspire young Americans to become involved with meaningful causes in their communities.

from Southwestern College in 2018. She was also Grand Marshal of the Bonitafest, California Senate “Mother of the Year,” and “Woman of Valor” at the San Diego Jewish Arts Festival. She is the central subject of RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust, the ambitious exhibit at the Chula Vista Library.

Jessie Lark

Born Jessica Lerner, the prodigiously-talented Bonita Vista High School graduate is a critically-acclaimed singer-songwriter and recording artist. She is also an actress who has starred in “La Pastorela” and other regional musical productions.



Sandra Scheller

A gifted artist and costume designer, Scheller worked for Cirque du Soleil for many years in Las Vegas before returning home to Chula Vista to assist her mother, Ruth Sax, as she continued her Holocaust witnessing into her 90th year. Scheller has taken up her parents’ torch and helps other Holocaust survivors to schedule appearances and make presentations. She curated the RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust exhibit at the Chula Vista Public Library and has a YouTube channel with interview of Holocaust survivors. She is currently working to establish a Holocaust Center in Chula Vista.



Kurt and Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax

Holocaust survivors who actively helped other Jewish immigrants to get on their feet in America, the Sax’s were pillars in the Chula Vista community. Kurt was a leader in the Temple Beth Shalom, which in 2012 received an historic designation from the Chula Vista Historical Preservation Commission.

Ruth Sax was a tireless speaker and witness for Holocaust victims and survivors. She spoke at hundreds of schools, service organizations, conferences, churches and historical gatherings, sharing her harrowing experiences at Auschwitz and Theresienstadt as a young Jewish prisoner. Mrs. Sax was present an Honorary Degree

ROBERT PENNER PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO JEWISH WORLD
 LOWELL BLANKFORD PHOTO COURTESY OF PARADISE POST
 HELEN WATERFORD PHOTO COURTESY OF UNITED STATES
 HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
 STEVE KOWIT PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA
 KURT AND RUTH SAX PHOTO COURTESY OF SANDRA SCHELLER
 JESSIE LARK PHOTO COURTESY OF ALAN HESS

horror of Auschwitz.

“I promised my father I would tell the world what they did to us,” she said. “I am keeping my promise. Now I need younger people to keep telling others what happened during the Holocaust.”

Surviving the atrocities of Auschwitz took courage, determination and shrewdness, Schindler said. Also a great deal of luck. She and her sisters had another power that helped them to stay alive, she said.

“I had hope,” she said. “Hope is what kept us going.”

Benjamin Midler, 94

BEN MIDLER AGREED THAT HOPE AND OPTIMISM were essential to his survival. So were other strategies.

“I volunteered for everything,” he said. “I learned that it was not a good idea to stay in one place for too long. Your chances of being killed were greater. So I volunteered for every work detail and every project hoping that I would seem valuable and they would keep me alive.”

Midler said he grew up in a Polish city that was 65 percent Jewish “with a temple on every other block.” His father made a good living selling milk as a distributor.

He was 11 when his happy childhood turned into a six-year struggle to survive. In 1939 Germany declared war on Poland and partitioned the country. Germany took control of the western half while its then-allies the Russians took over the eastern portion. Midler said in the beginning of the occupation the Russian side was better for Jews than the German half.

“We could do most of the things we had always done except run businesses and practice our religion,” he said. “The Russians did not want us going to Temple on Saturday.”

Jews who fled the German side without permission that were captured by the Russians were shipped to Siberia and put to work, he said.

Matters took a turn for the worse in 1941 when Germany declared war on Russia and took over the entirety of Poland.

“The happened on June 22, 1941,” he said. “I remember that clearly because I was 13 and looking



BEFORE THE STORM



Young Benjamin Midler (front) with his grandmother and grandfather in Poland before the 1939 Nazi invasion.



forward to my Bar Mitzvah. I never got to have my Bar Mitzvah as a teenager. I was 88 years old and in America when I finally had my Bar Mitzvah.”

Polish Jews were forced to wear cloth Stars of David that read “Jude.” Failure to do so meant summary execution. He and his family were forced to live in a Jewish ghetto created by the Germans. Each family was allotted one room in a house or apartment.

“It was very difficult,” he said. “We were all forced into very small spaces without enough food or mattresses or blankets.”

Midler said the German captors realized the same thing and decided to cull the population of his ghetto. Soldiers took his father and others into nearby woods and shot them, dumping their bodies into a mass grave. He said it was years after the war before he learned what had happened to his father.



Midler said he is alive today because of “three miracles.” His first miracle happened in 1943 when the Jews of his ghetto were rounded up and stuffed into railroad freight cars. They were taken to the Treblinka extermination camp and murdered. Their bodies were cremated in groups in large ovens designed specifically to eliminate bodies after mass executions. There was not room for him in the car, so he was left behind.

Miracle number two happened at the Birkenau extermination camp when his well-intentioned uncle advised young Ben to tell the Nazis he was a mechanic. His uncle thought the Nazis needed mechanics and would spare them. At the moment he was face to face with a scowling Nazi officer, the 13-year-old panicked and told the truth.

“I worked as a presser in a tailor shop,” Midler said. “So I told the German officer I was a presser.”

It saved his life. Young Benjamin was sorted into a group of tailors and cobblers. All mechanics were killed. German and Russian soldiers needed uniforms, coats and shoes, so Midler survived by making and repairing clothes. Afterwards he worked in a quarry making gravel for muddy eastern European roads.

His third miracle was his strategy of volunteering at the right moments.

“By volunteering for every difficult job and working hard I was able to stay alive,” he said. “I was motivated by my belief that my family was still alive and that if I could survive I would see them again someday.”

He never did. He learned years later they were all



A New Life in America



Benjamin Midler and his wife, Esther, (l) with their family. Midler survived a tragic, dangerous childhood during the Nazi era, then military service in the Middle East as a young man to become a successful American business owner. He is author of the book “The Life of a Child Survivor” and remains active as a Holocaust educator.

murdered by the Nazis.

Teenage Midler struggled with malnutrition while he was a prisoner and he was afraid of not getting enough to eat to stay alive.

“I always ate all of my food right away,” he said. “Some of the other people would save some of theirs for later, but not me.”

In a hushed voice Midler said he also consumed uneaten food he found next to people who had died. Most days food rations were no more than a stale piece of bread with or without marmalade in the morning, a small bowl of clear soup at midday, and a piece of bread and butter in the afternoon. Often there was not even butter, he said.

In 1945 Midler’s prison was liberated by the Russians. A rare Jewish officer in the Russian army saved Midler from further suffering by taking him to Russia to recuperate before returning him to ravaged Poland. Over the course of a year he was shipped to Czechoslovakia, Italy, Palestine and Cypress before ending up in the brand new Jewish homeland of Israel in December 1946. He was drafted into the Israeli army in 1948 to fight in the Arab War with the Israeli Defense League. He served until 1950.

He eventually located uncles and cousins in Argentina and the United States. He moved to the Chicago area in 1978 and worked in the dairy industry. He later bought an auto parts store from his son-in-law and turned it into a successful business. In 1984 he retired. He and his wife Esther joined a friend in Rancho Bernardo. He was married for 71 years.

Midler became an active advocate for Holocaust survivors and one of the region’s most respected mourets (teachers). He also published an autobiography, “The Life of a Child Survivor.”

“I know by now I survived the Holocaust so I could speak up and tell others about the tragedies that took place in the hope that history would not repeat itself,” he said. “The Holocaust must not be forgotten. We must speak up and fight back by confronting anti-Semitism. There is a rising tide around the world of bigotry, hatred and prejudice that is built on intolerance. We should confront hatred and racism forcefully (without) compromise to stop atrocities and the persecution of people because of their religious beliefs.”

Midler extended his arm to reveal the tattoo he was given at Birkenau. B-2433 was still dark and clear across his inner forearm. So many prisoners came through Birkenau the German eventually had



Amazing Grace



Trapped in a series of dreary orphanages and foster homes, Ursula Israelski was gifted a pair of used ballet point shoes. She taught herself advanced ballet moves, including the very difficult toe dancing of prima ballerinas.

to issue five digit tattoos. Most never left the gruesome camp.

“On behalf of the millions who can no longer speak, I am the voice of their dead, burned bodies.”

Ursula Israelski, 86

URSULA ISRAELSKI WAS ONLY 3 IN 1939 WHEN SHE AND her mother fled their native Berlin to avoid capture by Nazis. They went to Belgium where they huddled for two years in a tiny attic, much like Anne Frank and her family. Like the Franks, they too were eventually discovered by the Nazis.

Young Ursula was 5 when SS officers showed up at their door and took her and her mother to their headquarters where they huddled in terror all night. In the morning German army trucks arrived and the crowd of Jewish prisoners massed at the headquarters were ordered aboard.

Nazis wedged as many Jews into the trucks as possible, but Ursula did not fit.

“They didn’t take me,” they said. “They took everyone else. I stood there by myself. The truck drove away with my mom. I saw her wave at me as the truck drove away.”

Abandoned and utterly alone, Israelski was sent to an orphanage. Then another. Then another and another for the next decade. She estimates she lived in about 15 different orphanages or family homes. She said she suffered constant physical, mental and sexual abuse.

When the war ended in 1945 Israelski was about 13 years old. Her mother miraculously survived concentration camps and later that year they were reunited.

She said she did not recognize the pallid, skeletal woman she was presented to.

“I can still see her in that bed,” she said. “I didn’t recognize her. She weighed only 28 kilograms (61 pounds). She didn’t have any hair and she looked



Life is So Special



After years of fear and depravation, Ursula Israelski (r) was thankful to be a survivor of the ravages of World War II and determined to live a long and happy life. She immigrated to Pendleton, Oregon and later moved to the South Bay's Paradise Hills community.

recognized as a nation.

Israel transformed her, she said.

“All my life I felt like I was nothing,” she said. “I felt so inferior. I was told I would never amount to anything.”

Israelski eventually returned to Germany where she married before moving to Pendleton, Oregon. In retirement she moved to Chula Vista and regularly volunteers at the public library and as a Holocaust witness.

“Ursula is a superstar,” said Scheller. “She is such a good speaker. She has made invaluable contributions to the world with her advocacy for Jewish people and her testimony about the *shoah*.” ■

RUTH: Remember Us, The Holocaust will remain on exhibit in the main Chula Vista Library through August. It is open during library hours and there is no charge. Visitors may pick up a copy of Southwestern College El Sol Magazine X, which features Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax on the cover as well as a detailed recounting of her Holocaust struggles.