Protests against police brutality hit home

By JEFF CLEMETSON | La Mesa Courier

The last few weeks will undoubtedly be viewed as some of the most troubled in the city of La Mesa’s history. A perfect storm of events caused millions of dollars in damage to the city and local businesses; one protestor to lose part of his vision; another protestor to be arrested and charged in federal court; the police department to be accused of racism; and the city to be fractured along political, social and racial lines. At the same time, the events brought hundreds of La Mesa residents together to clean up, rebuild and reform the city’s policing practices.

Jacobs stresses readiness in campaign for congress

Decision 2020

By JEFF CLEMETSON | La Mesa Courier

[Editor’s note: La Mesa Courier spoke with Sara Jacobs prior to the death of George Floyd and the protests that followed, so this profile does not include the candidate’s positions on police reforms. For more information about the Sara Jacobs campaign, visit sarajacobsforca.com.]

On March 3, voters in California’s 53rd congressional district made Sara Jacobs the frontrunner with 29.2% of the vote in what was a crowded field of 15 candidates. Jacobs, granddaughter of Qualcomm founder Irwin Jacobs, credits her success to reaching out to the district’s constituents.

“I love San Diego and I’m so proud of the primary campaign we ran where we talked to everyone and listened to everyone and built a broad coalition,” she said. “That’s what I plan to do in the general election and that’s what I plan to do in office — listen to everyone, work with people from all backgrounds and really make progress.”

Now that the race is down to a contest between Jacobs and City Council president Georgette Gomez — both Democrats with similar policy positions — Jacobs wants voters to focus on her experience working in politics at the federal level as reason to cast ballots for her in November.

“[Voters need] someone who has experience making and implementing policy at the federal level who understands all the levers of power that the federal government has to really offer San Diego — someone who is not going to Reforming, rebuilding, rioting

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LA MESA HIRES NEW ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER

After an extensive, national recruitment process, Carlo Tomaino has been chosen for the assistant city manager position for the city of La Mesa.

Carlo Tomaino (Courtesy photo)

Tomaino comes to La Mesa after 13 years at the city of Lake Forest, California where he was the economic development/housing manager for the past three years. Tomaino was responsible for Lake Forest’s economic development and hundreds of Lake Forest businesses; one to lose part of his vision; another to be arrested and charged in federal court; the police department to be accused of racism; and the city to be fractured along political, social and racial lines. At the same time, the events brought hundreds of La Mesa residents together to clean up, rebuild and reform the city’s policing practices.

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department since a 2018 incident at Helix High School where an officer was filmed apparently throwing a handcuffed 17-year-old Black student to the ground. (That incident was ultimately resolved on June 11 of this year with the city agreeing to pay the woman $130,000.)

The Friday protests, which drew about 100 mostly local residents, was in response to a May 27 incident caught on video between LMPD Officer Matt Dages and a young Black man at the Grossmont Trolley Station, which ended in the young man arrested for resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer — charges that were later dropped.

With the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis sparking nationwide protests and the media attention from the Grossmont Trolley incident, a much larger protest was planned for La Mesa on Saturday, May 30. Protesters — initially a few hundred, but eventually numbering over a thousand — gathered at the LMPD station and City Hall before taking to the streets and shutting down a section of Interstate 8.

Witness accounts about how and when serious trouble began vary, but an official LMPD incident report on the protest released on June 9 said that around 4 p.m. there were "reports coming in that protests are morphing into violence and destruction." By nightfall, protesters at City Hall were met with pepper spray and beanbag guns and police were met with rocks and other thrown projectiles. Offices in City Hall were broken into and vandalized and several vehicles were set on fire. One protester, 59-year-old Leslie Furcron of La Mesa, was shot with a beanbag and taken to a hospital in a coma. She has since been released from the hospital but has lost sight in one of her eyes.

From there, chaos spread to other parts of the city as rioters and looters took advantage of the situation and fires were set at multiple buildings in the downtown Village. In the midst of the chaos, LMPD arrested 28-year-old Zachary Alexander Karas of San Diego after being found in possession of glass bottles with wicks filled with gasoline. Karas now faces federal charges for possession of an unregistered destructive device that carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

In the early hours of May 31, City Manager Greg Humora, acting as Director of Emergency and Disaster, declared a curfew. The protests finally subsided a few hours later.

COMMUNITY RESPONDS, REBUILDS

The next morning, Sunday May 31, residents began cleaning up the damage caused by the rioting and looting. Throughout the day, more and more people joined the effort as word spread through social media about the extent of the damage to businesses in the Village and the La Mesa Springs Shopping Center.

As the several hundred La Mesans painted over graffiti, swept broken glass, and helped business owners with boarding up broken windows or picking up merchandise, firefighters were still working to put out the last smoldering embers alight in the now destroyed Chase Bank, Union Bank and Randall Lamb buildings.

In the days and weeks that followed, local artists took paint to the plywood sheets that covered broken windows and created art with messages of peace and unity, many showing solidarity with the Black community and protests over the deaths of George Floyd and others at the hands of police. Those temporary art pieces are now coming down, thanks to the generosity of La Mesa Glass, which has offered to donate its services and replace broken windows. As for the painted boards, several local organizations and churches have expressed a desire to maintain and display them for their historical and educational value.

All told, the damage done in the city will likely total in the tens of millions of dollars. To that end, the La Mesa community also quickly responded. A GoFundMe page started by East County Chamber of Commerce Foundation exceeded its goal of $50,000 in a matter of hours and currently has raised over...
Protests

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$199,000. The La Mesa Chamber of Commerce also has its own business assistance fund, which has attracted donors like the Lions Club of La Mesa ($2,000). The Fairh PRODUCE Company ($1,000) and Randall Lamb Associates, who’s building was destroyed by fire on May 20, but still donated $5,000 to help fellow La Mesa businesses that were damaged or robbed. A GoFundMe for one such store that was robbed, Crazy Fred’s Cards and Comics, has raised over $25,000 — well above its $5,000 goal.

In the days and weeks following the protest and riot, the city and LMPD worked to restore order. A mandatory curfew went into effect throughout the city. The police ramped up investigations into the looting and vandalism — of particular interest are recoveries of a jewelry store and a firearms store. LMPD is asking the public to come forth with any information involving crimes committed during the protest.

On the evening of June 3, San Diego County Sheriff Bill Gore requested National Guard assistance for San Diego County and specifically La Mesa. Guard troops were stationed around City Hall for four days, leaving the evening of June 7.

There have been no reported instances of rioting or looting since the May 30 protest, but for many days after, rumors of a second, more violent protest were shared on social media. In this atmosphere, a local group formed calling itself “La Mesa Civil Defense.” After the group’s formation was reported by the Times of San Diego, some residents applauded the group for volunteering to protect the city, others saw it as a mostly-white vigilante group that will further divide the city.

At a LMPD press conference to discuss the incident report held June 9, Chief Walt Vasquez said his department does not “condone or encourage any type of vigilantism.”

LMPD also sent officers to speak with the group to inform members what they can and cannot do under the law, Vasquez said.

REFORM EFFORTS CONTINUED

While groups like La Mesa Civil Defense believe increased patrolling is the answer to keeping the public safe, other groups have focused on police reforms. At the June 9 press conference, Mayor Mark Arapostathis announced that work on proposed citizen oversight of LMPD would resume.

“Someone said to me, ‘I just want to get past this.’ I said, ‘No, we’re never going to get past this. If we are going to be part of our narrative. But hopefully it can be a benchmark on how we move forward.’” he said.

On June 17, the Citizen Public Safety Oversight Task Force met for the first time since the protests. The task force was initially approved by City Council following the Helix High incident in 2018, but after the events of May 30, the group found new urgency in completing its work.

Task force vice chair Jack Shu proposed an aggressive timeline to make its recommendations to City Council by the end of July so that a proposal could be added to the November ballot. Having voters decide on the task force’s recommended plan is necessary because La Mesa is a general law city, which carries some obstacles to citizen oversight of police unless approved by voters. One obstacle to oversight involves an oversight commission’s ability to subpoena officers to testify — a wishlist item for reformers that is generally opposed by police officers associations. Shu also recommended presenting a dual proposal to City Council that will work within the general law framework in case voters reject the ballot initiative.

Task force chair Jamal McRae stressed the importance of implementing citizen oversight by pointing out that La Mesa has recently “made the national news three times” over aggressive policing.

On June 23, City Council narrowly passed the task force recommendation to put a proposal on the ballot, with Council members Colin Parent, Akilah Weber and Mayor Arapostathis voting in favor of the plan and Council members Kristine Alessio and Bill Baber opposing it. The Council voted unanimously to remove some impediments to the task force’s ability to present a report and recommendations quickly, and also provided $50,000 from the budget to pay the City Attorney to help with legal questions and other staff support. The task force report is now expected to be presented to City Council in September.

Although the Council will have to wait for September and voters until November to weigh in on how much public oversight LMPD will have in the future, some reforms have already been enacted.

On June 3, La Mesa Police Department and 14 other law enforcement agencies in San Diego County announced they would ban officers from using carotid restraint chokeholds — the kind that killed George Floyd.

At the June 9 LMPD press conference, Chief Vasquez recognized that further steps need to be taken to win back public trust of police.

“I think that unfortunately nationwide the trust in police departments, especially starting with the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis, I think the trust has been impacted,” he said. “It’s impacted all of us. I can’t even watch that video. It was criminal. So I think every police department in this nation is looking into their souls and trying to figure out how to build that trust back up and La Mesa Police Department will build that trust back up. We will. That’s our responsibility. That’s our commitment.”

For some, that trust is still a long way off. At a June 14 protest organized by Black Lives Matter in front of La Mesa Police Station, activists called for the firing of Officer Dages and for LMPD to release the name of the officer who shot the beanbag at Leslie Furcron. Other “non-negotiable” demands included a town hall meeting for the public to voice concerns and complaints about policing in La Mesa.

The June 14 protest drew several hundred people and remained peaceful throughout.

—Reach editor Jeff Clemetson at jeff@sdcourier.com.
Sheriff Bill Gore to bring new mental healthcare team to launching. The pilot program to take people to behavioral health facilities for North County due to lack of services.

There are so many facets to the McKinney House landscape project, which aren’t always apparent to someone driving by.

The current system for responding to suicides calls, psychotic episodes and other behavioral health calls is the Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams (PERT) which pairs a clinician with a member of law enforcement. According to Fletcher, of the 54,000 mental health-related calls in the county in 2018, PERT responded to 10,000 of them. Half of those responses concluded with the person going to jail or the hospital.

Law enforcement even being present can escalate a situation, make it unsafe and can add to the traumatic nature of the event.

When I had a friend in mental health crisis, the PERT clinician was mostly observing during the experience.

Albert S. “Al” Caldrone
December 20, 1941 – April 26, 2020

La Mesa – Albert Salvatore Caldrone, 78, passed away peacefully at his residence in La Mesa, California, on April 26, 2020. Al was born on December 20, 1941, to the late Albert D. and Carol (Carmel Dinard) Caldrone in Youngstown, Ohio. Al was a young boy, Al studied clarinet from his father, and throughout his life Al was proficient in various woodwind instruments.

Al received his Bachelor of Music Education at Youngstown State University in 1965. He then attended Ohio State University and graduated with a Master of Music degree in 1968. After college, Al remained in Columbus (Ohio) and became a member of the Columbus Symphony and taught music privately.

In the 1980’s, Al relocated to the San Diego area (La Mesa). He resided there for the rest of his life.

In La Mesa, Al taught students privately and sold instruments at McCrea Music Company, then later at Alan’s Music Center, Inc. for many years.

His students greatly admired Al and learned much from him. He received many expressions of gratitude over the years, not only from his students but also from their parents. In 2019, Al retired from Alan’s Music Center.

Throughout his life, Al was a huge NASCAR racing fan. His knowledge of NASCAR racing history always amazed fellow car-buffs! In addition, Al was an avid reader, artist, and writer.

Al is survived by his sisters Patty Caldrone of Poland, Ohio, and Sally Caldrone (Tom Mahan) of Palm Coast, Florida.

There will be a private burial of Al’s remains at Resurrection Cemetery in Youngstown, Ohio.

La Mesa Historical Society (Courtesty La Mesa Historical Society)

McKinney House landscape project underway

Supervisor Nathan Fletcher’s proposal expedites bringing the program to the entire county, which was the long-term goal of the pilot program. Supervisor Kristen Gaspar, who spearheaded the pilot program, questioned why Fletcher was circumventing the phased-in and targeted process the board initially planned on but ultimately voted in favor of the motion.

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When I had a friend in mental health crisis, the PERT clinician was mostly observing during the experience.

County supes approve mental healthcare team

New unit will respond to crisis without law enforcement

La Mesa – County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted in support of creating a Mobile Crisis Response Team to respond to those suffering from untreated mental illness.

People with untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter than other civilians, with race and gender compounding those risk factors. The Black Lives Matter movement in San Diego was galvanized in 2016 when Ugandan refugee Alfred Olango was killed by police after his sister called for emergency psychiatric aid.

The board approved a pilot program last year to respond to behavioral health calls in North County. After months of delays due to North County lacking behavior health facilities for the crisis team to take people to, that pilot program is close to launching. The pilot program is supported by District Attorney Summer Stephan and Sheriff Bill Gore to bring new options to address nonviolent situations.

[Editor’s note: This article appeared in the Spring 2020 issue of “Lookout Avenue,” the quarterly newsletter of the La Mesa Historical Society. To subscribe to the newsletter, visit lamesahistory.com.]

There are so many facets to the McKinney House landscape project, which aren’t always apparent to someone driving by.

The Landscape Committee, which includes Historical Society board members Kristin Dooley, Jim Newland, Alex Quintero and Tracey Stotz, has been working behind the scenes for more than a year to pull together the overall plan, recruit donors, seek bids and schedule phases of work.

After removing the beetle-infested and diseased historic pine, the rest of phase one was to demo the grass, take down and level the yard, add a small wall in the front of the house, add new water lines and irrigation valves, plant a new pine and install decomposed granite through out the site.

Most of phase one is completed thanks to donations from Artistic Arbors Gardens, RCP Block and Brick, La Mesa Rotary and many individual donors who made personal gifts and purchased bricks. The Historical Society already had $860 in gifts made in memory of Gordon Jones reserved for the landscape project, so all told we have raised $13,360 so far. That should get us through phase one.

As soon as the site dries out we will be compacting the yard and bringing in the decomposed granite to provide the yard a more historic ranch feel. After that, supporter Don Cary is ready to donate his services to paint the McKinney House and Behr paint is lined up to donate product. From there we plan to finish the fence (it won’t be as tall as the wood posts currently out front which will be cut down) and add plants including moving the memorial rose garden to the front of the house. Fundraising still needs to be done for the second order of bricks, and the ongoing fundraising campaign to fund the project is “Buy A Brick.” The inscribed bricks, each $100, will wind throughout the front yard of the property. The first order of bricks has been placed and will be installed after the decomposed granite is in. A second order will be sent once we reach the order minimum. To purchase a brick, visit lamesahistory.com/product/buy-a-brick.

Our original intent was to have a ribbon cutting ceremony this summer when phase one was complete but at press time we were unsure what virus safety guidelines would permit. The site, lamesahistory.com, will have more details on upcoming events once the site is open. If you have any questions please email info@lamesahistory.com or call 619-466-0197.

—Tracey Stotz is vice president of the La Mesa Historical Society.
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On Monday, June 22, the city of La Mesa celebrated Pride Month with a flag raising ceremony of a rainbow flag — a symbol of the LGBTQ community. The ceremony marked the first time the city raised the flag to honor Pride Month. (Photo by Jen Althof)

Mattress Makers boarded up storefront with messages of unity following the May 30 protests (Facebook)

Wave it wide and high

Mattress Makers celebrates three years in La Mesa

Mattress Makers in the La Mesa Village is bringing in more customers as lockdown measures in the county ease. Staff are spraying down mattresses with special upholstery disinfectant to keep the store clean between customers and special appointments are available.

The La Mesa store is coming up on its third anniversary on July 1, but Mattress Makers has a long history in San Diego.

Pablo Hernandez, one of the current co-owners, explained that in the 1960s, his grandfather opened up a small mattress factory in Downtown San Diego. His dad took over the factory in 1984 and continues to run it today. The majority of their business was to hotels and other stores.

Despite their growth, they continue to use only natural materials in their mattresses and avoid modern chemicals.

In 2012, Hernandez and his brother opened the company’s first storefront in Miramar to bring natural, affordable mattresses directly to the public. In 2017, the second store was added in La Mesa.

“We saw the La Mesa Village. We just love that area and a spot that opened up. It worked out perfect. We were able to get another location and we love the community,” Hernandez said. “It’s been good since we’ve been in there.”

Like other retailers, the coronavirus caused a major hit for the business. At first, they were available by appointment only but have since opened back up. Immunocompromised and cautious shoppers can still book a one-on-one appointment online for the hour before the store opening and after its closure.

Sales have been slower to return in La Mesa than Miramar, Hernandez said, partially because customers disappeared for a week or two after the riots. At this point, sales are steadily coming back though.

Mattress Makers has a history of giving back to the community and this period has been no exception. When the lockdown began, Hernandez said they brought a few seamstresses into the store to sew masks for the community.

“We made about 5,000 face masks to give out to the community and to the frontline workers. That kept us busy. Even though we’re not making money off it, it kept us busy,” he said.

Currently, Mattress Makers is giving free custom pillows to police officers and other first responders at the La Mesa store.

—Reach contributing editor Kendra Sitton at kendra@sdnews.com.

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Community colleges offer high school grads an alternative to a gap year

By LYNN CERESINO NEAULT, Ed.D.

Flummoxed by a public health crisis that has bought a disappointing end to high school for many, along with uncertainty about returning college in the fall, today’s high school graduates are feeling anxious and confused about what lies ahead.

As the public health crisis prompts many colleges and universities to pronounce online learning for the coming fall semester, many students and their parents are pondering alternatives, including a “gap year,” while waiting to return to more a more traditional college experience.

It’s easy to see why. For many, the pandemic has quashed the iconic scenes of collegiate life: living in dorms, packed lecture halls, fraternities or sorority pledges, or the excitement of college football. As tempting as it is an idea that a gap year represents, the downside is that it only prolongs the process of acquiring a college degree at a time when more jobs are requiring at least some post-secondary education for workforce training.

As leaders in transfer to San Diego State University and many other four-year institutions throughout the state and nation, Grossmont and Cuyamaca Colleges have many workforce training programs that provide a seamless pathway to a bachelor’s degree. In fact, more than half of CSU graduates and 30% of UC graduates began their studies at a community college.

Community colleges, the leading source of workforce training in the state, are also key to the economic recovery of the state and East County. Grossmont College programs like nursing, respiratory therapy and Administration of Justice. Moreover, the profits of these college programs are based in large part on building user “engagement” through false and inflammatory content while starving trustworthy and accountable information sources of ad revenue.

The fight between President Donald Trump and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey is a good illustration of the dangers that result from such concentration. The fight appears to be pricing out yet another option. We can support the idea that a private executive who controls one of the most important information gates in the world should be allowed to censor the speech of the U.S. president. Or we can support the idea that a president who has routinely wielded lies and subverted norms has a right to force all communication platforms to broadcast his libels and hate speech.

This is a false choice. We don’t have to be ruled by oligarchs or autocrats. A third option is to return to the principles and practices that Americans long upheld to promote true freedom of speech and of the press, by offering equal and open public access to any essential communications technologies even when it is privately owned.

A&T, for example, was a private company. But we didn’t let its executives make decisions about who could speak over its wires, much less censor the content of those messages. By the same token, we did not hold AT&T executives accountable for any libels or hate speech that happened to cross their networks. We did insist that AT&T operate as a highly regulated public utility, meaning it could not discriminate in price or terms of service and was forbidden from engaging in other lines of business.

We need to apply the same principles to today’s social media platforms. As the Open Markets Institute detailed in a recent letter to the AntiTrust Subcommittee of the House of Representatives, the key goal of government policy must be to ensure the complete neutrality of all essential communications platforms. The only way to achieve that goal is to ban the platforms from engaging in any personalized discrimination in the delivery of information and prohibit them from using an antitrust law to restrict these corporations to eliminate dangerous conflicts of interest, and ban the platforms from selling advertising around information and news published by other companies.

This will take time. To address the conflict between President Trump and Twitter, the Open Markets Institute calls on Congress to immediately create a bipartisan commission to provide guidance to executives at Twitter and other platforms on how to manage these complex challenges, and to begin the process of establishing common sense rules for regulating the most vital communications of U.S. citizens over the long term.

Barry Lynn is executive director of the Open Markets Institute, an independent organization that works to address threats to our democracy, individual liberties, and our national security from today’s unprecedented levels of corporate concentration and monopoly power. Visit openmarketsinstitute.org.

News from your County Supervisor

Our great outdoors: A huge thank you to Mayor Kevin Faulconer and Poway Mayor Steve Vaus for spearheading talks that led to the recent reopening of lakes and reservoirs.

The mayors and others crafted a city-county cost-sharing agreement that made the reopenings possible. These city-owned attractions are regional treasures that can again be enjoyed by those who love boating and fishing, or just anyone who enjoys our great outdoors.

El Capitan and Upper Otay reservoirs were among the first to reopen.

Helping hand: At my urging, the county recently initiated a low-interest loan program for mom-and-pop shops and other small businesses in San Diego County's unincorporated areas. Businesses hit by COVID-related losses, and with 50 employees or less, have been allowed to seek loans of $5,500 to $50,000. For more information, go to us.accion.org/covidrelief.

The sooner these businesses can get some relief, the sooner they can get on the road to recovery.

In the Zone: With summer temperatures bearing down, several Cool Zones are back in business, including in Spring Valley, Potrerio, Santa Ysabel and Lakeside. These spots are for seniors and others who may not have access to air conditioning and are looking to beat the heat.

Locations include community centers and libraries. They are open from noon to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

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San Diego is leading the way in safely reopening, offering the blueprint for the rest of the state and country. The rallying stock market suggests optimism that the economy is reopening and people are getting back to work and the worst of the economic downtown may be behind us. While other places remain largely shut down, San Diegans have taken the appropriate steps to balance public health concerns and other serious implications. Former congressman and current CA-50 candidate Darrell Issa is working closely with Governor Newsom and pressing to assure that the best interests of San Diegans and our local communities are top priority.

We are all united in our condemnation of racism and support of our communities in this tumultuous time. We are proud that our communities in this tumultuous time. We are united in an effort to restore peace and respect for all is the best goal we can set for ourselves at this time. Support our local businesses and help them get back on their feet.

Republican Women of California – Navajo Canyon is continuing to grow in membership which reaffirms the Republican enthusiasm. When we get back in regular session, we will be stronger than before and ready to go to work to educate voters and help elect Republicans in November.

For now, we have been sharing and enjoying stories from our members of what they have been doing during their “sheltering in place” time. With a little practice, we learned to conduct our board meetings via conference call, and had a very successful ZOOM general meeting. When some of us were forced update our technology skills, we came through like champs!

Liz Wheeler, host of “Tipping Point with Liz Wheeler” on One America News, is the featured speaker for our tentatively scheduled meeting July 10 from 5 to 8 p.m. The meeting will be held at Carlton Oaks Country Club in Santee. The cost is $30 which includes a gourmet burger bar dinner.

We had this event previously scheduled for last April, and for obvious reasons that was cancelled. We are hopeful this meeting will be feasible in July, but we will have to wait and see.

Please call Marjie at 619-990-2791, as we get closer to the date for the latest information and to make reservations. Until then, please visit our website at rwna-vajo-canyon.org and see our activity on Facebook at Republican Women of California-Navajo Canyon. We look forward to resuming our regular monthly meetings and always welcome new members.

Pat Boerner writes on behalf of the Republican Women of California – Navajo Canyon.
Helping hands for ‘Hope’

La Mesa Spring Valley School District students and families in need have been getting some relief thanks to a program run by City of Hope with partners Hope Alliance and La Mesa Rotary. Every Friday from 3 to 5 p.m., food assistance is offered for pick-up at Spring Valley Academy. “We have been receiving food, gift cards, checks, and donations of time to hand out the food,” said program coordinator Danielle Womack of City of Hope. “I always enjoy seeing the community serve together to be the solution for community. It has been an honor to watch this happen!”

To arrange for pick up or delivery or for questions about the program, call 619-319-4423.

Mental health

CONTINUES FROM PAGE 4

interaction. The mere presence of police sirens and a police car escalated the situation. I could visibly see my friend becoming less comfortable and less interested in talking through her feelings. She was handcuffed, searched and put in the back of a police car for expressing suicidal thoughts during a psychiatric crisis,” Chrissy Croft, a mental health professional, said about a time she needed emergency care for a friend who was eventually taken to a psychiatric hospital.

The mental health care she received likely saved her life, but I can’t help imagining other possibilities that would have eased her into receiving help that night instead of simulating arrest,” Croft said.

For people who have interacted with PERT and law enforcement mental health responses regularly, they noted the difference between someone being booked for assault or being checked in to a hospital is usually left to the officer’s discretion — which can lead to bias playing a role in the decision.

“Are they $150 — a danger to themselves and others — where they go to the hospital or is what they’re doing criminal and they go to jail seems in so many instances such a judgment call,” Luke, a social worker specialized in homeless care, said. [Editor’s note: Luke is remaining anonymous so he can speak openly about his interactions with PERT.]

He explained that when someone is yelling and spitting at people whether that is treated as assault or a mental health episode too often depends on who made the call and where the person is. For enforcement officers responding to calls from a business about a homeless person who is incentivized to get the person out of the business district as fast as possible. However, when a similar call is made from a shelter or community meal area where the only people who are being affected are also homeless, the response is usually much slower.

A staff member at a local college library explained that while she was not told directly, officers in-sinuated that whether a homeless person having a mental health episode was booked in jail or received a different response largely depended on whether the person “pissed off” enough people.

“That’s really subjective,” said the staff member.

Many of the people at the library show up again as soon as they are released from jail or the hospital. The lack of long-term care and shelter makes the law enforcement interactions a recurring issue for the police, library staff and homeless people.

“The police hate doing it too. They get annoyed. It’s just a bad system. It’s a bad system for everyone,” the staff member said.

During the supervisor’s meeting, many members of the public called in support of Fletcher’s package of racial justice and law enforcement realignment proposals. Bishop Cornelius Bowser called to oppose them because they did not do enough to address the major police reforms needed. While Luke sees having a non-police emergency response team as a necessary move to better serve the communities he works in, he believes more is needed because there is too little that can be done during a psychiatric episode in the first place other than going to the hospital or jail or the police leaving because there is nothing they can do.

“It just sucks that those are the options we currently have available to us as a mental health system,” Luke said.

Luke wants the county to invest in street psychiatric medicine teams so homeless people can be connected to ongoing care that prevents major psychiatric episodes. Without robust mental health care and wraparound services, people with recurring mental health issues take up a huge portion of police, emergency room and hospital resources.

The details of how the new Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) would be deployed are still foggy, but the teams would not replace PERT as law enforcement would still be utilized to respond to violent situations. The number of PERT units could be cut in the future if they are less needed.

Supervisor Jim Desmond questioned whether there would be a separate phone number for the non-violent calls or if the system would be simplified with only one number for PERT and MCRT. Clinicians would then decide if they felt safe enough to send a response team without law enforcement.

Luke and Croft both support having a designated phone line for the MCRT so they can ensure a response from mental health professionals rather than law enforcement.

“We don’t need people weighing the pros and cons of calling help for their loved ones. When police brutality is a real issue, we have to think twice before getting emergency psychiatric help for loved ones under the current PERT structure,” Croft said.

PERT could not be reached to comment on this article.

—Reach contributing editor Kendra Sitten at kendra@sd-news.com.

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LA MESA SUMMIT ESTATES

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discuss her efforts at police reformation and other state bills, including limiting police use of force. She was followed by La Mesa City Council member Dr. Akihika Weber, who addressed the rioting and civil unrest in La Mesa, and the rough arrest of an apparently innocent African American man at a trolley stop near Grossmont Center. Charges have since been dropped.

Rep. Susan Davis followed with an update on congressional efforts to transform policing in America to combat police brutality and racial injustice. She has since commented: “We are at a pivotal moment in American history with a real opportunity to reform how the police engage with our communities, especially communities of color. We cannot let this opportunity slip by. Never again should any family or community have to suffer through what has become a recurring nightmare in America.” Davis also shared some of her future plans after closing out her term in office in January.

Professor Carl Luna enlightened us with his reaction to the turmoil in American politics, and how it has made a significant change in his prediction for the November election. Pre-pandemic, and before the country was rocked by the untimely and racially-tinged deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, Luna figured Trump would run on the economy and achieve re-election. He now feels that Trump’s shortcomings in handling both the pandemic response, and his inability to address social injustice and institutional racism across America, will lead to his loss this November to former Vice President Joe Biden. Current polling supports Luna’s suppositions as Biden enjoys not only a large national lead, but also leads in most key battleground states.

Supervisor Nathan Fletcher updated county efforts on several fronts including protest reactions by the Board of Supervisors; San Diego’s COVID-19 progress made slowing the spread of the virus; and his profound disgust at the military-style excessive force forms. Her opponent for the CA-53 seat, Sara Jacobs, went into great detail about her views on criminal justice reform, and also the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and protests in major cities affecting small businesses and the economic recovery.

President Georgette Gomez related that she joined Mayor Kevin Faulconer, Council member Monica Montgomery and San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit in announcing an end to the Police Department’s carotid restraint (chokehold) protocol. Opipez also announced plans to move forward with a ballot measure to expand police oversight by creating an Independent Police Practices Commission which will review community complaints of police misconduct and recommend reforms. Her opponent for the CA-53 seat, Sara Jacobs, went into great detail about her views on criminal justice reform, and also the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and protests in major cities affecting small businesses and the economic recovery.
Reads about race and racism

While this is a monthly column about books, we’ve got to start out by acknowledging that life is difficult for many of us right now. We face the social and economic impacts of a global pandemic, and people of all identities are also taking action against racial injustice on a scale not seen in decades.

As the community is challenged to reunite and rebuild, protests calling for justice for Black people continue worldwide, with special focus on the relationship between police and the Black community. So here are some books about racism. You may think that America has long been facing, and seeking to overcome. I sincerely hope that everyone reading this is healthy and safe.

Ijeoma Iloso’s “So You Want to Talk About Race” is a powerhouse of a book. It very clearly explains the United States as a racialized society, in which a person’s past experiences are heavily influenced by interracial dynamics, and those experiences then shape their present and future interactions, successes and failures. For people who have not dealt much with racism in their lives, it is eye opening. For people who have, it might show them the ways in which many of racism’s injustices are baked into a lot of our policies, institutions and culture.

Alex S. Vitale’s “The End of Policing” has been mentioned frequently in the past several weeks. Vitale focuses on a shift in the nature of American police in the past 40 years. Not only are police officers asked to handle a wide variety of social ills that never used to be their duty, but that the culture of policing is tainted with racist assumptions and a warrior mentality that can make things worse rather than better. This book makes a compelling argument that not only do core aspects of the police need to change, but that many other American institutions and priorities have to change as well. If we want a more just and safe society.

The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013, after George Zimmerman was acquitted after shooting and killing Trayvon Martin. One of the movement’s founders, Patrisse Khan-Cullors tells her story of her experience in this movement, as well as other struggles she has faced in her book “When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir.” While the other books listed are more about society at large, this is the story of one person: her childhood days watching family face discrimination and police brutality to her early days as a political organizer, to her current work as a professor and prison reform advocate.

Ibram X. Kendi’s “How to Be An Antiracist” tries to move the reader from understanding racial injustice to doing something about it. While many Americans will proudly proclaim that they aren’t racist, we all do live in a society with many racist beliefs, practices and systems. To make for a more just world, Kendi argues, we must be anti-racist. The book combines an intellectual look at the meanings and history of racism, and Kendi’s personal story of seeking to overcome his own internalized racism. It’s a compelling work about having to change ourselves to change our world.

Have you been missing the library? We’ve been missing you too! And now, you can start making some safe steps to use the La Mesa Library once again using door-side pickup. Visit sdcl.org/covid19-services.html for more details.

—Jake Sexton is a librarian at the La Mesa Branch of the San Diego County Library.

Connecting generations through technology

2. Video Chat

Video chat makes you feel as though everyone’s in the same room. Use apps like Skype or FaceTime to have a video conversation from virtually any device, and share life events such as graduations or weddings.

3. Gaming and Creativity Apps

Apps like Magisto and PhotoFunia allow you to personalize photos and videos. Looking for some friendly competition with your grandparents? Try a gaming app like Wheel of Fortune or Minecraft. Or keep your grandparents updated with an app like Keepy, an interactive platform for sharing school projects and artwork. Use family tree apps like Ancestry to discover photos and stories together as you navigate your family history.

4. Social Media

Start a private Instagram account where you can post photos and videos. Grandparents have lots to share as well, so encourage them to make their own Instagram handles and record their stories. This can be a unique way to learn about your grandparents’ past, pass down family memories or share family recipes.

Snapchat is another option for sending and receiving custom pictures or videos with a variety of fun filters and lenses.

How to Help Your Grandparents

Only 44% of grandparents identify as tech-savvy.

Teaching non-tech savvy family members how to use video chat and social media can be a bonding experience. You can also set your grandparents up with useful home features like the SURE Universal Remote, which allows them to control their TV and other devices from their smartphone. Less tech-savvy grandparents may not realize they can watch their cable TV content from their mobile device or schedule DVR recordings with their apps to connect.

Giving your elders the power to connect helps build relationships with the people you love most, and that’s priceless at any age.

Four easy ways tech can help grandparents bond with younger family members

Grandparents: a word often associated with presents, special outings, yummy food and unconditional love. Yet many Americans don’t talk to, or see, their grandparents as often as they’d like.

Here are four ways technology can help you connect with your grandparents.

1. Messaging Apps

A recent study revealed that 73% of grandparents own smartphones. Messaging apps like WhatsApp or Talkatone are a great introduction to texting for grandparents.

With messaging apps, you can send and receive text updates, photos and videos in one place. When there’s time for a longer conversation, you can use these apps to chat for free, as most don’t use cell minutes.

July featured artist: Judy Sawyer

Judy Sawyer, a talented artist and longtime member of the Foothills Art Association, is the Foothills’ Featured Artist for the month of July. Her exhibit will be on display at the Foothills’ website at foothillsartassociation.com. While in more normal times her artwork would hang in the Foothills Gallery for the month, the current restrictions of the coronavirus have caused the organization to move its shows online.

Over the years, Judy has developed a unique perspective on everyday items and her work covers a range of styles and subjects. Her paintings of leaves, branches, pottery, and animals are unique and charming.

Judy studied art in high school, then at Mesa College. She also took classes at Sun Diego Community College and Grossmont Adult School. She continues to study art with local teachers Drew Bandish and Marsha Austin-Rogers.

Years ago, Judy received a scholarship to the Hillcrest Beauty College and since 1967 has been a talented stylist. She owns two salons in the community of Kensington.

The Foothills Art Gallery remains closed at this time because of COVID-19, but you can view Judy’s work, as well as the work of other local artists, on the Foothills website. We plan to re-open the gallery in the near future, but in the meantime we invite you to visit our website at foothillsartassociation.com.

“White Dog” by Judy Sawyer

The Foothills Art Gallery will be on display on the Foothills’ website at foothillsartassociation.com.

Judy Sawyer

FOOTHILLS ART ASSOCIATION

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The fantastic rise of Alforon

By FRANK SABATINI JR.

It wasn’t long ago that San Diego’s eminent Lebanese restaurant was just an obscure blip on the culinary scene. After opening in 2010, Alforon attracted faint trickles of curious neighborhood residents and students from nearby SDSU. With its non-flashy facade barely blinking from a small strip plaza, the place was easy to miss — and it still is despite expanding into an adjoining storefront since then.

Word eventually began spreading about the restaurant’s unique Old World cuisine as well as the owners’ charming front-line style of hospitality. Local food critics picked up on the buzz, and soon after, so did Guy Fieri of the Food Network’s “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives.”

“I said ‘no’ to doing the show seven years ago,” said George Salameh, a native of Lebanon who owns and operates the restaurant with his delightful outgoing wife, “Sam.”

It wasn’t until this past year that the Food Network contacted Salameh again. This time, he was ready. And the cameras got rolling in July.

The segment (season 30, episode seven) already aired a couple of weeks ago. Not long after, dozens of reviews and write-ups on the walls by local food critics attest live up to their many raves.

“People come here from all over — from North County and South Bay, and all the way from Los Angeles,” said Salameh in preparation for even more fanfare once the Food Network starts randomly re-airing his episode down the road.

Alforon owner George Salameh (Photos by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

The soujouk features finely ground beef with the support of fluffy basmati rice; an array of ‘kibbie,’ which are blends of various meats, bulgur wheat, onions and spices shaped into balls that I encountered after opening “a secret San Diego” (ECW Press) and began his local writing career through the coming year.

“The meats are marinated in different spices that I couldn’t identify; the chicken for three days and the beef overnight. Both titillated the taste buds with the support of fluffy basmati rice; a grilled tomato, a charred onion, garlic paste, and a sauce of yogurt, cucumber and mint, which Salameh stresses is novel and comforting. It wasn’t until a few years ago that Salameh introduced kebabs to his expanded menu. I ordered the combo plate featuring a chicken and filet mignon kebab. The meats are marinated in different spices that I couldn’t identify: the chicken for three days and the beef overnight. Both titillated the taste buds with the support of fluffy basmati rice; a grilled tomato, a charred onion, garlic paste, and a sauce of yogurt, cucumber and mint, which Salameh stresses isn’t tzatziki.

“Tzatziki is Greek and it has onions and shallots in the recipe. This doesn’t,” he noted.

The menu extends to lamb ouzi: clay-pot sausages; baked portobello mushrooms with feta cheese; and excellent house-made hummus and baba ghanouj served with puddles of fruity-tasting Lebanese olive oil. (Notice how much smoother-tasting the oil is compared to California varieties.)

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programs, including business attraction and retention strategies, marketing outreach, and communication. He coordinated the economic development function with city departments and outside agencies.

Tomino was also responsible for managing the city’s affordable housing fund, entitled affordable housing projects and managing the city’s real property. In addition, he oversaw Lake Forest’s response to homelessness and has worked on private property development negotiations.

Tomino holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and a master’s degree in public administration. He began employment with the city of La Mesa on June 15.

GROSSMONT HEALTHCARE DISTRICT EXPANDS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates statewide healthcare workforce shortages, the Grossmont Healthcare District (GHD) recently announced $227,000 in scholarships to promising local students pursuing health careers in fields of growing demand.

A recent report by the California Future Workforce Commission stated that California faces an overall shortage of about 4,100 primary care providers by 2030 as many prepare to retire, including a 34 percent decline in the number of practicing psychiatrists. While COVID is today’s healthcare crisis, these shortages will reach epidemic proportions tomorrow, particularly concerning for residents in underserved and rural areas already struggling to access care.

In 2020, two new programs were created as a response to looming shortages of professionals who can prescribe medication, with emphasis on building an adequate supply of advanced degree professionals in behavioral health, nursing, and primary care.

Six $10,000 scholarship awards were announced to local behavioral health professionals and five $7,000 scholarships were announced to local registered nurses pursuing advanced degrees as nurse practitioners and physical assistants.

The GHD has also been an active supporter of healthcare education and training for the benefit of future generations through scholarship programs since 1999. Each year, a portion of the overall grants and scholarships budget has been allocated for annual scholarship programs offered to local high school and college students living or attending school within GHD boundaries, with emphasis on building health technicians and new Registered Nurses.

This year, six students pursuing careers as health technicians in cardiovascular and respiratory health received a total of six $10,000 scholarship awards.

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Showing up to heal a community

By GENEVIEVE SUZUKI

Five days after a Minneapolis police officer murdered 46-year-old black American George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for more than eight minutes, ignoring Floyd’s cries for breath, our relatively quiet city of La Mesa, a town mostly known to outsiders for antiquing and its Oktoberfest, made national news.

Demonstrators stood outside the La Mesa Police Department May 30 calling for recognition that Black Lives Matter and an end to police brutality. What began as a peaceful protest slowly morphed into something else, however, when individuals set fire to a La Mesa Fire Department vehicle, vandalizing the police department and an LMPD armored car. At around 6 p.m., police fired pepper balls and tear gas into the crowd to try to quell the growing chaos.

By nightfall, La Mesa wasn’t so quiet anymore as a different kind of upset hit the town. Riots and looters ravaged La Mesa Village, setting fire to the Chase and Union banks on Spring Street and burning down the Randall Lamb buildings. They looted local stores and defaced city buildings.

As my family and I watched everything unfold for hours on the local TV news, we heard the police helicopter flying overhead. It’s a sound I’d be happy to never hear again as the chopper flew well into the night, even as we finally fell asleep at around midnight.

The next morning, I woke bleary-eyed and spent. As I scrolled through the comments on the Facebook La Mesa Happenings page, I saw that local realtor Laurie MacDonald, a friend and the president of La Mesa Park & Recreation Foundation, had posted an invitation to everyone to meet downtown at 9 a.m. to help clean up.

Ordinarily, I would have immediately gotten dressed, no questions asked. But these are not ordinary times. No, friends, they’re quite extraordinary.

See, like most LaMesans, we have been sheltering in place since our children were sent home from school March 13. Because, in addition to the social pandemic that rebirthed a movement for change, we are also trying to survive Covid-19, which has, at print, killed more than 120,000 Americans.

I wanted to go, but I also wanted to keep my family safe from a virus we still don’t understand. I walked into my 11-year-old daughter’s room to tell her about my dilemma.

“We have to go,” Quinn said. Simply. “Let’s go.”

As a parent, there are moments where you think, “Wow, I’m proud of this kid.” This was one such moment. Quinn didn’t waffl. She wanted to join the community clean-up, because La Mesa is our city. It’s our community, where we live and work. I opened my office here. My kids go to school here. We shop for groceries here. We go to church here. La Mesa is here for us and we needed to be there for it.

As we drove into downtown, face masks and garbage bags packed, we realized we were already late. It was only 9 a.m., but people had begun cleaning up more than an hour before. Determined to show up, we parked in front of the La Mesa Fire Department and headed toward the Village.

Along the way, we found Laurie’s sister, Tracy Giordano, and her daughter, Bella. We couldn’t hug, thanks to social distancing, but we shared looks, grateful for each other, for being there together.

Dan and Chelsea, who painted over a La Mesa Village business, stood with us. My neighbor, Tracy Giordano, approached, with open arms, and hugged me as a couple of La Mesa High senior girls joined us.

By the time we left a couple of hours later, Quinn and I felt better. The May 31 community effort assures me we need to take steps. The May 31 community effort assures me we can do it when we show up and work together.

—Genevieve Suzuki is a family law attorney and former editor of the La Mesa Courier.

Learning black parents teach their sons how to behave around the police so they aren’t unfairly targeted is heartbreaking. The statistics are astounding. There’s so much many of us don’t know or understand, but we need to listen to our black brothers and sisters to figure out how to unwind the knots of oppression.

Change is never easy, but we need to take steps. The May 31 community effort assures me we can do it when we show up and work together.

—Genevieve Suzuki is a family law attorney and former editor of the La Mesa Courier.

Eleven-year-old Quinn Suzuki (front) insisted on joining the community May 31 in cleaning up La Mesa after vandalized city buildings. (Photo by Genevieve Suzuki)
According to a flyer about the job fair, applicants can expect an interview process that is “fast-paced” and “intense.” Applicants must bring a resume printed out and/or a printed and completed application form and should arrive early due to expected lines. Prater also suggests applicants bring their “best attitude” and research the company culture on its LinkedIn and Facebook pages.

For more information, visit zuzierfarmsmarket.com.

VIRTUAL SENIOR CENTER FEATURED IN NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

At the onset of the shelter-in-place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020, the leaders at the nonprofit San Diego Oasis had to make very quick decisions on how to continue to offer their classes and workshops virtually. Until then, all of their classes were delivered in-person at more than 40 locations throughout the San Diego County region. Although San Diego Oasis’ mission is to change the way people age, adjusting to a 100% fully online environment was a big change and risk. The team trained and coached their professors and experts in history, humanities, language, technology, art, finance, fitness, and more to bring their presentations online. It has paid off for the nonprofit, in ways they could never imagine, and created a virtual senior center, replacing their physical community presence temporarily.

“Today’s older adults are more vibrant and busier than seniors of yesteryear,” says Simona Valanciute, president and CEO, San Diego Oasis. “Some of our students jumped in to take on the challenge of taking classes online, others were hesitant, but with coaching from volunteers from Qualcomm and the community at large, we have been able to be there every step of the way to transition how students take classes and how instructors present them. We are also attracting new students who haven’t had an opportunity to come into our physical location at Grossmont Center, but through the new ‘virtual senior center’ model, they can. The classes we offer allow students to continue with their studies and participate in new ones, while not physically being together.”

A new social media campaign from Cox Communications features the virtual senior center created by San Diego Oasis, as part of the technology company’s Connection Project initiative, a non-branded campaign which began the COVID-19 period by reaching people with messages of connection. A short film (youtu.be/yRm_oViv-ek ) captures the importance of connection in the challenge of taking classes virtually and created a virtual senior center model, they can.

The East County Advanced Water Purification Program is a regional water and wastewater solution. This program is a collaborative partnership between Padre Dam Municipal Water District, the County of San Diego, the City of El Cajon and Helix Water District. It will create a new, local, sustainable water supply using state-of-the-art technology to purify recycled water and diversify East County’s water supply while reducing our dependence on imported water. This Program will provide up to 30 percent of East County’s drinking water supply while reducing wastewater discharge into the Pacific Ocean.

“A approval of these service agreements brings us another step closer to securing this new local water supply source for East County,” said JPA Chair Gary Kendrick. “This innovative and collaborative project has significant water and wastewater benefits for our community and will ensure necessary water reliability for future generations.”

The JPA’s execution of service agreements for wastewater and water supply are a prerequisite to obtaining a credit rating for the JPA, which is required for many financing options. The agreements also provide the necessary financial commitments to ensure long-term security of the JPA’s revenues.

Once complete, the $528 million East County AWP program will generate up to 11.5 million gallons per day of new drinking water. The project uses four advanced water purification steps to produce water that is near-distilled in quality. After treatment, the purified water will be blended with water in Lake Jennings and treated again at the R.M. Levy Water Treatment Plant before being distributed as drinking water. In addition to providing a new local water supply, the program will eliminate the need to send most of East County’s wastewater to the City of San Diego’s Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant, where it is currently treated and then discharged into the ocean.

The procurement process for the East County AWP is well underway. The project has three Progressive-Design-Build packages. The final request for proposals (RFP) have been issued to short-listed firms for Packages 1 and 2 and statement of qualifications (SOQ) for Package 3 were due on June 1. Additionally, the JPA Board approved the release of the RFP for Owner’s Advisor Services at its May 21 meeting. The Owner’s Advisor is intended to provide experience and insight through the procurement, design and construction process to ensure a successful project. For more information about the East County Advanced Water Purification Program, please visit eastcountyawp.com.
Congratulations to all of you who have achieved and will all accomplish in the future. Good luck at your colleges and universities and military branch of choice... Oh, The Places You Will Go!
On June 4, Helix Charter High School proudly celebrated its 69th commencement, featuring more than 500 members of the class of 2020. With strict guidelines from the state and the county of San Diego in place prohibiting a traditional graduation ceremony, the administrative team had to put a plan in place quickly to ensure these deserving students had a memorable experience for this milestone occasion. Prior to the big day, it was clear that students and their families would not have a procession onto the football field with their family and friends in the stands, the teachers knocking on the lot, each stationed at their cars and driving into the parking lot, and dropping each one of their little ones on the stage set up for the ceremony. Parents/family had this to say following the ceremony:

“I thought it was fantastic, and everyone that helped and participated, please know that you made our seniors feel extra special and we appreciate it. It was so fun and beautiful,” said Shawna Jimenez. Helix wishes the class of 2020 a sincere congratulations and best wishes for their futures!
This year, 454 seniors became part of an amazing group: 38,000 Foothiller graduates. For 99 years, Grossmont High School’s students and staff have taken great pride in the traditions surrounding graduation. The challenge this year was to honor those traditions in a socially distant way. “Grossmont perseverance has been around for 99 years since the Spanish Influenza first hit our country. Our alumni have fought and died in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and more recently wars in the Middle East. Fifteen of our students and one teacher were sent to Japanese Internment Camps during WWII. Many survived the Great Depression. “In all of these events, including our last 84 days as a pandemic, seeing our continued struggle as a nation with racism, and just recently the rioting in our local streets ... our students, staff, and community continue to show the courage and resilience of how great it is to be young and a Foothiller. As we celebrate your achievements tonight, I want to encourage you to make sure to take special pride in that tradition, continue to be proud, respectful, involved, disciplined, and most importantly show empathy towards others in all that you do.”

During the celebration, the five retiring teachers were recognized for their decades of service to Grossmont: Frank Foggiano, Mike Ridgway, and Ray Webb. Kyle Zoellner, Cannon Zamora, Evan Vasiliou, Carly Starkey, Charles Sotelo, Grace Sachariason, Alyssa Rosales, Jazell Richardson, Eric Ramirez, Toula Payan, Kassidy Patino, Summer Oraha, Damien Ochoa, Shelvy Millado, Madeline Minutelli, Damien Ochoa, Summer Oraha, Kessidy Palomo, Toula Payan, Xinena Paz Arrevelaga, Eric Ramirez, Jazell Richardson, Alyssa Rosales, Grace Sachaieron, Angel Soriano, Charles Sotelo, Carly Starkey, Evan Vasiliiou, Olivia Wangler, Aurelia Willett, Cannon Zamora, Miles Zewodoki, Kyle Zoellner.

In his Valedictorian speech, Elliott shared with his classmates: “As much I’d love to continue talking about our time together, issues larger than ourselves need to be addressed ... And I’m sure some of you have heard this before, but it’s worth repeating, it’s simply not enough to not be racist. We must be vehemently anti-racist. So stop being silent. Educate yourself, educate those around you, actively seek out ways to be an outlet of change and magnify the voices of those that are speaking up. Hell, even use this as an opportunity to start a dialogue with those around you.”

This year as in years past, three perpetual graduation trophies are awarded to seniors. The most prestigious service award given at graduation is the Norman Freeman Award, first given in 1943 as a memorial to Norman Freeman, ASB President, Class of 1947. The trophy is engraved “For the Grossmont student who has most strengthened democracy through participation and leadership in student government.” This year’s recipient is Jade Manuel. Since 1927, two identical silver loving cup trophies have acknowledged an outstanding young woman and one outstanding young man. Each trophy is engraved with the names of the 91 previous recipients. Joining them this year are Mallory Smith and Diego Velarde.
all over the country participated in various events at the tournament.

**GRAMMY MUSIC EDUCATOR AWARD**

Helix Vocal Music Director Michelle Tolvo-Chan is a quar -terfinalist for the 2021 Music Week 2021. Nearly 2,000 nominations were submitted for the award, and 216 music teachers from 199 cities have been announced as quarterfinalists.

The Music Educator Award was established to recognize current educators (kindergarten through college, public and private schools) who have made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of music education and who demonstrate a commitment to the broader cause of maintaining music education in the schools. The recipient will be recognized during Grammy Week 2021.

**ACE SCHOLARSHIPS**

Students from Helix’s Architecture, Construction and Engineering Club (ACE) were recognized recently by the ACE Mentor Program of America. ACE is a national program that pairs mentors with schools to help students explore careers in design and construction. Thirteen Helix students were awarded with a total of $18,000 in college scholarship money. Congratulations to all of the students, and to advisor Jennifer Bullock.

$1,000 winners: Andrew Ayap, Bryan Quezada, Christian Reel, Isaac Reveles, Jose Romero, Ryan Trainor, Ruben Vaca

$1,500 winners: Uriel Lopez, Fernando Pluma, Miguel Talamantez

$2,000 winners: Olivia Havluckuyan, Nick Smith

$2,500 Winner: Alex Chau


**Foothiller Footsteps**

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In 1925, outstanding seniors were first recognized with a Circle G, which was the highest award then given to graduating seniors. In 2020 six seniors were honored for their all-around excellence in academics, leadership, citizenship, and service: Rwan Adwer, Lucie Chisugi, Darrowd George, Jaye La Bruno, Devin Provence, and Maya Zimmerman. Each student received a gold pin, a G enclosed in a circle, a reminder of the legacy binding GHS graduating seniors.

Since 1965, the Principal’s Letters of Commendations have been awarded to students who have demonstrated leadership in many areas. This year, Principal Barnes recognized 17 students: Ivana Biven’s, Jordyne Barnett, Gabriella Contreras, Mia Foster, Ghaith Ishaq, Ruby Lytle, Patricia Gonzalez Ochoa, Jaime Odom, Alexander Oleksyn, Judy Mohamad, Breann Pavich, Kiera Smeenge, Elizabeth Sweeten, Vivian Votel, Kailey Wilkens, Andrew Zeller, Cameron Zeller.

As Barnes shared with the graduates, “Certainly this has been one of the most challenging years in a long time for our nation, our school, our community, and this senior class, one that will never be forgotten by us. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, ‘We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.’ You, the Class of 2020, will go on, you and your families have all faced disappointments, especially this spring, but we will soon see that it was a finite moment that does not define who you are as an individual or as a class. Never give up that infinite hope. Continue to seek opportuni -ties to change for the better, grow in knowledge and skill, and create a society that we can all be proud of...and then let that define who you are.”

Appropriately, the graduation ceremony video ended with a visual display of each of the 454 graduates’ senior photographs labeled with their names. Then, led by Senior Class President Kiera Smeenge, with a turning of their tassels, the Class of 2020 left GHS with unforgettable memories.

—Connie and Lynn Baer write on behalf of the GHS Museum. Visit foothiller museum.com. Due to the coronavirus, the GHS Museum is currently closed, contact ghs museum@guhsd.net or 619-668-6140.
take time to get their sea legs, but hit the ground running on day one and make sure San Diegans get the representation they need as these incredibly important decisions are being made.

AN EARLY PATH TO PUBLIC SERVICE

Jacobs proudly says she is a third generation San Diegan, born and raised. When talking about her famous family, she focuses more on their early struggles than on their financial successes.

“When my great grandparents first moved to San Diego, they lived in College Area and that was one of the few areas that Jewish families had been allowed to live. Obviously a lot has changed in San Diego and in my family since then,” she said. She was always taught about how much San Diego has given us and that it was my responsibility to do much San Diego has given us and that was something that I was able to have.”

Unlike her family, children raised in families with extreme wealth, Jacobs attended public schools growing up.

“My parents felt very strongly that they wanted us to be in public schools and getting an education that was more than just academics — that we interacted and got to have friends from all different walks of life and that was something that they felt very strongly about,” she said.

When Jacobs entered Torrey Pines High School, she expected that she would follow in both of her her grandfathers’ footsteps and become an electrical engineer. During her high school years, Jacobs was involved in community service, such as leading the youth group at her synagogues and volunteering for San Diego Youth Services to serve the homeless. In her junior year, she took part in a program bringing Israeli Jewish teens together with Israeli Arab teens that inspired her to want to work with people over working in a lab.

With that inspiration, Jacobs studied Political Science with a focus on international issues at Columbia University.

“Some problems where there’s a solution but we just don’t have political will to do it, and there are some where even if we had the political will, we wouldn’t know what to do,” she said. “And those are the kinds of problems I got really interested in college. I spent a lot of time studying some of the smaller conflicts around the world that weren’t getting much political attention and studying peace-building interventions and peace-keeping approaches.”

Jacobs earned her Master’s in International Affairs from Columbia and then took “a little bit of time off to celebrate” before going to work at the United Nations in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, helping write policy based on research she did in grad school.

After her stint at the UN, she went to work for UNICEF’s innovation unit, then went to work in the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations during the Obama administration, where she was tasked with helping the State Department better solve conflicts.

In 2016, she ran on the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign, helping the former Secretary of State draft foreign policy. For Jacobs, the Clinton campaign’s loss in 2016 still stings.

“I’m pretty much frustrated and angry every single day because I know exactly what Hillary Clinton and our team would have been doing to prevent us from getting to the position we’re in with coronavirus,” she said. “I wrote the pandemic prevention plan and actually was working with members of Congress on setting up new funding streams for preventing and rapidly responding to pandemic threats.”

A FIRST RUN FOR OFFICE

Although Jacobs’ job for the Clinton campaign was more policy wonk than campaign strategist, she said she did learn some lessons about running for office from her time working for Team Hillary.

“I will say the thing I learned the most is that you have to find a way to let yourself be vulnerable and authentic as possible, even when it’s really hard. I think the generation of women who ran for office before us had to be so perfect because they were running with our men,” she said. “When I first started running for office, I actually wrote down all the mean things I thought I could be said about me and I made my friends read them to me over and over again to desensitize myself to it. Forcing yourself to just continue to be as open as possible even if difficult things are being said about you, I think is very important and something I learned during 2016.

Those lessons were put to the test in Jacobs’ first run for congress — a 2016 bid to unseat Rep. Darrell Issa in California’s 49th.

“Some things I’ve done in public service, such as leading support to other campaigns and other candidates at the local level. After her run for the 49th, Jacobs started another nonprofit — San Diego For Every Child — because of what she learned while campaigning around the region.

“It became clear to me that here in San Diego County we have a huge issue with childhood pov- erty,” she said, adding that even pre-COVID, 40% of San Diego kids live in poverty.

Jacobs also joined the Kroc School of USD as a Scholar in Residence.

A SECOND RUN

When Rep. Susan Davis announced she was retiring, Jacobs said there were two reasons she decided to throw her hat in the race. One was that the 5th was losing 20 years of government experience per person and the race was one where she believed her previous work in federal and international organizations would help ease the transition.

The other reason was to bring a more youthful perspective to the position we’re in with the pandemic. That prompted Jacobs to want to do more.

“I looked at the races here at home and saw the 49th and reached out to Emily’s List and asked if they were going to get a woman to run because I would love to support her and help her run,” she said. “They eventually called me back and told me that if I wanted there to be a woman in the race I had to run, so I did — after much heartache. They say you need to ask a woman seven times to run and I think that was pretty true for me.”

Jacobs lost the primary, coming in third behind Republican Dianne Harkey and Democrat Mike Levin who would go on to win the seat.

“One of the things I’m proud of is we ran a totally inclusive camp- aign, even in the midst of a very difficult primary,” she said, adding that after losing she spent the rest of the campaign season helping Mike Levin win, as well as lending support to other campaigns and other candidates at the local level.

After her run for the 49th, Jacobs started another nonprofit — San Diego For Every Child — because of what she learned while campaigning around the region.

“We have a real opportunity here I think to do things differ- ently,” she said. “Part of that is making sure that other priorities are imbued in any recovery and thinking about how we can make sure that we are prioritizing com- mittees that have emissions targets in line with the Paris Agreement.

“As, also as we’re doing quantita- tive easing or bailouts, we should be thinking about the unem- ployed sector really looks like,” she continued. “A lot of folks are har- ring back to the programs that came out of the Great Depression which are really good models in some ways but I think we need to realize that the construction indus- try has become much more tech- nical than it was then and unlike then, the vast majority of people that are out of work right now are in the service sector.”

And despite the enormous cost of rebuilding the economy after the COVID crisis passes, Jacobs still favors support for large gov- ernment programs, including a Medicare for All plan.

“I not only believe that it will still be possible to do Medicare for All but actually it is more important than ever,” she said. “We’re seeing 20%-30% unemployment and people’s healthcare is directly tied to their employment, which means we’re going to have a de faco public option when all of the people who lose their employer- sponsored health care still need care in the middle of a pandemic. And if that’s the case, we might as well do it in a strategic way.”

“To deal with the costs of pro- grams, Jacobs favors repealing the GOP tax bill “that didn’t do anything to grow the economy,” raising taxes on very wealthy people and cutting tax loopholes. “The next generation will be the one that will have to deal with the consequences of this deficit down the road,” she said, adding that despite its costs, the government needs to use the current zero Fed rate to keep states afloat and provide stimulus to jumpstart the economy.

—Reach editor Jeff Clemeton at jeff@sdbnews.com.
this difficult time,” said Vince Hall, CEO of Feeding San Diego. “Amidst the insurmountable challenges this difficult time is, beautiful to be a part of a community that comes together to meet real needs and to bring hope,” says Jon Foreman, the band’s award-winning band Switchfoot.

In addition to appearing in the PSA, Foreman and his Switchfoot band members have been incredibly supportive of the Feeding San Diego mission. When the band canceled this year’s Bro-Am events because of COVID-19, they made a gift to Feeding San Diego and launched #HomeFoodChallenge to help raise money and awareness for the organization.

In response to soaring unemployment levels and school closings, Feeding San Diego continues to meet the needs of people facing hunger across San Diego County. Since the pandemic began in mid-March, the hunger-relief organization has distributed over five million meals through emergency regional food distribution networks, rural mobile pantries, drive-through distributions, and youth meal sites.

The community is encouraged to share the PSA on social media to garner support for Feeding San Diego. Donations can be made at feeding-san-diego.org.
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