Plunge pool rebuild begins at Belmont Park

By DAVE SCHWAB

Elected officials, stakeholders and Mission Beach residents paid homage to a local landmark, a fallen hero and a public-private partnership, during a Jan. 30 groundbreaking ceremony kicking-off restoration of Belmont Park’s historic Plunge swimming pool.

The event included a plaque unveiling dedicated to Maruta Gardner, a Mission Beach educator tragically killed in 2016 by an intoxicated driver while painting graffiti near the Mission Beach jetty.

“Maruta was involved in every aspect of the Mission Beach community — she embodied public service,” said Phyllicia Cicalo-Aiken, Mission Beach Women’s Club president. “The plaque will stand as a testament, honoring her work and commitment to our community for future generations and serve as a reminder of her love for Mission Beach.”

In remarks before sledgehammer-wielding construction crews and heavy equipment began toppling the existing building, Mayor Kevin Faulconer talked about its significance. He noted San Diego pioneering developer John D. Spreckels built the Mission Beach Amusement Center now Belmont Park.

One of the amusement center’s star attractions was the Giant Dipper roller coaster. Along with the coaster, the Natatorium, which was later renamed the Plunge swimming pool, was constructed as a centerpiece of the park.

The 60-foot by 175-foot pool was, at the time, the largest saltwater pool in the world.

“Many of us who grew up around Mission Beach learned to swim at the Plunge — our children learned to swim there.”

GARY WONACOTT, MISSION BEACH TOWN COUNCIL PRESIDENT

PB leaders initiate clean and safe plan

New pilot program for community

By DAVE SCHWAB

Public officials, businesses and residents collectively launched a clean and safe program to remove trash in Pacific Beach and make the community safer, while offering the homeless a hand up at a Feb. 5 press conference on Garnet Avenue.

District 2 Councilmember Lorie Zapf hailed the efforts of Discover PB, the community’s business improvement district, which took the lead, along with civic leaders, in inaug urating the clean and safe program.

“Many of us who grew up around Mission Beach ..."

GARY WONACOTT, MISSION BEACH TOWN COUNCIL PRESIDENT

PLUNGE INTO HISTORY

In 1925, in an effort to stimulate real estate sales and to promote his electric railway, John D. Spreckels built the Mission Beach Amusement Center, now Belmont Park.

One of the amusement center’s star attractions was the Giant Dipper roller coaster. Along with the coaster, the Natatorium, which was later renamed the Plunge swimming pool, was constructed as a centerpiece of the park.

The 60-foot by 175-foot pool was, at the time, the largest saltwater pool in the world.

‘This is an absolutely exciting program.’

BRIAN CURRY
PB PLANNING CHAIR

Zapf also made a contribution from her office, $20,000 in grant seed money for the new pilot program, presented in an oversized novelty check.

In comments, Zapf alluded to an email she got from an East Coast police officer who said he and his family would attend a seminar at it was held.

SEE PROGRAM, Page 13

Accused homeless killer, Guerrero, ruled mentally competent for trial

By NEAL PUTNAM

A psychiatric hospital has made a finding that Jon David Guerrero is mentally competent to stand trial for three bizarre murders of homeless men in Ocean Beach, downtown, and Mission Bay.

Guerrero, 39, appeared Feb. 1 before San Diego Superior Court Judge Margaret Woods for a judicial ruling of his mental competence, but his lawyer won a three-week delay to review the hospital’s report.

Woods set another hearing in order, along with the lead, along with her office, $20,000 in grant seed money for the new pilot program, presented in an oversized novelty check.

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Planning group in favor of Pacific Beach as proving ground for autonomous vehicles

By DAVE SCHWAB

In January, Pacific Beach Planning Group voted to send a letter asking that the beach community be considered as one of 10 proving grounds being sought nationwide for so-called driverless vehicles.

A “driverless” car, also known as an autonomous, self-driving or robotic car, is a vehicle capable of sensing its environment and navigating without human input. Such vehicles can detect their surroundings using a variety of techniques such as radar, lidar, GPS, odometry and computer vision. Some of the technology behind driverless cars dates back to the ‘20s and ‘30s, while the first truly self-sufficient cars appeared in the ‘80s.

Benefits of autonomous cars could include less traffic collisions and injuries, less need for insurance, increases in traffic flow, driver relief from navigation chores, lower fuel consumption and reduced need for parking space in cities. Disadvantages may include technological challenges, liability questions, and consumer concern about their safety, as well as the possible loss of driving-related jobs in the transportation industry.

“We’ve been talking about driverless cars for years,” said PBPG board member Henish Pulickal, who made the motion asking the advisory group to draft a letter seeking to become a driverless car test site.

Pulickal suggested the plan group “put together a list of 10 different reasons why PB is a great location for driverless cars.” He himself listed several reasons: the community’s street grid pattern, the coming of a Balboa Avenue trolley station, the city’s aggressive Climate Action Plan and the need for car sharing among them.

SAN DIEGO CHOSEN AS AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE PROVING GROUND

The U.S. Department of Transportation has designated the San Diego region as one of 10 proving grounds for autonomous vehicles in the nation. The region has advanced features in its local transportation network and a global reputation as a high-tech hub for research and wireless innovations.

“This is great news for the San Diego region,” SANDAG chair and County Supervisor Ron Roberts said. “We are at the start of a new transportation era, and it’s tremendously exciting for our region to be part of a national initiative to foster innovations and best practices that will enable the safe deployment of driverless vehicles.”

SANDAG, Caltrans, and the City of Chula Vista jointly submitted the application to the federal government for the designation. The application garnered support from major auto manufacturers and technology companies, including Toyota, Qualcomm, Teradata, and DENSO International America Inc. To see the list of supporters and other background materials related to this initiative, visit www.sandag.org.

“The designated proving grounds will collectively form a Community of Practice around safe testing and deployment,” U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said.

“This group will openly share best practices for the safe conduct of testing and operations as they are developed, enabling the participants and the general public to learn at a faster rate and accelerating the pace of safe deployment,” Foxx said.

As part of the nationwide pilot, proving ground sites will bring together auto manufacturers, local cities, public agencies and private companies to test autonomous vehicles on designated facilities. The test sites will share information and work together to develop best practices.

SEE VEHICLES, Page 7
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Dalai Lama to speak at UCSD commencement

The University of California San Diego, in partnership with The Friends of the Dalai Lama Foundation, founded by Ven. Lama Tenzin Dhonden the Personal Emissary for Peace to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, recently announced that the exiled spiritual head and leader of the Tibetan people will offer the keynote address at the invitation-only UCSD All Campus Commencement June 17. This will be his first 2017 U.S. tour stop.

Mission Bay girls basketball turns it around, boys in position for post-season success

By DAVE THOMAS

As the high school basketball season moves a step closer to CIFs, the Mission Bay High boys and girls teams are trying to position themselves for the playoffs.

Girls basketball

On the girls side of things, head coach Vince Ichihara had his Bucs sitting at 10-10 (6-0 Central League play) heading into action this week.

Senior Sammy Zambrano and freshman Maggie Acquah are averaging 11 points a game, respectively. Sophomore Natalie Mddbomott is averaging 10 points a game, with freshman Noella Coiquaud tallying eight points a game.

“We have a very balanced attack and there always seems to be someone different stepping up night in and out,” Ichihara commented.

Sophomore Ryleigh Maple is the team’s only true post player and has done great inside for the Bucs, according to Ichihara. The coach added that Brooklyn Grooms is a defensive specialist who also has knocked down big shots at times.

Maggie Acquah (5-foot-5 inches tall) has dominated bigger teams on the glass, averaging almost 10 rebounds a game to go with her 11 points.

“We are currently ranked fifth in our division and are on track to not only make the playoffs for the first time in four years, but also be a top four seed and host a playoff game at Mission Bay,” Ichihara remarked.

“We started the first 10 games of the season 1-9, missing different combinations of starting players each game. Since having all of our team together, we are 9-1 and on a seven-game win streak."

Boys basketball

On the boys side, head coach Marshawn Cherry has the Bucs at 16-8 coming into this week’s play.

Sophomore sharp-shooting point guard and great competitor, Rejean (Boogie) Ellis, continues to be the team’s leader and leading scorer.

Sophomore Jamaryee Norton is the team’s second-leading scorer, getting to the rim and piling up points, while fellow sophomore Roni Latting is the team’s leading rebounder and shot blocker.

Sophomore Andre Scot is a athleticism slashing guard, getting to the rim and possessing a great mid-range game. Senior Marcus Nickerson is a lightning-quick, athletic lock-up guard, capable of scoring in many ways.

“I am very happy with our current position; we are tied for second in the league and looking to finish the second half of league off strong,” Cherry commented. “We are preparing for the playoffs and hoping to get the one or two seed in Division I.”

As Cherry pointed out, coming into the season he didn’t know what to expect with this team, losing all the seniors from last year and the core of the team being sophomores.

“They have all performed great and each brings a lot to the team,” Cherry pointed out. “But the X-factor is senior Marcus Nickerson; his defense and leadership has been invaluable to the team’s success. We wouldn’t be in the position we are in today without him.”

Celebrate San Diego Rally at Petco Park’s Park at the Park on Feb. 11

Local sports teams, elected officials and community leaders are joining forces on the Celebrate San Diego Rally, to be held Saturday, Feb. 11 at Petco Park’s Park at the Park.

The free public celebration will feature special appearances by athletes and leaders who call San Diego home, including Padres Hall of Famers Trevor Hoffman and Randy Jones, Padres manager Andy Green, former Chargers Nick Hardwick and Rolf Benirschke, San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman, San Diego Gulls head coach Dallas Eakins and more.

Gates to the Park at the Park (Gaslamp Gate on 7th Avenue at K Street and East Village Gate on 10th Avenue at K Street), will open at 10 a.m., and the event ends at 3 p.m.
PB has No. 3 most dangerous intersection

By DAVE SCHWAB

Pacific Beach made Circulate San Diego’s “The Fatal Fifteen” list of most dangerous intersections for pedestrians.

The problematic intersection at Mission Boulevard and Garnet Avenue was No. 3 on the list and has been the site of 16 total collisions, with 17 serious injuries recorded between 2001-2015, according to Circulate San Diego.

There were only two intersections ranked more deadly on the list – University Avenue and Marlborough Avenue, and University Avenue and 52nd Street.

City spokesperson Anthony Santacroce said plans are in the works to improve Pacific Beach’s busy intersection at Mission Boulevard and Garnet Avenue.

“It’s a matter of safety and communications,” Santacroce said. “If you’re on Garnet and want to cross (Mission Boulevard), you have to first press the button and then see the green light before you cross. We’re adding a push button and a visual signal to improve pedestrian safety.”

San Diegans for Safe Roads President Sara Berns, executive director of Discover Pacific Beach, noted the intersection at Mission Boulevard and Garnet Avenue has been the site of 16 total collisions, with 17 serious injuries recorded between 2001-2015, according to Circulate San Diego.

“The traffic volume is high here,” Berns noted. “We’ll be installing accessible pedestrian push buttons there, which are audible signals to go along with the visual signals already there to warn pedestrians and tell them what to do.”

Santacroce noted, in addition to the new high-tech pedestrian push buttons, that the city will also be upgrading street lighting to LED lighting at that intersection, which, he added, will give brighter and more clear lighting to that part of the street.

Santacroce was uncertain exactly how soon improvements at the intersection will be made, other than to say it’s a “high priority.”

Pacific Beach civic leaders and residents reacted to the news that their beach community has one of the city’s top three most lethal intersections.

Sara Berns, executive director of Discover Pacific Beach, noted the community’s business improvement district, as well as other community leaders, have been working with the efforts of Vision Zero to address pedestrian safety on Garnet Avenue, one of the six most dangerous corridors in San Diego regarding pedestrian vs. vehicle fatalities.
DANGER ✶ CONT. FROM PG. 5

“Vision Zero is a collaborative citywide effort to bring that fatality number down to zero,” Berns said.

“Local efforts include a vision for Garnet Avenue to include a consistent visual crosswalk plan along the entire street that includes the scramble crossing at Mission Boulevard and Garnet Avenue. Unfortunately, that effort has been denied by the City because of the impediment to traffic.

“We believe we need to start looking at Garnet Avenue as less car-centric, and more of a complete street, which gives equal opportunity for safety and travel to the pedestrian, bicyclist and car. We have a great community of diverse mobility here in Pacific Beach already with bikes, skateboards, walkers and cars, and that needs to be recognized,” Berns said.

Long-time Pacific Beach Planning Board member Chris Olson said he would like to see San Diego successfully implement a “pedestrian scramble” like the one done by Vision Zero in Los Angeles. Information on that is available at visionzero.lacity.org.

Mike Beltran, chair of Pacific Beach Planning Group’s Traffic, Parking and Streets Subcommittee, gave his take on why Mission Boulevard and Garnet Avenue is so bad.

Beltran noted that “at Garnet and Mission you have pedestrians wanting to go west to the beach, east to the shopping on Garnet and all directions for food and beverages. The lights going east and west have no turn signals, so vehicles have to wait for pedestrians to cross before making those turns, and by the time the cross walks are clear, the lights start to turn causing drivers to speed through the intersection.”

Beltran offered a possible solution previously tried successfully elsewhere.

“My idea to fix this intersection is to create a pedestrian scramble similar to the one found in downtown San Diego at the intersection of Market and 5th,” he said.

“This allows pedestrians to cross diagonally as well so the intersection can be cleared more quickly and vehicle traffic can carry on. It is my goal as the chair of the Traffic, Parking and Streets Subcommittee to bring this issue up at our next meeting (Feb. 22).”

TRIAL ✶ CONT. FROM PG. 1

VICTIM

ing under the Interstate 5 bridge near Mission Bay on July 3, 2016. An autopsy determined he died before his body was set on fire. Shawn Longley, 41, was found dead in Ocean Beach on July 4 and Dionicio Vahidy, 23, died July 10, four days after he was mortally wounded downtown.

The prosecutor said one surviving victim had a railroad spike cut into his sinus cavity and he was left blind in the Midway District. The fifth victim in Golden Hill was also attacked with a railroad spike. She said police found railroad spikes and a mallet in Guerrero’s downtown apartment, along with identification from two victims.

Special circumstance charges alleging Guerrero committed multiple murders have been filed that could allow the DA’s office to seek the death penalty.

Guerrero’s attorney, Dan Tandon, said Guerrero had “extensive mental health history.” He had been to Patton for a short time in 2009 after he was charged with stealing a bicycle from a homeless woman and knocking her down.

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PBPG chair Brian J. Curry agreed, commenting “We just want to get out in front of it (technology).” “Will driverless cars read speed limits signs?,” quipped board member Joe Wilding.

After the Jan. 25 PBPG meeting, Pulickal pointed out the technology behind driverless vehicles is becoming increasingly less expensive. “Electric car companies are working to retrofit cars,” he said, adding “The current cost of retrofitting a car is now $8,000, but may be down in a few years to $1,000 or less.”

Noting San Diego and Chula Vista have been designated as potential cities for a driverless-car pilot program, Pulickal pointed out a similar test program is already underway in Pittsburgh. The community planner added that statistics show an average car is “Only driven 4 percent of the time and is parked, and therefore unused, as much as 96 percent of the time.” “Parking is a big issue,” Pulickal concluded.

The driverless car trend had members of the San Diego Association of Governments, the region’s traffic-planning agency, enthused too. “This is great news for the San Diego region,” said SANDAG chair and County Supervisor Ron Roberts. “We are at the start of a new transportation era, and it’s tremendously exciting for our region to be part of a national initiative to foster innovations and best practices that will enable the safe deployment of driverless vehicles.” SANDAG, Caltrans, and the City of Chula Vista jointly submitted the application to the federal government to give the region a driverless-car test designation. The application garnered support from major auto manufacturers and technology companies, including Toyota, Qualcomm, Teradata, and DENSO International America Inc.

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VEHICLES »
CONT. FROM PG. 2

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The Benedetti Trio’s George Harrison Tribute at Dizzy’s

By BART MENDOZA

Beatle fans won’t want to miss The Benedetti Trio’s Tribute to George Harrison, taking place at Dizzy’s on Feb. 10. Led by virtuoso guitarist Fred Benedetti, the trio includes two vocalists, Regina Moonjean and Julia Piccone, augmented for this show by bassist Jeff Pekarek. The show will cover material from throughout Harrison’s career, from The Beatles through to the solo years, recast for acoustic guitar and vocals. With songs set to include such classics as “Here Comes the Sun” and “Something,” Beatles fans will love this show.

George Harrison Tribute with The Benedetti Trio: Friday, Feb. 10, at Dizzy’s at Arias Hall, 1717 Morena Blvd. 8 p.m. $15, www.dizzysjazz.com.

While Blaise Guld is technically a singer-songwriter, his talents go much deeper than that. Performing at Beaumont’s on Feb. 11, it’s Guld’s cool, seemingly effortless stage presence that sets him apart. If there had been a singer-songwriter in Sinatra’s Rat Pack, Guld would’ve fit the bill. With a set list that includes ace originals as well as hits by the likes of Bruno Mars, Bobby Brown and the Doors in the mix, this night will be a great soundtrack to a Saturday evening out.

The Blaise Guld Trio: Saturday, Feb. 11 at Beaumont’s, 5662 La Jolla Blvd. 9 p.m. 21 and up. www.beaumontseatery.com.

Although classified by many as a smooth jazz performer, prolific pianist Keiko Matsui’s introspective instrumental music actually has far more nuance than that. Performing two shows, 7:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., at Humphrey’s Backstage Live, Matsui’s catalog does include contemporary jazz, but songs can also show the influence of world music: R&B and Latin sounds. Currently touring behind her 43rd album, “Journey to the Heart,” Matsui’s concert doesn’t quite fall on Valentine’s Day, but the romantic themes that run through much of the music and the reflective nature of the songs, make this a great date night option.

Keiko Matsui: Saturday, Feb. 11, at Humphrey’s Backstage Live, 2241 Shelter Island Drive. 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. $35. humphreysbackstagelive.com.

Gabriela Aparicio performs at the Firefly on Feb. 14. Aparicio, who sings in both English and Spanish, has a wonderfully sultry voice, somewhere between Astrud Gilberto and Sade. What, however, has made her a local favorite is her terrific original songs, such as “You Captivate Me,” which blend equal parts melody and Latin rhythms. Great for listening or dancing.

Aparicio is currently in the studio working on a new album for release later this year, but in the meantime, any performance from her is well worth seeking out.

Gabriela Aparicio: Tuesday, Feb. 14 at Firefly, 1710 West Mission Bay Drive. 6 p.m. 21 and up. No cover. www.thedana.com/dining.

Beatle fans won’t want to miss The Benedetti Trio’s George Harrison Tribute at Dizzy’s
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said Faulconer, adding Spreckels “generously donated it to the city” after his death.

Pointing out the storied pool was “in desperate need of repairs,” Faulconer praised developer Pacifica Enterprises for “turning Belmont Park into a world-class destination. Restoring the Plunge is going to continue that momentum.”

Noting the Plunge’s restoration is “a public-private partnership if there ever was one,” Faulconer said the partnership is “making sure the Plunge is restored the right way, at no cost to taxpayers.”

After acquiring the lease to Belmont Park in 2012, Pacifica Enterprises and the City of San Diego negotiated a new lease in 2015 and entered into a partnership. Pacifica has committed to advance $5.2 million to rebuild the facility owned by the city. The company will recoup the $5.2 million through rent credits over the next seven to 10 years.

Pacifica also has agreed to pay for any cost overruns, which have been significant. The total cost to rebuild the Plunge building is approximately $11 million. The facility is scheduled to reopen in early 2019.

District 2 Councilmember Lorrie Zapf gave kudos to Pacifica.

“We have witnessed Pacifica’s commitment to restoring this community gem to its historical standards and creating a world-class facility for all to enjoy,” Zapf said.

“The Plunge has been around nearly 100 years,” noted Mission Beach Town Council president Gary De Luca, president/COO of Pacifica Enterprises. “Many of us who grew up in and around Mission Beach learned to swim at the Plunge. Our parents learned to swim there, our children learned to swim there and, in some cases, our grandchildren learned to swim there.”

Pacifica Enterprises’ plans for the Plunge include the complete restoration of the historic swimming pool, along with reconstruction of the building that surrounds it. A brand new state-of-the-art fitness center will be created on the new building’s second floor operated by the nationally-acclaimed Fit Athletic Club.

Boasting a predominantly glass facade, Fit Plunge will integrate exterior light with interior coastal textures. The new building will feature a glass retractable-roof system. It will also promote natural air circulation and prevent some of the deterioration issues that plagued the old building from moisture and salt water, while incorporating some of the Spanish Renaissance architectural features seen throughout the park.

“The Plunge has been closed and in dire need of a comprehensive revitalization for far too long,” said Dario De Luca, president/COO of Pacifica Enterprises. “We are confident the revitalized swimming pool, coupled with the new athletic center, as the re-imagined and reconstructed Fit Plunge, will serve as a source of great pride for the Mission Beach community for generations to come.”

Pacifica Enterprises and its construction contractor, Lasardi, began demolition of the old Plunge building in mid-January. Construction of the new building and fitness center, as well as the restoration of the Plunge swimming pool, is expected to begin later this year.

**Pilates for Guys and Here’s Why**

While women tend to dominate Pilates classes, Pilates holds plenty of benefits for men who rise to the challenge. Whether you’re a power lifter, or you’ve never tried Pilates, a Pilates class can help fine-tune your performance. How? The Pilates method is a system of physical and mental conditioning formerly known as eurythmy. A big part of Pilates is focusing on those muscles that don’t typically get a lot of attention. In my 20 years of experience working with men, their muscles are a little tighter than women’s, especially in the hips and hamstrings, but exercises can be easily modified to allow those areas to stretch out gradually. Men that add Pilates to their routine can show improvements in a just a few sessions, including muscle strength, control, balance and posture. While I’ll never know what makes one guy pursue Pilates and another try it only once, one thing is true: Pilates does benefit men just as it does women.
Albion Pros soccer ready to kickoff season

By DAVE THOMAS

Are you ready for some exciting soccer action in your neighborhood? If so, you don’t have to go too far. The Albion Pros will return to Mission Bay High School Stadium for their home games this season.

Finishing 16-4 last season, Albion looks to continue to entertain the fans. “This pre-season’s schedule is full of high-caliber opponents and offers great opportunities for them.”

According to Albion director of operations, Tim Reitgen, “This pre-season’s schedule is full of high-caliber matches, with our NPSL-play-off toels ending East Bay FC Stompers on Feb. 11, and Phoenix Rising from the CSL on Feb. 25, all leading up to our league home opener March 11. Those two matches will set the tone for the new season, with a commitment to success and a style of play that will entertain the fans.”

As Reitgen also pointed out, Albion’s commitment to success involves myriad of things. “We will continue to set the standard in the NPSL, with state-of-the-art facilities, sports performance, and the integration of our youth academy, providing a pathway for them to play professional soccer.”

Berns introduced hotelier Hyvin Lai, Discover PB’s vice president and owner of Ocean Park Inn. Lai said he’s been seeking answers to making the community safer and cleaner after one of his patrons was hospitalized several years ago after an altercation with aggressive pan-handlers.

Goals of clean and safe include: • Sweeping and removing litter from sidewalks, rights-of-ways, curbs and gutters in front of businesses; • Removing graffiti; • Emptying and maintaining trash receptacles; • Having roaming street team members patrolling the community on foot and by bicycle looking to curb public intoxication and other unacceptable behavior; and • Referring the unhoused to social services along with offering them employment opportunities.

Acting Northern Division Capt. Tina Williams remarked that “public safety is a shared effort,” while adding clean and safe “is a fine example of San Diego Police Department partnering with the community down here at Pacific Beach.”

Caryn Blanton, of PB Street Guardians, praised clean and safe for changing the community’s focus on homelessness from “a soup kitchen concept” to a “pithoc concept,” wherein everyone contributes as well as benefits from working together to combat social ill.

Moonshine Beach owner Ty Haueter noted he deals with the homeless every day.
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