

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

LET’S REFRAME OUR NARRATIVE TO HONOR DR. KING

Tomorrow, our country remembers civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King envisioned a world where his children wouldn’t be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

In a 1967 speech titled “America’s Chief Moral Dilemma,” Dr. King talked about the evil of racism and the struggle for genuine equality.

He believed that advances like integrating lunch counters and hotels — even guaranteeing the right to vote — were important but easy, because they didn’t cost the country anything.

To Dr. King, the real struggle for equality was just beginning. He said, “Now we are in a period where it will cost the nation billions of dollars to get rid of poverty, to get rid of slums, to make quality integrated education a reality. This is where we are now. The fact is that there has never been any single, solid, determined commitment on the part of the vast majority of white Americans to genuine equality for Negroes. There has always been ambivalence.”

Fifty-five years later, that ambivalence persists. We can easily find it in the way we talk about people of color.

At the National Conflict Resolution Center, we understand why this matters. But we don’t always get it right. Let me explain. NCRC has been working in the field of juvenile justice for nearly a decade. Our programs are changing systems that punish youth — disproportionately, youth of color — when they cause harm. Instead, we use a restorative approach that holds youth accountable while keeping them connected to community.

When we talk about these programs, we use words like “at-risk” or “disadvantaged” to describe the participants and the communities in which they live. Those terms — while convenient and familiar — conjure up images that stigmatize and also create fear.

A very thoughtful member of the NCRC board of directors once wrote to me following a discussion about the juvenile justice initiative. It made her feel uncomfortable. She wrote, “Looking at the

racial or ethnic profiles of those served may lead to unwarranted conclusions, since kids of color are far more likely to have their behavior labeled as ‘bad’ — and even criminalized — from a very young age.” White, affluent families have more resources to support kids in trouble — as well as influence, to keep their records clean.

Having raised three teenagers, I know she’s right. Behaviors attributed to kids who look like mine are often considered mistakes or youthful indiscretions. They are overlooked, because no harm was intended. Youth of color, who reside in the “wrong” ZIP codes, are perceived as potential criminals who need to be fixed or punished.

That narrative can short-change a kid’s future. Even if the facts tell a different (and less dire) story.

Trabian Shorters is founder and CEO of BMe Community, an organization that provides equity training that reframes the way we talk about people and communities of color. Shorters speaks of the trillions of dollars that have been spent since King’s time,

fighting racism and poverty.

Yet progress has been slow, hindered by something as basic as the words we choose.

Shorters believes that our persistent use of a fear-based narrative has led to an “inculcated practice of denigration and division.”

The way we react to fear is by trying to avoid, control or eliminate it. It’s human nature. (Think of finding a spider in your house.)

Instead, we should center on a person’s assets and aspirations. BMe calls the approach “asset-framing”: replacing fear-based language with words that engender understanding and confidence by focusing on a person’s worth. Asset-framing creates a fuller set of information and associations to draw upon when making decisions, inspiring more equitable action.

Asset-framing works. Last week, a member of our restorative team told me about his work with two high school students who had been fighting.

Tensions only mounted when school administrators tried to intervene. But instead of inquir-

ing about what happened and why (deficit-framing), he asked the boys what they like to do in their free time (asset-framing). As it turned out, both like to cook and help their single moms in busy households.

The exchange turned into bonding over cooking and ended with mutual apologies.

Polarization and incivility in our society are rampant in large part due to misguided assumptions we make about people of color and the words we choose when talking to or about them. Perceptions can change dramatically as we open our minds to finding the worth in others, instead of their challenges or shortcomings, and when we stop resorting to stereotypes. It’s not easy to do, but at NCRC, we’re working on it, every day.

There could be no better way to honor the memory of Dr. King.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC’s programming, visit ncrconline.com.

SCENE

Feeding San Diego

Telethon raises thousands to help San Diegans

BY U-T STAFF

Feeding San Diego’s staff and supporters gathered recently at the organization’s headquarters in Sorrento Valley to raise funds during the 10th annual Month of a Million Meals telethon in partnership with ABC 10News.

Guests included celebrity chef Claudia Sandoval, local cooking personality Sam the Cooking Guy, former Padre and Feeding San Diego board member Mark Loretta, Olympic skateboarder Bryce

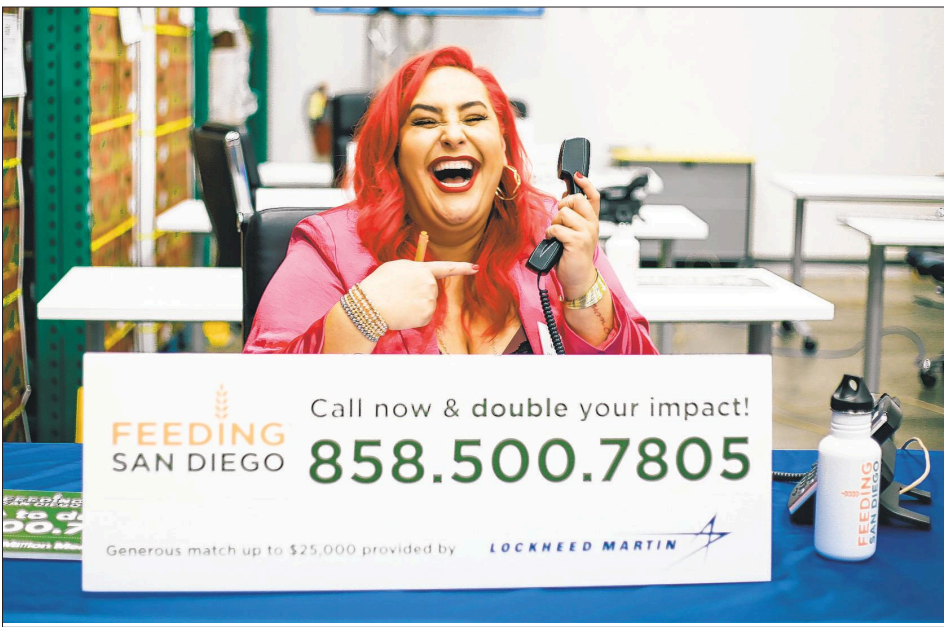
Wettstein, Tommy the Fishmonger and Bachelor contestant Sarah Trott.

The telethon raised \$38,000, and the nonprofit raised a total of \$395,973 in total on that “Giving Tuesday,” the annual global day of giving.

Funds raised for Feeding San Diego provide food assistance throughout the county through various programs that help such groups as low-income families, seniors, college students, military families and veterans. In its last fiscal year, the organization dis-

tributed 40.3 million meals, a 29 percent increase from the year before.

If your organization has held a philanthropic event, you’re welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduniontribune.com. Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer’s name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.



CARLY MATSUMOTO

Celebrity chef Claudia Sandoval answers phones during the telethon.

ROCK

FROM B1 rocks hand-painted by visitors from 113 countries and all 50 states. It also features thousands of plants, hand-made statuary, meditation stumps for sitting and playing checkers, a flagpole and a self-service art station where anybody can paint rocks for Dean to add to the garden.

Dave’s Rock Garden is now a beloved part of the city’s funky art scene, but its presence wasn’t always appreciated. Just two weeks into Dean’s project in 2015, a nearby resident filed a complaint with the city and Encinitas officials issued Dean a cease-and-desist order, demanding he stop what he was doing and remove all the plants within two weeks or they would take action.

The city never followed through on its threat, and Dean eventually sneaked back to the property. But instead of working in broad daylight, he gardened every night under the cover of darkness. It wasn’t until 2017 — after the garden had become recognized as a community treasure — that Dean finally felt safe gardening in the sunlight again.

“One of the inspirations I used for my motivation in creating the garden is I like to think of Moonlight Beach as the crown jewel of our city and the road to Moonlight as the gateway to our crown jewel,” he said. “I feel that we as citizens of Encinitas owe more to our visitors than to let them view a field of weeds on their way to the beach.”

Although Dave’s Rock Garden remains an unofficial public art installation, it has been widely recognized by local and national media, art and rock-painting groups and even Google, which has registered it as an official point of interest. A



HAYNE PALMOUR IV

Dave’s Rock Garden gets roughly 100 visitors a day who enjoy walking the paths and looking at the art.

couple of years ago, Dean was honored by the Ben’s Bells Project in Arizona, which recognizes people who perform acts of intentional kindness. And rather than adversaries, Encinitas city officials have become advocates for the garden. Last year, when the city decided to build a new retaining wall on the south border of the garden, Dean was invited to serve on the wall design committee.

“Though the city has not officially endorsed the garden yet, many of the city officials have given their unofficial support and appreciation of the garden,” Dean said.

The garden has a small box where visitors can leave donations to help pay for paints and plants. It has raised a little money over the years, but Dean remains the project’s main funder. Over the years, he has spent more than \$20,000 on plants at local nurseries and green glacier boulders from a quarry in Utah and hundreds of dollars more on paints and brushes. He also spends every weekend morning weeding, trimming and raking the garden, and he stops by most weeknights before sunset to check in. Whenever he visits, Dean sets out paints, plays music

on a wireless speaker, meets with visitors and enjoys offering tours to the roughly 100 visitors who stop by daily.

Dean said he’s driven to work so hard and spend so much on the garden because it’s his hobby and he feels well reimbursed by the volume of “thank yous” he receives.

“The locals love it so much,” Dean said. “When I go into any restaurant in town, people will see me and say, ‘Hey, you’re the rock guy.’ It has happened a thousand times. I never knew I’d be known by so many people.”

Among the thousands of rocks in the garden are painted tributes to the Grateful Dead, the Kool-Aid Man, painter Bob Ross, Volkswagen buses, Peter Pan, the Morton Salt Girl, the Taj Majal, Taco Bell and Humpty Dumpty. There are rocks painted with Arabic and Chinese lettering, a 9/11 memorial flag, an elaborate octopus and photo-realistic koi fish. Dean has created groupings of rocks painted with themes like mushroom, animals, human faces and college insignias and there’s a path he calls “believers row” lined with hundreds of rocks with spiritual and religious themes.

Although most of the rock

artists are amateurs, Dean said several professional artists have contributed greatly to the project over the years, including David Owens, Svetlana Kozak, Tiana Souligny, Steve Grah and Rich Strayer.

Dean’s favorite rocks are those with poignant backstories. One rock painted with an oceanscape features the words “I dropped a tear in the ocean. When I find it, I’ll stop missing you.” Another depicts a broken heart held together with a Band-Aid. It memorializes a local surfer who died from a heart attack a few years ago. A third rock features the words: “I donated a kidney to my wife. She already has my heart. Aug. 11, 2021.”

Dean said that some rock artists arrive with their donations pre-painted, but most of the rocks in the garden were painted on-site by visitors. Over the years, he has only had to remove two rocks, because they featured inappropriate content.

“My only rule is it has to be safe enough for Disney because we get a lot of children here,” Dean said. “All these little kids come up to me to share their rocks. I never imagined I’d have a connection with so many kids. This project has exceeded my wildest imagination.”

On Jan. 9, Colorado-based artist Brian Simmonds, who paints under the name “Pher01” (or “Pharaoh 1”), stopped by while out walking his Lab mix, Lola. He grabbed a few brushes and tubes of paint and began brushing a rock with a bright blue and green cactus design, which he said was inspired by a recent visit to Peru.

“I love it here,” Simmonds said of the garden. “I love the imagination that went into creating such a beautiful art installation for the community.”

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SAND

FROM B1 Acosta. “We want to open the line of communication with Oceanside and solve these problems together.”

Studies show between 100,000 and 200,000 cubic yards of sand annually flow south from Oceanside beaches to neighboring Carlsbad. The transfer continues southward along the coast.

“Our residents and our community would be detrimentally impacted” by the project, said Carlsbad City Manager Scott Chadwick, who offered to work with Oceanside on regional solutions to the problem of eroding beaches.

“The big thing that’s obvious is that there needs to be more collaboration, not just with Carlsbad, but with all cities to the south,” said Councilmember Keith Blackburn.

The subject also surfaced briefly at Del Mar’s City Council meeting Monday, where Mayor Dwight Worden said the item would be on a future council agenda.

About a dozen Oceanside residents spoke on Zoom connections to the online Carlsbad meeting, nearly all asking the City Council not to vote for the resolution.

“A sand retention system can be designed to mitigate downstream drift impacts,” said Bob Ashton, a member of the local group Save Oceanside Sand, which supports the project. “This is a great opportunity for Carlsbad and Oceanside.”

Oceanside Mayor Esther Sanchez said that whether or not Carlsbad voted to support the sand project, she would be willing to work collaboratively with the city on solutions for the region’s eroding coastline.

“It is unfortunate that we

did not start off by working together,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez has said before that the pilot project is a waste of time and money because the Coastal Commission is unlikely to approve it. She suggested the effort would be better spent in expanding the city’s ongoing sand restoration efforts.

Most of Oceanside’s sand comes from the annual dredging of the Oceanside harbor, but in recent years that source has been insufficient.

Other Oceanside council members have said their city needs to explore all avenues for protecting its beaches, and that the retention devices are worth a try.

Oceanside Councilmember Ryan Keim also called in to the Carlsbad meeting and said that, though he voted for the pilot program, “I would not support a project that negatively affects our neighbors to the south.”

The plan calls for a “two-pronged approach,” he said. In addition to building the groins, Oceanside would replenish the sand on the beach between the groins. Also proposed as part of the project is a bypass system to pump sand over or around the harbor that stops the natural flow from Camp Pendleton to Oceanside.

“The goal is to bring more sand to beaches south of the harbor and everyone south of us,” Keim said. “This project is not only good for our city, but it’s good for your city as well.”

Oceanside is using a portion of its federal COVID-19 relief money to pay for the preliminary work on the pilot project.

So far, the city has no money to pay for construction, which is expected to cost about \$50 million. Most of that would have to come from federal and state grants.

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VEHICLE

FROM B1 mines and improvised explosive devices.

Thursday’s operation is the first time the vehicles have conducted waterborne operations as part of a named exercise, according to 1st Lt. Charlotte Dennis, a spokesperson for the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, or MEU. The exercise — called “Iron Fist” — is held on Camp Pendleton every year with U.S. Marines and Japanese self-defense forces.

The Marines’ struggle with the previous generation of armored troop carries comes as the service is two years into a decade-

long plan to refocus its missions from land-based combat to ship-to-shore amphibious operations with the winding down of U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and rising tensions with Russia and China.

The ACVs training with the 15th MEU at Camp Pendleton during this exercise will be the first to deploy with a MEU, Dennis said. That deployment will be with the 13th MEU, also based at Camp Pendleton.

Marine Corps’ investigations into the 2020 sinking found that the infantry Marines riding in the vehicles were not all fully swim qualified, nor had they all been trained in deep-water escape procedures, due in part



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

Marines take a break in between training operations with the Amphibious Combat Vehicle.

to the pressures of the pandemic and the deep-water trainer on Camp Pendleton being down for maintenance while the Marines were preparing for deployment.

The incident led the Corps to revamp its training requirements for Marines who will ride in the vehicles, including swim qualifications and underwater es-

cape training, among others. That was why Thursday’s operations did not include infantry Marines from 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines riding in the vehicles yet, Davis said.

“Those infantrymen from (2/4) ... are not qualified to ride in the back of the ACVs at this time,” Davis said. “This is all safety measures as a result of the 15th MEU incident back in 30 July, 2020, and all the follow-on investigations.”

Elsewhere at Camp Pendleton, administrative boards continued for leaders identified by those investigations as bearing some responsibility in the training and maintenance oversight that investigators say led to the AAV’s sinking.

A board of inquiry into the commander of the infantry company involved in the accident wrapped up Friday on the base. Capt. George Hepler, the commander of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, was removed from command in the months following the deaths. He’s accused of substandard performance and dereliction of duty and faces separation from the Marines and an other-than-honorable discharge.

The results of Hepler’s board, and several others either completed or still to come, will not be announced by the Marines until they’ve all been finished, the Corps said last week.

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