

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

AT THE BURNHAM CENTER, IT’S COMMUNITY BEFORE SELF

It’s not mathematically correct, but I’ve long believed that 1+1=3 — that people working together can accomplish more than each person working on their own.

One sport that’s all about teamwork is competitive sailing. There is hardly any task on a racing yacht that a person can accomplish on their own; trusted teammates are needed to get things done safely and quickly. And sailors know: To win a race, the team must act as one.

As an avid competitive sailor, Malin Burnham understands and values teamwork. He’s woven those principles into the Burnham Center for Community Engagement (BCCA), a “think-and-do tank” that officially opened its doors last summer. BCCA envisions making the San Diego binational region a better place to live, work and play for all, drawing on the power of community.

BCCA notched an early win. In November, San Diego-Tijuana was selected as the World Design Capital for 2024. The bid showcased the ways our region is tak-

ing a human-centered approach to design, building more interconnected communities to address global problems like climate change and social inequity. BCCA was one of the organizations that spearheaded the bid campaign, the result of a multi-year effort led by a binational team of designers, innovators and civic leaders.

So, in true Burnham fashion, it was a collaborative effort.

Along with the World Design Capital bid, BCCA’s early priorities include revitalizing Balboa Park, increasing economic opportunities for all, improving housing affordability, and helping rebuild our community fabric.

Burnham’s community focus was sharpened by reading he did three years ago. He was struck by society’s shift away from community and the consequences it’s had: a loss of connection — even among neighbors — and deepening polarization.

But Burnham has long been community minded. In 2016, he authored a book called “Community Before Self: Seventy Years of Making Waves.” The book ex-

plains how anyone can live a life of integrity and purposeful giving, regardless of their income, political views or age.

Burnham invited the National Conflict Resolution Center to become one of BCCA’s early partners. Last summer, we launched the Civic Engagement Initiative with support from the San Diego County Health and Human Services Administration, as part of the Live Well Exchange.

We work with BCCA to facilitate conversation between project stakeholders, a process that begins with the discovery of shared values.

Over six months, participants built a cohesive community bond. That led to a shift away from competitive thinking toward more collaborative, inclusive problem solving and decision making. It also led to a realization: that sustainable outcomes are more likely when all voices and interests are heard.

NCRC facilitated four dialogue events. In a session that focused on reorienting toward collaboration, we led an exercise called

“Just Seven Things.” It’s a different take on the principles of teamwork that focuses on the need to collaborate and compromise when stakes are high and time is short.

Participants are told that in approximately 10 minutes, they will be teleported to an uninhabited island.

They must work together to identify just seven things their group can bring to survive indefinitely. The items must be real; all seven must be able to fit into a large backpack or duffel bag. They are divided into small groups and given just seven minutes to complete the exercise.

Eden Yaege participated in the Civic Engagement Initiative. Yaege is immediate past president of the Clairemont Town Council and serves on the organizing committee of the San Diego Network of Town Councils.

When Yaege was approached to join the group, she couldn’t imagine adding something to an already full plate.

By the second session, she was eager to pick a project and wondered, what is all this talking? At

the third meeting, Yaege had her moment of understanding: The goal is the process.

It came to light for her during the island exercise. Yaege said, “I found that (our group) produced a much better list when everyone was free to participate and be heard. We were able to discuss the pros and cons based on a level of trust.”

Everyone was working toward a shared goal. This led to more suggestions and better decisions, as the goal was to listen — not just be right.”

Yaege also told us that participation gave her a better understanding of the commonality of issues across the region, as well as tools to build a more civil community. She has learned the power of a group having shared principles.

That’s just what Burnham knew would happen.

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.

HOPE • Children’s book in the works about mini horse Peabody, his animal friends

FROM **B1**

was on top of the more than 500 million combined views of Peabody’s earlier videos. And within the next month, San Severino said she expects to close a deal with a major publisher on a children’s book about Peabody and his animal friends. But in this version of the story, Peabody won’t die in the end.

San Severino said many of the comments posted on the Peabody videos are from people around the world who say his can-do spirit lifted their spirits while they were dealing with depression and disease. Two followers, including Mexico-based artist Nancy Hache, were so inspired by Peabody that they made paintings of the horse that now hang in the couple’s home.

Although there are hundreds of videos on the @faithfulminis social media pages, Smith said he believes the reason that Peabody’s story resonates the most with followers is that Peabody fought the odds and he had a sweet, innocent and energetic personality.

“He was just as cute on the inside as he was on the outside and he had a very innocent nature,” Smith said. “From the moment Faith picked him up, he was coddled and spoiled and bottle-fed. He owned this house. Even though he didn’t have a long life, he had a good life to the end.”

Peabody isn’t the only miniature horse with dwarfism that Faithful Friends has taken in over the past decade. San Severino said



Faithful Friends Mini Horses business owners Faith San Severino and Adam Smith walk with some of their miniature horses at their ranch. The horses have a longer life span than service dogs and can be more docile.

she doesn’t run a rescue and she does not breed horses, but some professional miniature horse breeders have reached out to offer foals when one of their mares has produced a baby with dwarfism, a condition that usually leads to multiple health problems and a shorter life.

The ranch’s “new Peabody” is a 1-year-old male with dwarfism named Buf-

falo, who is 19 inches tall and weighs about 50 pounds. So named for his thick, shaggy bison-like coat, Buffalo is believed to be one of the smallest living horses in the world, San Severino said.

San Severino used to work as a television writer and editor in her native Vancouver, Canada, before she retired and moved to San Diego in 2012. Not sure what to do next, she decided she

wanted to work with horses and she wanted to volunteer as a pet therapist at senior centers for veterans and Alzheimer’s patients. Eventually she hit on the idea of buying and training miniature horses as therapy animals. Now she’s a nationally certified trainer and she works with buyers from all over the country.

According to the U.S. Service Animals official reg-

istry, miniature horses make up a small but growing number of service animals in America. They live longer than service dogs (up to 35 years), are non-allergenic, are usually more calm in public spaces and because of their larger size they can be useful as a guide animal for blind people who need to lean on their service animal for support.

San Severino said not ev-

ery miniature horse is suited to being a therapy animal. They must be docile, unflappable, easily trainable and interested in interacting with people. The training process usually begins at six months of age and can last for three months to a year, depending on the skills that the owner requests. She said most of her buyers, who pay \$5,000 and up for the trained minis, are professional women who have worked in the health care and education fields and want to use their horse to help others.

Because miniature horses are increasingly popular as therapy animals, San Severino said she has seen many abuses in the breeding industry. She hopes to use her social media platform to raise awareness about unscrupulous practices. She warns that miniature horses should never be sold before they’re a year old. Some breeders are selling foals at three to five months of age when they are not fully weaned or mature enough to leave their mothers and they haven’t received any training.

San Severino and Smith said they still miss Peabody but they’re grateful for the time they had with him and the hundreds of thousands of followers he generated to help promote their message about the value of miniature therapy horses.

“All I wanted to do was find a therapy horse for elderly people in the neighborhood. I had no idea I’d find a therapy horse for the world,” she said.

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SMOLENS

FROM **B1**

from obtaining guns and requiring locked gun storage; also rejecting “stand your ground” laws and allowing guns to be carried without permits.

“While each of the top 14 states in the gun law rankings has all five of these policies in place, none of the bottom 14 states maintains any of these critical protections,” the study said.

The leading states on gun laws averaged 7.4 gun deaths per 100,000 residents while those at the bottom averaged 20 per 100,000. The national average is 13.6

Hawaii, which also has the lowest rate of gun ownership, had 3.4 deaths per 100,000. California was at 8.4 deaths — about in the middle of the states with the strongest gun laws. Mississippi had 28.6 deaths per 100,000 residents.

With some exceptions, that blue state-red state contrast is consistent throughout the study.

Overall, the correlation bears out as the average of states shows. But some individual states counter the trend. For instance, Illinois was ranked as having the sixth-strongest gun laws, yet its gun death rate was 14.1 per 100,000.

That’s higher than New Hampshire, which had a rate of 8.9 per 100,000, though it was ranked as having only the 42nd-strongest gun laws.

The study suggests that some strong-law states are, to a degree, victimized by neighboring states.

“Virginia, which had weak gun purchase laws until 2020, has long been the top supplier of crime guns into Maryland,” said the report, which added that



San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo visits a makeshift memorial for the May 2018 shooting victims in May.

“Illinois is surrounded by states with much weaker laws.”

The number of guns also can skew the laws-to-shootings correlation, according to the study.

“A state like Rhode Island has low gun violence relative to the strength of its laws — likely due in part to its very low gun ownership rate (it’s third-lowest in the nation),” the report said. “On the other hand, states like Nevada and New Mexico have higher rates of gun violence than their laws might suggest — perhaps in part as a result of above-average gun ownership.”

Is this study conclusive? The Everytown folks think so.

“When we compare the states head-to-head on the top 50 gun safety policies, a clear pattern emerges,” the study says. “States with strong laws see less gun violence.”

No doubt critics will see plenty to pick apart in the study. Nobody seems to have a good explanation for the nationwide increase in crime, particularly involving the use of guns. There may be economic, societal and pandemic-related reasons

for it. Easy access to guns, illegal and legal, certainly contributes to it.

Common-sense laws like requiring locked storage for guns and tighter background checks certainly make sense. How things play out with more innovative ones, such as requiring liability insurance, will be interesting to watch.

But concurrent with the increase in gun violence has been a softening of public opinion on tougher gun laws.

A Gallup poll released in November showed a majority of American adults still support stronger gun restrictions. But the 52 percent taking that position was the poll’s lowest reading since 2014.

The survey said 35 percent believe laws covering the sale of firearms should be kept as they are now and 11 percent want regulations eased.

A Quinnipiac University poll around the same time showed 49 percent oppose stricter gun laws, while 45 percent support them. That’s the first time since December 2015 that fewer than 50 percent of voters supported tougher laws in

that poll.

Gun sales have increased dramatically over the past two years, with first-time buyers fueling the surge.

Meanwhile, there may be a perception that, contrary to the study’s conclusions, gun laws may not be effective.

The study ranks Illinois as a strong-gun-law state, yet 2021 was the deadliest crime year in Chicago in a quarter century. Granted, Chicago isn’t the entire state, but that’s what people have been talking about.

Further, the study shows Illinois’ gun death rate is higher than the national average.

The more recent focus has been on New York City, which is in a state that the study deemed to have the third-strongest gun laws and a relatively low gun-death rate in 2020 of 5.3 per 100,000. The alarming gun violence there recently included the shooting deaths of two police officers.

Newly-elected Mayor Eric Adams last week unveiled a “Blueprint to End Gun Violence” in the city. When big things happen in New York City, they tend to draw national attention, and not just from the news media.

Next week, President Joe Biden plans to meet with Adams in New York to discuss what can be done about all the shooting.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Jeremy B. White (@JeremyBWhite) of Politico in California.

“Would love to see an LA/SF lawmaker bet with actual stakes. Like, ‘if the 49ers lose I will resign #CALeg and get a job at my local library.’”

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PODCAST

FROM **B1**

leased in December, featuring an interview with Christina Lu, the Philadelphia high school senior who made national news in November when she defended a fellow Asian student being attacked on the public transit system. Christina was brutally attacked by a group of four high school girls who called her racial slurs — the cellphone video of the attack went viral.

On the podcast, the group had a conversation with Lu about the rise in Asian hate crimes, harmful stereotypes, Asian portrayals in TV and film, and how schools might better help educate students about Asian culture and history.

“I’m an avid podcast listener and this is my first time doing a podcast. In general, I just like talking!” Michi said. “I think it’s great to get kids’ stories out there, let them know that they’re not alone and that there is a place to have a dialogue.”

Episodes have featured interviews with San Diego school board Vice President Michael Allman about the board’s resolution denouncing antisemitism and Superintendent Cheryl James-Ward about combating hate in an educational setting.

“I admire Dr. Ward so much. She is so kind and she really cares about these race-based issues,” Michi said. “It’s so important to have a superintendent that fully advocates for students.”

Steven and Joyce took the lead on a recent podcast about how private schools like Bishop’s are addressing hate and Sammy is planning a podcast interview with Solana Beach School District

Superintendent Jodee Brentlinger.

While podcasts are Annihate’s main venture, the group is also building up its social media presence to help raise awareness. As an example, this year for Lunar New Year, which begins Feb. 1, a group Instagram post provided a list of book recommendations.

In 2018 at age 11, Michi was part of the winning team on the NBC show “Genius Junior,” demonstrating her smarts and skill of spelling challenging words backward. She is a three-time Carson Scholar, a program that honors students’ academic and humanitarian achievements, founded by Candy and Ben Carson, the former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Michi’s main extracurricular activity at CCA is debate. The only freshman on the debate team, she and her partner, junior Ishan Deshpande, earned a bid to the Tournament of Champions in April at the University of Kentucky.

“In the future, I would like to study law and become a Supreme Court justice or have enough influence to change major laws in the U.S.,” said Michi.

Michi’s work with Annihate was recently recognized by the San Diego Union High School District board at its Jan. 20 meeting.

“She is just a remarkable young lady,” James-Ward said. “It was amazing to me that a young lady at the age of 14 would start such a podcast and engage with people around the world on how to make the world a better place.”

Find the podcasts at annihate.org.

Billing writes for the U-T Community Press.