

## A PATH FORWARD

## AS PANDEMIC PERSISTS, SO DOES WORK OF PEACEMAKERS

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

We interrupt Americans' pre-occupation with the coronavirus for an important message: Life goes on. With 24/7 coverage of the pandemic, we are losing sight of other issues facing society. Those problems may look a little different when all of this is over, but they won't go away.

Just two weeks ago, the National Conflict Resolution Center was scheduled to host its annual Peacemaker Awards dinner. At the event, we planned to honor four individuals who are doing vital work that benefits the San Diego community.

In the spirit of my column last week on heroes, I'd put that label on them, too. Even if our collective attention is elsewhere at the moment, their important work continues. They deserve acknowledgment. They've earned our respect and gratitude.

So, ladies and gentlemen, it's my honor to introduce you to NCRC's 2020 Local Peacemakers:

- Sherrie Rubin is an opioid educator and advocate for drug-policy changes. She founded the

Hope2gether Foundation after her son, Aaron, overdosed on Oxycontin. Aaron survived, but he is now a quadriplegic. He joins Sherrie as she addresses students and community groups, serving as a powerful testament to the dangers of opioid abuse. The opioid epidemic will continue to rage post-coronavirus.

On the Health Affairs blog, Navdeep Kang recently wrote that public health precautions such as social distancing and self-quarantine can aggravate anxiety and depression. So, too, can the fear and uncertainty that come with economic distress.

Kang says, "Many people will self-medicate with drugs and alcohol to ease the stress. It is a known fact that the path to addiction is littered with loneliness and disconnection." The opioid crisis is unrelenting. And so, Sherrie's work continues.

- Then there is Nico Marcolongo, a Marine Corps officer who served through two deployments to Iraq. He is now the senior program manager for Operation Rebound at the Challenged Athletes Foundation. Nico helps

injured veterans strengthen their mental and physical well-being and reintegrate into the community through participation in sports. This essential work was born of his own experience, struggling with post-traumatic stress. He joined Operation Rebound in 2008, guiding a program that has served more than 2,700 veterans since its inception.

The work of the Challenged Athletes Foundation — which aims to increase self-esteem and encourage independence, enhancing quality of life — is already vital. But it will likely become even more important as our veterans are forced to navigate the uncertainties that await us all in a post-coronavirus world. And so, Nico's work continues.

- Buki Domingos speaks and performs locally to raise awareness about human trafficking. She has firsthand experience with the subject. Born in Nigeria, she came to the U.S. six years ago and unknowingly, became entangled in a human-trafficking scheme. Locally, human trafficking is a nearly \$1 billion industry, according to a study by two professors at the

University of San Diego and Point Loma Nazarene University. Seventy percent of trafficking victims are sold online — in the very digital arena where our kids are spending more and more time. Add to that our new economic reality, with households upended — and vulnerable — as they face unforeseen financial hardship, and we have a dangerous confluence of events. The predators are taking notice. Already, one out of every five young people has been sexually solicited online. And so, Buki's work continues.

- Dr. Amber Pairis founded and directs the Climate Science Alliance, an organization that since 2015 has worked to safeguard communities by increasing awareness of climate-change impacts, promoting solutions and facilitating action.

We've seen the photos that bear witness to the environmental benefits when economic activity shuts down and global carbon emissions fall: clean air in countries like China and cities like Los Angeles, clear water in Venice's Grand Canal, thriving sea turtles on the beaches of Thailand, and

much more worth celebrating. And yet, a recent article in the Financial Times suggests that it's too early to declare victory — and that any benefits we're now enjoying are likely to be short-lived as we move toward recovery.

The fight for a better and cleaner world is nowhere near finished. And so, Amber's work continues.

Understandably, in the face of a global pandemic, almost every other fact of life for Americans is now on the back burner. Yet when this crisis is over, we can't afford to just go back to business as usual. Instead, we have to link arms with brave warriors — people like Sherrie, Nico, Buki, and Amber — and dedicate ourselves anew to finding creative solutions to lingering problems. Our work continues.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based organization working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. NCRC is nationally recognized for its conflict management and communication strategies. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com)

## CHALLENGE • Center for Autism has online tools for parents, kids

FROM B1 school setting. Participating in the newly online version of his improv classes has helped him to feel less lonely during the stay-at-home order.

"I think that's a really good outlet for him because he gets to see all of the other kids in his class who he's friends with and actually have a chance to, like, socialize," she said.

Kids diagnosed with autism often thrive when they have a set schedule and can regularly meet with behavioral therapists and other counselors, Doreen Grantepeeh said.

She is a clinical psychologist and board-certified behavior analyst who founded the Center for Autism and Related Disorders, based in Woodland Hills with offices in San Diego County.

"For anyone when their routine changes, we all kind of become a little bit more anxious," Grantepeeh said. "For children with autism, it's even more so because they really depend on the people they know and their routines to kind of give them a sense of security and just so they know what's coming next."

Even without the structure provided by a school day and extracurricular activities, parents can still create routines so their children know what to expect day to day.

One of the symptoms for those diagnosed with autism is being

over or under responsive to different sensory stimuli, according to Autism Speaks.

This can make wearing masks difficult for kids when they're out in public, Grantepeeh said.

To help kids feel more comfortable wearing masks, parents can train them by practicing wearing one for increasing intervals, starting at five seconds. As with other behavioral training, they should receive rewards when they complete a mask-wearing session.

Having kids make their own mask or draw on disposable ones can also increase the likelihood that they'll want to wear it.

"When the kids engage in making masks themselves out of bandanas and things like that, they love them and they wear them," Grantepeeh said.

There are several resources connected to CARD that parents can turn to both during the pandemic and in their daily lives.

The Institute for Behavioral Training is offering two free training modules each week for parents to help overcome challenging behaviors at home.

Online tools from Skills for Autism help parents create and use treatment plans for children and adolescents with autism. There is currently a 10 percent discount for subscriptions.

The nonprofit branch, Autism Care Today, is giving away 100



Amy Munera works with her son Sebastian, 12, on a remote-learning lesson recently.

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iPads to families so children can attend telehealth visits and participate in their new online classes.

It is also giving away \$50,000 worth of grocery store gift cards to families who are struggling financially. Visit [act-today.org](http://act-today.org) to learn more.

Lastly, there is a daily series of free advice videos that covers a variety of autism-specific topics available at [autism-live.com](http://autism-live.com).

Regardless of what tools a fam-

ily turns to, Grantepeeh said the key for helping children with autism to understand what is happening right now is to focus on the new "rules" without inciting fear. These include the importance of hand-washing and social distancing.

"We have just been telling our kids the rules associated with this," she said. "It's a little too much for a lot of young children on the spectrum to understand the danger.

That could cause a lot more fear than we really want to."

In addition to being a parent, Munera is president of Autism Society San Diego's board of directors, a nonprofit that supports the community with a summer camp, aquatics program and other resources.

Instead of the typical meetings shaping plans for the upcoming summer camp, the board is instead figuring out what will happen if an in-person camp isn't possible this year.

"It's not as fun as what we could otherwise be doing, especially given that it's April," Munera said. "We'd usually have quite a lot of different events happening because it's Autism Awareness Month, but unfortunately everything is canceled."

Until kids are back to attending classes in their physical schools, Munera suggests parents take their new role as home school teachers one day at a time.

"Parents need to try and be a little bit easy on themselves," she said. "When you're trying to educate your child, even if they were neurotypical, if you're not a teacher, you're not as skilled or practiced at education as someone who's gone to school and has a degree for it and has been doing it for many years. We're all doing the best we can."

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## PARK

FROM B1 Park" — just burst in. "We came down, came into the park, we made human chains around the tractors."

The students and community members occupied the site for 12 days, clearing the ground and planting flowers and nopales until the city agreed to buy the land from the state and build a park.

Fifty years later, the incident remains one of the most impactful yet often overlooked episodes in the history of social struggles in Southern California, the state and perhaps nationally.

Chicano Park became a locus for mural artists, part of the renaissance of Chicano and resistance murals of the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Soon, the freeway pillars were adorned with artwork that traced the history of local residents to Baja California and Mexico's northern states, and deeper, to the founding of the Aztec Empire, reflecting the cultural flurry that accompanied the ethnic nationalism movements of the period.

"It was literally a left-over space, a throwaway space, and the community took it," said Alexandro Gradilla, associate professor of Chicana/o studies at Cal State Fullerton and a San Diego native. And now, "The community has literally fused with that space."

On Saturday, Mexican Americans from across the U.S. Southwest were expected to descend upon Chicano Park once more for the annual Chicano Park Day. This year's 50th observance was going to be the biggest ever, drawing bands, vendors, dance troupes and low-rider vehicles.

But the coronavirus pandemic halted the anniversary celebration.

The festival was postponed by organizers, although a new date has not yet been set.

"Chicano Park reminds us that if we gather together and we fight for something, it is possible for us to win," said artist Soni López-Chávez of the local La Bodega Gallery. "Everyone was super excited



Joel Castillo of Ventura County pauses to shoot photos during a visit to Chicano Park.

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to celebrate, and for us to not be able to gather as one is really sad. It's crushing."

The annual tradition, held on the weekend nearest to April 22, had increasingly drawn visitors from throughout Southern California. For now, artists and surviving activists from the era are still finding creative ways to honor the heritage of Chicano Park on its golden anniversary.

The Chicano Park Steering Committee organized live online screenings and history sessions throughout the week. On Wednesday, the anniversary of the founding, surviving members of the original band and their descendants gathered, wearing masks and adhering to social-distancing guidelines, to raise their founding flag.

"I can feel them here, people who were here with us for the takeover of this land, for Chicano Park," said Tomasa "Tommie" Camarillo, the committee chair, in a video of Wednesday's flag-raising. "I know they're watching us with these big ole smiles, saying, 'See? I knew you guys wouldn't give up, you guys would stay there and finish what we started.' And hopefully every generation will be the same."

Over time, Chicano Park was acknowledged for its historical importance by local, state and federal preservation authorities, culminating

in a prestigious National Historic Landmark designation in January 2017.

Enrique Morones, longtime border activist and organizer, said he's been going to Chicano Park since high school. To honor the 50th anniversary, he is hosting interviews with veteran members of the founding generation on a podcast, "Buen Hombre/Magnificent Mujeres." This week's episode featured founding member Rigo Reyes.

"A lot of people are leaving us now, their age and so forth," Morones said. "So it's very important to record their history."

Other longtime attendees are honoring the park in their own ways. La Bodega Gallery's López-Chávez created a Chicano Park coloring sheet that she's been distributing through Instagram. Local artist Bob Dominguez is putting together a visual history book of Chicano Park Day memories.

Online, friends have been sending messages of honor and affection to the Chicano Park community from near and sometimes very far. "I wish I was there, I wanted to have my 2nd trip to Califas, but it couldn't come true," wrote one user on the park's general Facebook page. "Much love from Far East Side, Japan."

Hernandez writes for the Los Angeles Times.

## DISTRICT 1 Pandemic to affect race

FROM B1 when third-place finisher Aaron Brennan endorsed him, but LaCava has been endorsed by three other candidates from the primary — Sam Nejabat, James Rudolph and Harid Puentes.

"We basically split the pot," Moore said by phone Wednesday.

Precinct reports from the primary show a stark geographic divide, with LaCava winning in La Jolla and the district's other southern areas, while Moore won the district's more northern neighborhoods.

Fundraising doesn't seem likely to play a dominant role in the race. Both candidates raised about \$100,000 for the primary, although LaCava got more money from outside committees trying to influence the race.

The county Democratic Party and San Diego's largest labor organization — the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council — seem unlikely to prioritize a battle

among two Democrats. Neither made a District 1 endorsement in the primary.

Moore has been endorsed by the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Both candidates said Wednesday that the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the race. Visiting voters door to door, a common practice in city elections, seems unlikely. And requesting campaign donations could be more awkward.

Moore and LaCava also said a crucial issue in the campaign will be how to cope with a city budget that has lost several hundred million dollars in tax revenue because hotels are empty and restaurants are only handling takeout orders.

LaCava, 65, said his long track record of leadership and community involvement make him the more appealing candidate to deal with such issues. He has served on the La Jolla Community Planning Group, the Community Planners Committee and many other city panels.

"I have a track record — it's not hypothetical," said LaCava, adding that he has a reputation for working well with people of all ideologies. "That's the kind of leader-

ship people are going to be looking for during the time of the coronavirus."

Moore, 47, said he thinks LaCava's experience works against him, contending his opponent is too caught up in city bureaucracy to make independent and innovative decisions.

"This is an opportunity to reinvent the city," Moore said. "I won't be caught up in the dogma of how we've done things in the past."

The two men also differ on short-term vacation rentals, a controversial issue that may become less important depending on how lasting the impact of the pandemic is on tourism.

LaCava was endorsed by Save San Diego Neighborhoods, a group leading the local fight against vacation rentals by taking the position that the city must enforce existing laws in order to get companies like Airbnb to agree to compromise legislation.

Moore calls LaCava's position a "moratorium" and contends that San Diego must come up with a solution that allows vacation rentals to operate, but also respects neighborhood concerns.

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## DONATIONS

FROM B1 the real problem, which he said is special-interest-funded independent expenditures that are not made in coordination with any candidate.

"The concept of campaign contributions, while really popular and kind of the 'in' thing, I really think it's kind of a false security," he said.

Ultimately, Morrison voted against the limits because he thought it was unfair that political parties have a higher limit, \$2,000, than individuals, businesses and labor unions. He would have voted for limiting all contributions to \$1,000.

Morrison raised \$75,690 in 2018. The majority of those contributions would now be illegal under the new rules.

In 2018, Morrison received 13 donations of more than \$1,000. They totaled \$54,000. Nine of them, an amount of approximately \$47,000, came from outside National City.

Before voting in favor of the limits, Councilwoman Mona Rios pointed out that Morrison and mayoral candidate Ditas Delossantos Yamane raised substantially more than any other candidate.

For example, Rios herself raised \$26,000 and Mayor Alejandra Sotelo-Solis raised \$44,000. Meanwhile, Morrison raised \$75,000 and Yamane raised \$87,000.

Many of Yamane's biggest donors also contributed to Morrison's campaign, records show.

Of the 12 cities that do have contribution limits, the average is \$725. Roughly half of the cities prohibit busi-

nesses from donating to campaigns.

National City's \$1,000 contribution limit is the third-highest in San Diego County. Lemon Grove has a \$1,090 limit and Escondido has a \$4,300 limit.

Escondido planned to hold a vote to reduce its limits, potentially setting them as low as \$250 for City Council races and \$600 for mayoral races on March 4. However, that vote was delayed because Councilman John Masson became sick and later died. The Council is currently in the process of addressing the vacancy, according to City Clerk Zack Beck.

Carlsbad, El Cajon, Imperial Beach and Oceanside remain the only cities in the county without contribution limits.

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