

# Local

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DIANE BELL

Columnist

## County public health officials practice what they preach

As San Diego County public health officials updated the media on the spreading coronavirus, Public Health Officer Dr. **Wilma Wooten** stressed the importance of frequent hand washing, not touching your face, thoroughly cleaning your work space and staying home if you are getting sick.

But one key official was missing at the media gathering — Dr. **Eric McDonald**, medical director of the county's epidemiology and immunization branch.

"My colleague **Eric McDonald** woke up with a cold and sore throat, so he is not with us this morning," Wooten explained. His absence underscored the reason for the media conference. It was a great example, Wooten said, of putting into practice the county's new coronavirus guidelines.

**She's back:** Teen singer and songwriter **Makayla Phillips** was 15 when she earned "America's Got Talent" judge **Heidi Klum**'s "Golden Buzzer" that sent her straight through to the live shows. The Temecula area teen made the semifinals in 2018.

Nearly two years later, she triumphed during the televised audition for the new season of "American Idol" on Sunday.

Phillips is a longtime friend and singing pal of **Kodi Lee**, the blind musical savant who recently won AGT's Season 14 and its \$1 million prize.

You might say singing is in Makayla's genes. Her mother, **Regina**, is the daughter of **Tad Sisler**, Oceanside-based singer, pianist, composer and Las Vegas performer who has opened for numerous headline acts over the years.

He's currently an entertainment draw several nights each week at Manhattan restaurant in La Jolla. Sisler has given Makayla guidance. "But she is driven and serious about her growth and does much on her own," he says.

Last spring, Makayla sang the national anthem for a Padres game. In July, she updated her fans on Facebook: "I've been working hard, writing new songs (and) recording in the studio."

The result was her first single, "Love Left Me Blind," which debuted in August. Then came a duet, "Forming Great," in collaboration with singer **Dallin McKay**, released in December. Her most recent tune, "Fool Like You," came out last month.

After Makayla's rendition Sunday of The Supremes' "Who's Lovin' You," "American Idol" judge **Katy Perry** gushed, "You are top 10 in my book."

She isn't the only one in her family gaining recognition, though. In November, her dad, **Todd Phillips**, received "Firefighter of the Year" honors for the East Valley division of the Riverside County Fire Department.

**Never forgotten:** Former KFMB radio general manager and Big Brothers Big Sisters executive **Paul Palmer** passed away in an automobile accident last October. He had started a consulting business and was representing a cause he felt strongly about, the San Diego-based National Conflict Resolution Center, which promotes civil dis-

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KARLA PETERSON

has the day off.

## \$900M HOUSING BOND FACES HURDLE

As with Prop C, two-thirds voter approval needed; higher turnout could help

BY DAVID GARRICK

### SAN DIEGO

Last week's failure of a proposed hotel tax increase to fight homelessness and expand the convention center in San Diego could be viewed as either good or bad news for a

separate \$900 million housing bond proposed for the November ballot.

Among the good news is that opponents would likely have called the housing bond redundant if voters had approved the hotel tax increase, which was on the ballot as Measure C, because both aim to reduce homelessness.

Among the bad news is that Measure C had a broad coalition of support and minimal opposition, but it still fell short of the necessary two-thirds voter approval — the

same challenging threshold the housing bond must meet. The defeat of Measure C has prompted some local leaders to conclude it may be impossible for any proposal to get support from two-thirds of voters in San Diego.

"It's a very high threshold," said Stephen Russell, who is spearheading the housing bond and who supported Measure C, which got just under 65 percent of the vote. "It's disappointing that 65 percent of voters can support something and

have it still not succeed."

Additional bad news is that supporters of Measure C could characterize it as a tax on tourists because it would have hiked hotel taxes, while the housing bond would increase local property taxes.

"This is a different type of tax," said Dan Rottenstreich, who worked as one of the lead consultants on the campaign supporting Measure C. "The essential part of Measure C was 'tourists pay, you don't.'"

SEE BOND • B6

## CALM BEFORE THE STORM



K.C. ALFRED U-T

Surfers on Monday get out of the water in Sunset Cliffs during a negative tide, with the Coronado Islands off in the distance. A storm with subtropical moisture is expected to bring rain to the county today. There's even a chance of thunderstorms. The subtropical moisture from the south should keep temperatures today in the seasonal range. Colder air is expected later in the week.

## FRATERNITY TASK FORCES MEET

Policy proposals part of first conference since death of SDSU freshman

BY LYND SAY WINKLEY

### SAN DIEGO

Two San Diego State University task forces taking a hard look at student safety and alcohol and substance abuse after the death of a fraternity pledge met publicly for the first time Monday to discuss the work they have done and some of the policies they're considering.

The group consists of representatives from The Presidential Task Force on Student Activities

and Safety and The Presidential Task Force on Alcohol and Substance Misuse, which were created less than a week after the death of Dylan Hernandez.

The 19-year-old freshman became intoxicated on Nov. 6 at an event hosted by Phi Gamma Delta, the house he was pledging, police said. He later fell out of the top bunk bed at his dorm, suffering a blow to his head that led to his death.

Although each task force is still developing specific recommendations, both groups recognized early on that the college could do a better job of ensuring more students participated in the programs that exist to promote safety and responsibility.

Randy Timm, SDSU's dean of students, said some student organizations weren't taking part in existing educational programs because they weren't required to. To get a better handle on participation, the task force is hoping to track which student groups are involved in programs, as well as coming up with ways to measure whether that education succeeded.

Broadening the reach of these programs would be an important way to create campus-wide change, because fraternities and sororities aren't the only student organizations that occasionally get into trouble.

At the college's request, San Di-

SEE TASK FORCE • B3

## CITY, COUNTY STRIVE TO KEEP HOMELESS SAFE AMID OUTBREAK

Officials plan to install additional hand-washing stations across region

BY GARY WARTH

### SAN DIEGO

More hand-washing stations will be placed throughout the county and nurses may help train staff at shelters to keep the coronavirus from spreading among San Diego's homeless population.

Those and other steps were shared with homeless service providers Monday at City Hall, and one person at the meeting said he felt a sense of relief.

"I feel very comfortable we're being proactive rather than reactive," said Bob McElroy, president and CEO of the Alpha Project, which operates two of the city's four large, tented shelters.

No local homeless people have been identified as infected with the virus, but the population may be more vulnerable than most people because of hygiene challenges. Healthcare officials urge people to wash their hands frequently to avoid the infection, but that can be difficult for people living on the street or in encampments deep in canyons or other unseen areas.

"While this virus poses a very low risk to healthy persons, we know that many on our streets suffer from underlying health conditions — raising their risk for infection," San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer in an email. "We are on high alert and remain in constant communication with the county on this issue."

Faulconer said the city is consulting with county public health officials on steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, among people living outdoors or in shelters.

This would not be the first time the living conditions of homeless people contributed to the spread of a disease. Beginning in 2016, a hepatitis A outbreak heavily impacted the local homeless community, with

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## PIONEERS RECALL A RAGTAG RACE

Ironman competitors from 1980 celebrate 40th year of famous race

BY PAM KRAGEN

### SAN DIEGO

Today, the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii is recognized as the world's premiere triathlon. But the field of 108 ragtag competitors who assembled 40 years ago for the 1980 race were seen more as a bunch of zealous misfits with uneven skills than the elite multisport athletes of the modern age.

On Sunday, a half-dozen of that early race's finishers assembled in San Diego for the 40th anniversary celebration of the Ironman Class of 1980. More than 200 people — including Ironman founders, several past Ironman world champions and a few Paralympians — gathered for food, drinks, old stories, lots of laughs and a few tears.

The event was hosted by Bob Babbitt, who finished an unspectacular 55th in the 1980 race but went on to become a 2002 inductee to the Ironman Hall of Fame due to his decades of work as an Ironman



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

Bob Babbitt hosts the "Ironman Class of 1980" party at Challenged Athletes Foundation headquarters on Sunday.

historian and journalist. The event was held at the headquarters of the Challenged Athletes Foundation, which Babbitt co-founded 26 years ago with fellow 1980 Ironman competitor Rick "Koz" Kozlowski and local philanthropist Jeffrey Essakow.

Besides Babbitt and Kozlowski, other Class of 1980 attendees included Chuck Neumann,

who finished in second place; John Howard, third place; Kurt Madden, seventh place; Dennis Hearst, 15th; and Ned Overend, 23rd.

The Ironman World Championship — which involves a 2.4 mile rough-water swim, a 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile marathon — was first held in Oahu, Hawaii,

SEE IRONMAN • B3

THICH QUANG DO • 1928-2020

# BUDDHIST MONK DROVE DISSENT IN VIETNAM DESPITE DETENTIONS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Thich Quang Do, a Buddhist monk who became the public face of religious dissent in Vietnam while the Communist government kept him in prison or under house arrest for more than 20 years, has died at age 91.

Do, who died Feb. 22 in Ho Chi Minh City, was the highest leader of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, which has constantly tangled with the government over issues of religious freedom and human rights.

He suffered for many years from diabetes, a heart condition and high blood pressure, said the International Buddhist Information Bureau in Paris, which speaks for the outlawed church and announced the death.

Do was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and received several awards for



his activism, including the Rafto Prize for Human Rights and the Hellman/Hammett award, which

the New York-based group Human Rights Watch gives to writers for courage in the face of political persecution.

"People are very afraid of the government. Only I dare to say what I want to say. That is why they are afraid of me," Do told The Associated Press in a rare 2003 interview.

Even as Vietnam has embraced economic liberalization and free markets, its political system remains firmly under the control of the Communist government.

Do said that freedom, democracy and human rights "are more important than economic development" and without them

"we cannot make any progress in the real sense."

He had been under near-constant surveillance for years at his home in Ho Chi Minh City, the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery, where according to his supporters he organized microcredit programs and flood relief campaigns while coordinating provincial committees of his outlawed church.

According to the International Buddhist Information Bureau, he had been deprived of all means of communicating independently for the past year after he moved to the city's Tu Hieu Pagoda, after being sent out of Thanh Minh Zen Monastery and briefly living in northern Vietnam.

"The people who looked after him confiscated his cellphone and prevented his personal assistant from visiting him," the Paris-based support group said in an email.

## BOND

FROM B1

The housing bond would raise taxes on city of San Diego property owners by an average of \$72 per year to pay for 7,500 subsidized apartments for the homeless, veterans, seniors and the poor.

Russell said he hopes to counteract concerns about paying higher taxes by stressing that the housing bond would allow San Diegans to benefit from a greater share of the property and sales taxes paid by local residents.

The money generated by the bond would make San Diego eligible for more than \$3 billion in state matching funds, which only go to communities that can provide local funds for housing construction.

Right now those matching funds are being split up by counties and cities that have recently passed housing bonds, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Monica, Alameda County, San Mateo County, Santa Clara County and Berkeley.

"The fair-share argument is absolutely critical to our campaign," he said. "As it stands, other regions are spending our tax money."

Another reason for optimism could be that voter turnout is expected to be higher in November because it's a presidential election. And property owners tend to make up a smaller portion of

the electorate in general elections than they do in primaries.

"It's clear that November 2020 is our very best shot," Russell said.

One reason for pessimism is the failure Tuesday of several local school bonds, which also proposed higher property taxes.

Russell agreed that was a concern but suggested those failures were partly because a statewide school bond measure was also on the ballot, and because of some recent scandals involving school bond money being allegedly misspent.

He said the housing bond, which has been dubbed "Homes for San Diegans" by supporters, would solve a clear problem — homelessness — in a straightforward way.

That's in contrast to the failed school bonds and Measure C which, in addition to providing housing, also would have provided money to expand the convention center and repair roads.

"I think the clarity of a single-topic message may be an advantage," Russell said.

The prospects for the housing bond may come down to how much opposition emerges.

A poll that supporters conducted last fall found that support for the measure dips from 71 percent to 64 percent when likely voters are told the most common arguments that opponents

are likely to make against the measure. No formal opposition to the housing bond has mobilized, but the county Republican Party plans to oppose it, just as they did Measure C.

"We have a standing opposition to any tax increase and bond that goes on the ballot so yes, we will be opposing it vigorously," party chairman Tony Krvaric said by email Monday.

Another key factor may be how strong the bond is supported by local labor unions and potentially by business groups like the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council, an umbrella group for local unions, said Monday that the group supports "the spirit" of what supporters of the housing bond are doing, but the organization can't officially endorse the measure until the workers the group represents have weighed in.

Russell said he is scheduled to make a presentation on March 17 to a chamber committee, which could lead to an endorsement.

The City Council's Rules Committee is scheduled to discuss the bond at a meeting scheduled for 2 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall, 202 C St. The full council is expected to place the measure on the November ballot this summer.

david.garrick@suniontribune.com

## DIANE BELL

FROM B1

course and problem solving.

I remember seeing his eyes light up as he enthusiastically described a new idea or program the center was undertaking to foster better communications.

"He was funny and smart and passionate," said center President Steve

Dinkin. "It was such a big loss."

Instead of promoting its peacemaker awards on April 18 this year, Palmer will be the posthumous honoree for his "visionary leadership in bringing people together." An endowment fund, The Paul Palmer Memorial Fund for Civility, has been created to support the center's core programs.

The national peacemaker award will go to author and Harvard Kennedy School professor **Arthur Brooks**, who until recently directed the American Enterprise Institute. The title of his most recent book says it all: "Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt."

diane.bell@suniontribune.com



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