

A PATH FORWARD Steven P. Dinkin

Rays of hope shine at end of dark year, start of brighter one

The year 2020 will be remembered as one we would all like to forget. Beginning in March, the COVID-19 pandemic started to consume our every thought and control our every action. Our lives changed in ways that were previously unimaginable. In fact, it feels as if they changed forever.

In some respects, it's been a year ruled by fear: We hoarded toilet paper and cleaning products, worried that they would be in short supply. We hurled insults at Asians and stopped patronizing their businesses —

It's also been a year of mental health challenges. Loneliness. Anxiety. Depression. According to a KFF Tracking Poll, 53 percent of adults in the U.S. reported that their mental health has been negatively

impacted due to worry and stress over the pandemic. For comfort, too many of us turned to alcohol, consuming 14 percent more spirits this year than last year.

Lastly, it's been a year of division. We've witnessed the birth of a new and ugly form of polarization. Americans squared off in the most absurd of debates: To wear a mask, or not to wear a mask. How bizarre, given the undeniable efficacy of masks in stopping the spread of COVID-19.

When all of this began, we heard dire predictions. Sadly, they have come true. We end the year with more than 18 million COVID-19 cases in the U.S., and more than 320,000 deaths. The numbers are still rising, causing hospital bed shortages from coast to coast.

Looking ahead, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projects that more than 500,000

Americans will have died of the coronavirus by the end of March 2021. The measured rollout of vaccines means that "normal" won't return until mid-summer, if not later.

Yet despite the darkness of this year, I see rays of hope for the future.

For one thing, Americans have demonstrated remarkable resilience, adapting quickly in the face of adversity and change. Psychologists say that resilience is a learned behavior — a muscle that is flexed when we are knocked down and then get back up under our own power.

As businesses go, restaurants have suffered a combination of knockout blows over the course of the pandemic. More than 110,000 restaurants have closed; others have persevered despite dizzying changes to rules around capacity and hours of service. One inno-

vation has been the emergence of "ghost kitchens" — shared commercial space dedicated to the creation of delivery-only restaurant food. It frees restaurant owners from the financial burden of physical space, which has proved to be a liability in a pandemic.

Other restaurants pivoted in a different way, feeding the poor and hungry in their communities, offering free lunches to unemployed restaurant workers and providing delicious, hot meals to time-strapped health care workers.

And that's the second ray of hope: the extraordinary compassion that we've witnessed in these challenging times.

Health care workers, in particular, have made unthinkable sacrifices to care for patients. Laurie Chock, R.N. — a nurse manager in the COVID-19 unit at Maui Memorial Medical Center, in

Walluku, Hawaii — wrote a powerful and moving letter to the editor of The Maui News, describing the scene on the pandemic's front lines.

Chock said, "We stay away from our loved ones — sleeping apart, some of us on the couch, others in a tent in the backyard or in a hotel room away from our families. We have to stop our kids from running up to hug us as we step foot in the door. We are lepers in our own homes and in our community ... told by our neighbors, friends and strangers to stay away."

In the hospital, Chock wrote, nurses have taken on tasks like disinfecting their units, in addition to providing medical care.

They have battle scars on their faces from tightly fitted N95 masks and face shields, worn for 12 hours a day. "It is exhausting, sweaty,

grueling work," Chock concluded. "But we wouldn't be anywhere else. This is our calling, our life purpose."

As it turns out, there are exceptional human beings all around us.

They're our friends, our neighbors and our co-workers — ordinary people who rise to the occasion when called upon to do extraordinary things. And that is something for which to be grateful.

So long, 2020. Good riddance. Yes, it's a year we want to forget but the traits we've seen, like perseverance, empathy and compassion, bode well for a brighter 2021.

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 nccrconline.com

EAST

FROM B1 Council responded by denouncing the racism and expanding the scope of its Community Oriented Policing Committee.

Later that month, the region began to take a deeper look into intolerance when video surfaced of a White La Mesa police officer's rough detainment and arrest of a Black man at a San Diego Trolley station near Grossmont Center. The May 27 incident happened just two days after the in-custody death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, a Black man killed by White police officers, when protests were beginning to grow nationwide.

The arrest of Amaurie Johnson by officer Matt Dages — later fired by the department — was a local tipping point that led to the following weekend's social justice protest in the streets of downtown La Mesa. The demonstration drew thousands and culminated in the looting of a shopping center and several businesses in downtown La Mesa, the torching of three buildings and damage to other businesses at Grossmont Center.

La Mesa City Manager Greg Humora, who took over the city's top spot in January, Mayor Mark Arapostathis and the City Council took heat for months from residents and business owners about the police department and how the city handled the protest and civil unrest.

Johnson has since filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the city of La Mesa. Another lawsuit has been filed by a woman who said a police detective fired a beanbag round at her head during the protest.

In August, La Mesa Police Chief Walt Vasquez announced his imminent retirement, which he had been planning before the pandemic hit but said he put on hold to see the city through the challenges that followed. La Mesa has hired a company to help it find a replacement for the chief and hired another consultant to get to the bottom of the May 30-31 protest-turned-riot.

Next door in Lemon Grove, the city continued its budget struggles and in June passed a spending plan that showed a nearly \$1 million deficit and talk still swirling around the possibility of a county takeover. Voters turned down a sales tax measure on the March ballot that backers said could have brought as much as \$3 million to the city.

Lemon Grove voters did, however, pass a measure in November that will tax its cannabis dispensaries and looks to add about \$350,000 to the city's coffers next year. Meanwhile, City Councilman David Arambula, who in November finished last of four candidates seeking two open City Council seats, stayed mired in litigation. Arambula and the city were named in a lawsuit stem-

ming from a July 2017 fight at his home in which a local businessman sustained serious injuries.

That case, which also involves Democratic party leader Taisha Brown and Lemon Grove Mayor Raquel Vasquez, who works for the city of San Diego, will be heard by a jury in May.

In November, Arambula was named as defendant in a workplace restraining order filed by then-City Councilwoman Yadira Altamirano. Although Altamirano, who did not seek re-election, and Arambula are not working for Lemon Grove at this time, a hearing on the restraining order is set for Dec. 30.

Early in the pandemic, El Cajon was one of the hotbeds for the virus, mostly because of the high number of skilled nursing facilities. But the city continues to be one of the top two or three areas in the county hardest hit with spiking COVID-19 cases, likely related to its large number of low-income, high-density housing, in which there are many people living in cramped spaces under one roof.

The city was able to open a small dog park near its animal shelter that just started to be managed by the San Diego Humane Society. In June, the city celebrated the opening of its second brand-name hotel, the Hampton Inn & Suites by Hilton, on the site of its old police station.

Santee had been touting a new branding effort for 2020 — "Do More Due East" — but by the end of the year saw residents seeking to undo some city work, most notably Fanita Ranch, in the works since the 1980s.

The Santee City Council in September approved the nearly 3,000-home Fanita Ranch housing development, but signature-gatherers in October were able to get enough people to sign a referendum to put the issue on the ballot, where residents voted to overturn the council vote.

In November, Santee voters also approved an initiative that amends the city's general plan. Santee will now need voter approval for zoning changes that would increase the density or otherwise intensify land uses permitted by city law; or alter or increase Santee's general plan's land use categories.

Opponents of Fanita Ranch and other large developments for years have cited increased traffic and fire dangers among their reasons for pushing back. And this year's unprecedented, ongoing wildfires in California have made their points more poignant.

The Valley fire that hit Alpine and Jamul in September was the county's most destructive fire this year, charring nearly 16,500 acres, destroying 61 structures and damaging 11 more. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

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U-T FILE PHOTOS

Budget struggles have led to talk of Lemon Grove considering an end to cityhood status.



KRISTIAN CARREON

The city of San Diego anticipates nighttime construction on 30th Street between Upas and Thorn streets in North Park to continue through the end of January, with the possibility of extensions due to rains.

PIPELINE Official says residents notified

FROM B1 emails sent to the city's project email address obtained by The San Diego Union-Tribune, LaVelle is not alone.

In November, one resident questioned why the needs of business on the corner of the block were being prioritized since they were outnumbered by residential structures.

"I'm not satisfied with your previous assurances that 'compromises' are being reached regarding this situation," the neighbor wrote.

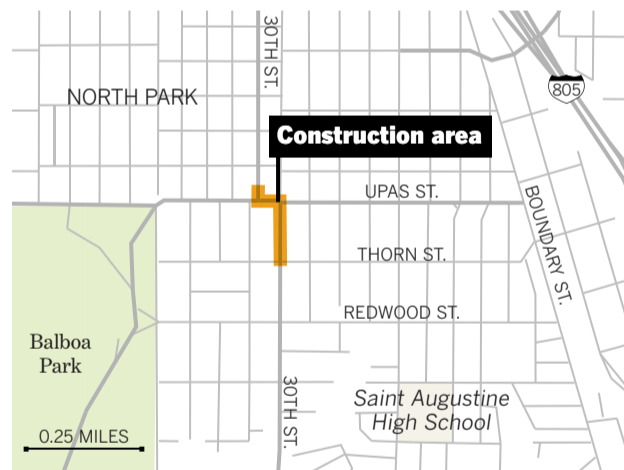
Another person said the noise and light from the project was horrifying and should not be done at night.

"We all as neighbors are really losing our patience with this project by lack of sleep," the resident wrote Nov. 24.

One resident wrote on Dec. 2 that noise persists from 8:30 p.m. to 7 a.m. and questioned why construction wasn't moved to daylight hours.

30th Street Pipeline Replacement Project

North Park residents have complained for months about the nighttime construction. The city says the work is being done overnight to lessen the effect on local businesses.



Sources: City of San Diego; Nextzen; OpenStreetMap

MICHELLE GUERRERO U-T

"While I don't intend to come across as 'that guy,' I am someone that has gotten very little sleep over the past two weeks due to heavy equipment," the resident wrote.

That same person followed up with the city five days later after not receiving a response from the city and wrote, "... I'm currently lis-

tening to an oversized jackhammer outside my living room." Most received similar responses from city staff explaining that night work was being done to avoid hurting businesses and thanking residents for cooperating.

LaVelle believes communication with residents could be better than generic email responses.

"It's completely unfair to ask us to be patient not to sleep for three or four months," she said.

Phillipp said residents are notified of construction activities through email blasts, door hangers and letters. He said the city's community liaison has received around six inquires about the night work and on-site staff have had discussions with community members.

The city anticipates that construction will continue through the end of January, with the possibility of extensions due to rain.

Liz Saba, owner of Presley & Co., a jewelry store on 30th Street, said although she's thankful the city is thinking of the businesses because a street closure could be a "nail on the coffin" for many merchants, she understands why residents are frustrated by the nighttime construction.

She said the city could look for a compromise because most of the businesses on the block open at 11 a.m.

"It's a Catch-22 unfortunately because we don't want the residents to be inconvenienced," Saba said. "But it has been a challenging year."

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SMOLENS

FROM B1 have clean air without damaging our economy."

Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, the top Democrat on the committee, said the proposals would create thousands of jobs and help "save our planet from the climate crisis."

That all may sound too good to be true, but others basically agreed.

Marty Durbin, a senior vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said the legislation is "truly historic" and will lead to innovation, economic growth and a better environment.

In addition to expanding clean energy sources, Barroso said the legislation aims to develop systems to capture and store carbon produced by power plants and phase out hydrofluorocarbons over 15 years. That will give companies time to develop alternative cool-

ants, he added.

According to The New York Times, HFCs are a small percentage of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, compared with carbon dioxide from the fossil fuels that power vehicles, electric plants and factories, but they have 1,000 times the heat-trapping potency of carbon dioxide. International agreements seek to phase out HFCs.

The legislation "will bring significant climate relief relatively quickly," said Matt Casale, director of environment campaigns for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

The Rhodium Group, a research and consulting firm, concluded the coolant phase-out would be one of the most significant federal policies ever taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions, according to the Times.

The legislation takes the country in the opposite direction from Trump's approach, which has been to roll back regulations aimed

at reducing harmful emissions.

The vast majority of scientific research suggests drastic action is needed as climate change continues to march forward.

A new study by researchers from McGill University in Montreal said the threshold for dangerous global warming will be crossed between 2027 and 2042, according to Science Daily. That's a narrower window than the estimate by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which was between now and 2052.

The U.N. report referenced earlier contends that the planet has entered a new geological age of danger, not just from climate change, but from conflict that force people from their homes, and growing societal inequalities.

"In fact, the pressures we exert on the planet have become so great that scientists are considering whether the Earth has entered an entirely new

geological epoch: the Anthropocene, or the age of humans," wrote Achim Steiner, administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, which issued the report.

"It means that we are the first people to live in an age defined by human choice, in which the dominant risk to our survival is ourselves."

To paraphrase a famous saying, we have met the enemy and it is us.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Laurence Tribe (@tribelaw), constitutional law professor, quoting from a Max Boot column in The Washington Post.

"Never before in U.S. history has there been a record of a president discussing a military coup to stay in office. In this instance, all that is preserving the Constitution is the military's fidelity to the rule of law."

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