

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

ALLIANCES EMERGE IN RESPECT FOR MARRIAGE ACT

While other months of the year are filled with religious celebrations, December somehow feels extra packed. We tend to think of Christmas and Hanukkah, observed by Christians and Jews, but there are other holidays this month — like Rohatsu, or Bodhi Day, which commemorates the Buddha's vow to sit under the Bodhi tree until he reached spiritual enlightenment.

Yet for all the rejoicing, American society continues to secularize. The latest Pew Research Center survey finds that 29 percent of U.S. adults are religious “nones” — people who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular” when asked about their religious identity. That’s a 10-point climb from a decade ago.

According to Pew, self-identified Christians make up 63 percent of the adult population, outnumbering the “nones” by a 2-to-1 margin. In 2007, when the question about religious identity was first asked, the margin was almost 5 to 1 (78 percent versus 16 percent).

Far fewer of us today say religion is “very important” in our

lives. We’re praying less, too. Millennials have led the shift away from organized religion.

But religion remains omnipresent in decision making at the highest levels of government. Surprisingly, perhaps, it was an important factor in the recent passage of the Respect for Marriage Act. A bipartisan coalition of senators voted in favor of the measure, 61-36; on Thursday, the House gave its approval, sending it to President Joe Biden to sign into law.

The Respect for Marriage Act would afford protection for same-sex marriages, requiring that all states recognize unions legally performed elsewhere in the country. It also protects interracial marriages.

The bill was crafted by Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin, the first openly gay senator and a longtime LGBTQ rights advocate. It was a response to the Supreme Court’s decision earlier this year in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, which overturned the constitutional right to abortion — and specifically, conservative Justice Clarence Thomas’ concur-

ring opinion.

Thomas wrote that the high court rulings establishing gay rights, including same-sex marriage, should be reconsidered with the revocation of *Roe v. Wade*. Thomas called those rulings (as well as a ruling that affirms the right of married couples to obtain contraceptives) “demonstrably erroneous decisions.” RFMA is intended as kind of an insurance policy in case the Supreme Court decides to overturn *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized same-sex unions.

According to data recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau, there were about 1.2 million same-sex couple households in 2021. About 710,000 of them — nearly 60 percent — were married. It’s an idea that enjoys broad acceptance: A Gallup poll conducted in May found that 71 percent of Americans say they support legal same-sex marriage, a 40-point climb since the question was first asked in 1996.

The dramatic change in public opinion likely played a part in the bill’s bipartisan support and swift passage. Republican donors

played a role, too, according to Anne Flaherty of ABC News: Having seen a backlash in the midterms because of the *Dobbs* decision, they worried that similar moves by the Supreme Court could further alienate independent and moderate voters ahead of the 2024 election.

But ultimately, Flaherty said, the deal came together because of “unexpected alliances” between gay rights and faith-based groups, following a hard-fought, yearslong negotiation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which considers same-sex relationships against God’s commandments, emerged as an early architect of the bill.

The church worked closely with Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (a bisexual who grew up Mormon) to craft an amendment saying that faith-based organizations would not be required to provide goods or services for the “solemnization or celebration” of a same-sex marriage.

There is also language guaranteeing that these organizations won’t lose their tax-exempt status or risk federal grant money be-

cause of their objections to same-sex unions.

In exchange, Flaherty wrote, the Mormon church publicly endorsed the legislation, saying it “protects religious freedom” — and paving the way for a dozen Senate Republicans to support it.

Just following the Senate’s passage of the Respect for Marriage Act, I shared a meal with a couple whom I met through an adviser to our board at the National Conflict Resolution Center. They have been together for more than 40 years and married in 2016, following the *Obergefell* decision.

Seeing their joy only confirmed what I’ve learned in my career as a mediator for more than 30 years: Hard-fought negotiations, when they happen in good faith, can lead to wonderful outcomes. To that — and in the spirit of the holiday season — I say “hallelujah.”

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

PIER • Port of San Diego is investing about \$4 million for all facility improvements

FROM B1 ifornia and I’ve seen the ‘no jumping,’ ‘no running’ ... all along the pier like we had for many, many years,” he said. “They might as well put a placard that said, ‘no fun allowed on the pier.’ So, we’re changing that now ... to give people a sense of place when they arrive at the pier.”

In the coming week, Port officials said crews will install distance markers every 250 feet and surf destination arrows on the railing at the end of the pier that point to legendary surf spots like Mavericks and the Banzai Pipeline.

One of the bigger additions will be an artistic shade canopy and seating area at mid-pier across from the public restrooms. The structure will have a three-dimensional shark figure. The existing wood railing in the area and toward the end of the pier will be replaced with stainless steel cable railing for better visibility of the ocean. Construction is scheduled for next month, Port officials said.

There are also plans to



EDUARDO CONTRERAS U-T
Visitors make their way onto and off the Imperial Beach pier on a cool but sunny Friday morning. More improvements to the pier should be finished by spring.

build outposts and more seating areas under another three-dimensional shade structure over the sandy beach area. Its design will give visitors a “beneath the

waves” perspective surfers have before emerging from the water.

Toward the end of the pier and near the sole restaurant Tin Fish, the

Port wants to add a plaque or marker with historical facts and photographs of the pier.

Built in 1963, the pier is a few blocks south of Ever-

green Avenue and extends about 1,500 feet west toward the western horizon. The pier is owned by the Port, and the city provides services such as public safety.

It’s a popular destination for beachgoers and surfers as it covers the entire surf zone and attracts anglers who say they catch the best fish in the area, from yellowtail to thresher sharks.

Anglers last week said they were happy to learn the Port is invested in making improvements to the pier, but hope any future pier changes will not reduce areas designated for fishing. The city has prohibited fishing behind the restaurant since COVID-19 when restaurants had to rely on takeout and outdoor dining. Many residents said the move has made the area more enjoyable and cleaner, but fishermen felt they were being unfairly singled out.

“I’ve been to a lot of piers in Southern California, and this one is definitely one of the nicest ones, so it’s great to hear there’s improve-

ments coming. But with that kind of money, I hope they can give us (anglers) the pier again. This is a public pier,” said resident and fisherman James Salazar.

The Port is investing about \$4 million for all improvements, with the outpost and second canopy project costing about \$2.29 million. The agency plans to use \$2.5 million in capital improvement plan funding and federal stimulus dollars. The remaining \$1.4 million has yet to be allocated, said Malcolm.

“I think that’s what this community deserves,” Malcolm said of the investments.

Paloma Aguirre, a council member and mayor-elect, said renovations will enhance the multi-use pier because “it’s a fishing pier, it’s a surfing pier, it’s a walking pier.”

All pier projects are scheduled to be completed by spring, said Port spokesperson Brianna Mundy Page.

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HOSPITAL

FROM B1 that will accommodate gatherings of over 200 people. The current Education Center has a capacity of 45.

“This project started with the compelling need for a new medical facility, which only could be built in the place where the current Education Center stands. Everything just evolved from there,” said Judi Sanzo, president/CEO of the Rancho Coastal Humane Society.

The “Little Yellow House,” which served as the nonprofit’s headquarters for more than half a century, is being renovated and enlarged to serve as the new Welcome Center.

The animal shelter was founded in 1960 by animal lover Maria Lloyd, who

bought the property, which at the time stood off a dirt road, that is now Interstate 5. At that time, the shelter was home to dogs, cats, birds, goats, sheep and a donkey named Milton Burro.

“When you drove by, you could often see the donkey’s face looking out of the stall. She was an Encinitas landmark,” said John Van Zante, longtime spokesperson for the Rancho Coastal Humane Society.

The animal shelter’s neighbors were coyotes, foxes, raccoons and other wildlife that lived on the open land that surrounded the animal shelter. Since then houses, businesses, churches and a hospital have gone up in the neighborhood.

The animal shelter has grown to serve thousands of

community members and their pets through various programs ranging from adoptions to pet education, veterinarian services and a pet food bank to animal camps for kids and an Animal Safehouse program that the nonprofit created when it was a novelty.

“A community grew up around us. Now it’s our time to catch up so we can continue to serve,” said Van Zante. “Very exciting. A little scary. But long overdue.”

The campus project includes expanding the RCHS Community Pet Food Bank to 770 square feet. The Welcome Center will be expanded by 300 square feet and a 455-square-foot K-9 training office will be built.

The nonprofit expects to reach 1,500 adoptions in the first year of operation with the new facilities, and it ex-



RANCHO COASTAL HUMANE SOCIETY
Rendering of Charlotte’s Medical Center to be built at the Rancho Coastal Humane Society.

pects to provide medical care to 2,500 animals each year in the new Medical Center. That number includes offering discounted veterinary services to companion animals who are in the care of their rescue partners.

Adoptions have typically been between 900 to 1,000 per year.

The project is estimated to cost roughly \$14 million and take about a year and a half to two years to finish. The nonprofit raised more

than 60 percent of the projected cost and is starting the public phase of the capital campaign for the community to support the campus expansion.

The animal shelter continues to raise money through donations and proceeds from fundraisers and its thrift shop at 120 Aberdeen Drive in Cardiff.

The Rancho Coastal Humane Society is slated to remain open throughout construction. The nonprofit is continuing its Kids Community Service after-school program and is planning to hold its Spring and Summer Animal Camps.

The groundbreaking is scheduled for 11 a.m. at 389 Requeza St. in Encinitas. For more information, visit rchanimalsociety.org.

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LUCKY DUCK FOUNDATION
Attendees celebrate after winning an auction item at the Swing & Soirée.

SCENE

The Lucky Duck Foundation

Swing & Soirée raises millions to reduce homelessness

BY U-T STAFF

The Lucky Duck Foundation held its 14th annual Swing & Soirée recently to help alleviate homelessness. The event raised more than \$2.6 million.

The benefit was held at The Santaluz Club. Neil Everett of ESPN SportsCenter and PGA Tour Pro Peter Jacobsen were the hosts. The Gall Hale Team at RBC Wealth Management presented the event.

The “Swing” included lunch, open bar and amenities, and a golf “shamble” tournament. The “Soirée” included dinner, entertainment, live auction and paddle raise. All attendees were encouraged to “raise their paddle” to donate in support of the Lucky Duck Foundation’s programs to fight homelessness, including shelters, job training and employment opportunities.

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.

SHELTERS

FROM B1 for money to create new shelter programs. Fletcher said in September that the response was disappointing because only three cities applied, leaving about \$5 million on the table. Oceanside received \$3.3 million to help fund a 50-bed shelter, Vista received \$65,000 for a safe parking lot and San Diego received \$1 million for a safe parking lot.

Of the five projects funded in the latest round, four were for shelters that already exist or are planned. Fletcher said the effort still was a success because the funds would pay for significant increases that are needed throughout the county.

“From North County to South County, you can see progress being made,” he said.

Catholic Charities CEO Appaswamy “Vino” Pajanor agreed that the funding will make a significant impact on the Carlsbad shelter, which will expand its services and add up to 50 beds at La Posada de Guadalupe, which now has 100.

“We have been looking at expanding La Posada for the past couple of years,” he said. “When the county opportunity came about, the city said, ‘You’ve been talking about this for a long time. This is a great idea.’ ”

The shelter began as a cluster of buildings to provide housing for farmworkers in 1992, and in 2013 Catholic Charities opened La Posada de Guadalupe as permanent buildings with 50 beds for farmworkers and 50 for adult homeless men.

Pajanor said the money will fund a feasibility study on a planned second story that will provide beds for women and mothers with young children. The money will help with fundraising efforts for the project, which also will convert the emergency shelter into a navigation center with resources to help homeless people become self-sufficient and find housing, he said.

In Chula Vista, the city plans to open a shelter composed of 66 pallet homes, also known as sleeping cabins, next month.

City Homeless Solutions Manager Angelica Davis said the \$1.8 million from the county will pay for cost overruns and for an anticipated second phase to the project.

“We’d love to maybe double it or maybe not even do pallet housing, but permanent supportive housing,” she said. “The sky’s the limit.”

In the city of San Diego, the county’s \$393,000 grant will fund improvements to a 34-room senior shelter in a Pacific Highway hotel the city began leasing in September. Mayor Todd Gloria’s Director of Communi-

cations Dave Rolland said improvements will include new floors in all rooms, new laundry rooms, washers and dryers, and paint for all units and offices.

An additional \$350,000 will fund a planned 42-room non-congregate shelter that will serve up to 200 families a year. The location of the project has not been announced, but it is expected early next year, he said.

In Escondido, a \$736,000 grant will fund Interfaith Community Services’ plan to convert the Hawthorne Veteran and Family Resource Center into a family shelter. Interfaith CEO Greg Anglea said the money will add more beds to the 32-bed facility and fund capital improvements.

“Unfortunately, we’re seeing a significant increase in families who have lost their housing,” he said.

The county funds will pay to reconfigure the small rooms to accommodate larger families, expand the kitchen, add a playground and an outdoor recreation area.

Anglea said because government funding for shelters is decreasing, Interfaith projects to lose \$800,000 out of its \$26 million budget.

“We need this kind of support in order to do this type of work,” he said about the county grant.

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