

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# NCRC CELEBRATES LOCAL AND NATIONAL PEACEMAKERS

We've made it a habit to talk about the things that are wrong with our country: the discord and divisiveness, the violence and vitriol. We wonder and worry about what the future holds, especially for our kids and grandkids.

But last weekend, my attention turned to a few individuals and organizations that are working toward a better, more humane future for all Americans. They were honorees at the annual Peacemaker Awards dinner, hosted by the National Conflict Resolution Center.

I previously introduced readers to our Local Peacemaker honoree, the California Innocence Project. The organization, which was founded in 1999, reviews more than 2,000 claims of innocence from California inmates every year.

Justin Brooks is the director of the California Innocence Project. His award was presented by Kimberly Long, who shared her own story of wrongful incarceration with the audience. In 2003, Long found her boyfriend bludgeoned to death in their home.

She had been with a friend who misstated the time he had dropped off Long — but who died before he could be thoroughly questioned.

The case against Long proceeded. The first jury hung; the second jury found her guilty of second-degree murder. In 2005, Long was sentenced to 15 years to life in prison. She wrote to the California Innocence Project and in 2010, they picked up the case, believing the evidence against her was paper thin.

Finally, on April 22, 2021, the Riverside district attorney dismissed the charges against her, nearly two decades after being wrongfully imprisoned. Long told the audience she screamed with joy when she heard the news — and with full exoneration, she has begun taking back her life.

Phyllis and Daniel Epstein were recipients of our Philanthropy Award. For decades, the Epsteins have worked in service of institutions and initiatives of importance to the San Diego community. Their philanthropy is sometimes visible, as with the Epstein Family Amphitheater,

now open on the UC San Diego campus. But often, the Epsteins work behind the scenes to solve intractable challenges, like homelessness and Alzheimer's disease.

Our National Peacemaker honor was given to the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), based in Washington, DC. BPC supports leaders with differing points of view in their efforts to enact important policy initiatives. It was founded in 2007 by four highly respected senators: Democrats Tom Daschle and George Mitchell and Republicans Howard Baker and Bob Dole.

Kelly Veney Darnell is BPC's interim CEO. She spoke about some of the issues the center is tackling, like Social Security solvency and paid family leave. Just last year, the organization played a significant role in the development of 80 pieces of legislation — an achievement only possible through collaboration.

Darnell said that BPC is also working to bring civility back into our politics. It created the American Congressional Exchange program, which matches Demo-

cratic and Republican House members who visit their districts and meet with constituents together. Darnell noted that these pairings often lead to friendships and co-sponsored legislation.

On college campuses, BPC aims to build civil discourse, partnering with leaders to implement strategies that foster a welcoming environment for robust intellectual exchange.

Anyone who knows the work of NCRC will understand our decision to honor the Bipartisan Policy Center. Philosophically, our organizations are well aligned. As Darnell told the audience, "No matter what you believe, bipartisanship gets things done. Working across the political aisle is not a sign of weakness or an absence of intellectual purity. It is just the opposite. It puts the American people first."

She continued, "Over my three years at BPC, I have learned the power of incremental change. We all want everything to be done overnight. Yet our great movements have all happened over time. We know that if we want lasting and sustainable

solutions, we must seek out and embrace change through bipartisan collaboration."

That idea — bringing together different points of view to solve problems — is at the core of what NCRC has been doing for 40 years now. As it turns out, it's an idea that appeals to so many people — and why the Peacemaker Awards dinner drew more than 600 attendees from across sectors. Their political views, or age, or ethnicity didn't matter: There was a belief in our shared humanity that cut across differences.

By the end of the night, everyone realized that beyond the contributions of our honorees, we are all empowered to be peacemakers — to ease the discord and divisiveness, violence and vitriol in society today.

In that respect alone, it was a successful night.

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, go to ncrconline.com

## COMPANY Grant funding needed

FROM B1 small robot, is equipped with three sensors — a visual camera, a thermal camera and a chemical sensor. The visual camera leverages artificial intelligence to detect fires, DeSalvo said. The thermal camera uses infrared technology to detect heat and highlight hot spots. The chemical detector works similarly to a home smoke detector.

Once a fire is detected the Sentinel can send data and an image of the fire to a cell phone via a text message relayed by ODIN-Fire software. ODIN, which stands for Open Data Integration Framework for Wildland Fire Management, was developed by the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View in the Bay Area.

But before the next stage of testing begins, Delphire will need to be selected as a grant winner from Caltech's Rocket Fund to support the deployment, DeSalvo said. Rocket Fund is a granting pool that supports clean tech and sustainability startups. Grants of \$25,000 to \$100,000 help companies like Delphire grow their business with support from well-established companies like San Diego Gas & Electric, Southern California Gas Co., Southern California Edison Co. and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, he said.

"The idea is to get these devices out before fire season kicks off," DeSalvo said. "If there's interest in growing the program there's additional funding sources at local, state or federal levels that we can look toward to help expand it."

Delphire has already ac-



VICTOR LARA

The HeloPod by PumpPod USA is a high-capacity dip tank being automated by Delphire Inc. The HeloPod is shown here providing a water refill to a FireHawk.

quired \$1.35 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Energy for product development, according to DeSalvo. The company was one of four small businesses awarded funding in 2022 by the department's Office of Electricity.

Delphire launched in 2020 with plans to do wild-fire monitoring. But DeSalvo said it switched to fire detection because it makes the most impact on stopping a fire in the early stages. Delphire is also collaborating with PumpPod USA on an automated HeloPod water refilling system for firefighting aircraft. The HeloPod would allow aircraft to be refilled with water from a high-capacity dip tank rather than having to fly to a lake to get a refill.

DeSalvo said he began working with Peter Mehlitz at NASA Ames Research Center because they tackle a difficult data integration process. They can organize and make visible data from multiple sources in real time. Delphire can be a contributing data source to ensure that firefighting stakeholders are better informed.

The purpose is to give residents of a community advance warning of fire

bursts so they can evacuate as soon as possible, he said.

His inspiration for working on the project is his own experience with a fire that erupted in his apartment building while he was studying biology at California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.

"During grad school, my apartment building caught fire due to an electrical fire, so I had the displeasure of living in a hotel for three to four months around 2012," he said. "For me, it's a bit of a personal passion project to make sure people are not dislocated due to fire as much as possible. It's not a good experience."

Wildfires can be financially devastating when they destroy homes, he said. This disproportionately affects disadvantaged and rural communities with limited resources. A small or rural community may not have the same capacity to rebuild, he said.

Luca Carmignani, a fire adviser at the university's South Coast Research and Extension Center, observed the test while conducting separate research on the effects of irrigation on the flammability of plants.

"It's definitely an inter-

esting project that would allow for the detection of fires in an urban environment very quickly," said Carmignani, adding he was not directly involved in testing the Sentinel and is not endorsing it. "Rather than relying on a call from someone reporting smoke, they would have a camera detect it immediately. The project itself sounds very interesting and useful for firefighters."

Planning Group members asked about where the devices could be placed in Ramona.

DeSalvo said that high-fire risk areas are appropriate, such as the wildland-urban interface zones, which are transition areas between wilderness and developed communities. The device can be mounted on cell towers, water towers or even patio roofs with the goal of preventing fire impacts on communities and utilities.

After discussion, Planning Group members voted unanimously to send Delphire a letter of support that can be used when the company applies for pending and future funding.

Gallant writes for the U-T Community Press.

## SMOLENS

to talk about her legislation and the consequences of abortion bans, along with other matters, including mental health and the need for more child care.

Jacobs, 34, has especially attracted attention by discussing her personal experiences to give context to broader debates over issues. That has left some of her older colleagues — particularly men — uneasy.

Like when she spoke about having her eggs frozen to keep the option open to have children later in life. Or when she referred to her menstrual cycle when discussing her bill on the House floor.

"Mr. Speaker," she said last June. "As a young woman, reproductive health care is my health care, and like tens of millions of Americans, I've used apps to track my period."

She added, "It is unconscionable that our personal reproductive information could be sold to the highest bidder and weaponized against us."

She views these as broader "kitchen table issues" with "economic implications."

"I've had to have some uncomfortable conversations with people," she said in our interview. "Those shouldn't be stigmatized issues. . . This is a normal part of conversation for so many people across the country."

Perhaps not so much for some members of Congress.

"As a young woman, I really didn't see myself reflected in Congress," she said, explaining part of her motivation to run for Congress.

She was first elected in 2020 and currently represents the 51st Congressional District, which was recently redrawn to cover much of central and part of eastern San Diego County.

Jacobs also has been open about struggling with anxiety, particularly after rioters stormed the Capitol just days after she was sworn in in 2021. She had already been seeing a therapist, which she said helped give her the tools to deal with the attack's aftermath.

"I remember actually, after January 6, talking to some of my colleagues here who were a bit older and encouraging them to seek therapy and to get help because it was just something that . . . wasn't as accustomed for them," she told CNN in March.

Jacobs and other members of Congress have said they feared for their lives on that day, and she told the U-T that fireworks and sometimes large crowds still trigger her anxiety.

Jacobs said that assault on the Capitol and the effort

by Republicans to overturn Joe Biden's election as president have made it difficult for her to work with some GOP members, particularly the ones she views as more extreme.

"But I also believe I was sent here to get things done," she said in the interview.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, she said she helped to win the vote of Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., for a specific amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act. The amendment gave greater access to assisted reproductive services, including in vitro fertilization, to all service members whose injuries or illnesses on active duty affected their ability to have children — including LGBTQ+ and unmarried service members.

Jacobs noted at another time she got into a verbal tussle with Gaetz over comments he made about transgender people.

"It cuts both ways," she said.

In February, Jacobs teamed up with Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., to urge Biden to rescind a nearly \$1 billion arms sale to Nigeria following reports by Reuters on an illegal abortion program and the targeted killing of children carried out by the Nigerian military. Jacobs and Smith are both members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Jacobs is receiving a lot of attention for her views on abortion and reproductive rights, but also has been focused on international affairs for years. She has served in the State Department and worked on foreign policy issues in Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign.

Jacobs is not quite six months into her second term, but already has had more unique experiences than some people who served in Congress for many years.

She thought she might be killed in the U.S. Capitol, she voted to impeach a president and she was arrested outside the Supreme Court during an abortion-rights protest.

Jacobs also may be the only member of Congress who has both written an article for Foreign Policy magazine and been featured in Teen Vogue.

### Tweet of the Week

Goes to Chris Daly (@profdaly), university professor and former journalist at The Washington Post.

"Just realized one of the best things about retiring: I'll never have to deal with any new software (unless I really want to). That is all."

michael.smolens @sduniontribune.com

## WILDFIRE

FROM B1 it's very rare that we don't find ourselves in a critical situation at some point in the fall," D'Agostino said. "It's just the reality of our ecosystem. . . The weather in October is really what's going to dictate how bad our fire season is."

Meteorologist Adam Roser of the National Weather Service's San Diego office said vegetation growth allows for more opportunity for the plants to burn when they dry out — especially when accompanied by Southern California's notorious Santa Ana winds that blow strong, dry air from the east.

"Just like in a campfire, oxygen, wind and all that can fuel bigger wildfire spread," Roser said. "So if it's really dry and really hot, that can definitely contribute to the fires and if it's windy, that fire is going to travel at a much faster pace."

The seasonal forecast for the San Diego region by the Climate Prediction Center indicates slightly warmer conditions this summer and, encouragingly, "a pretty good chance that we'll be near average, precipitation-wise," Roser said.

Fire officials say one of the most important things homeowners should do is create a "defensible space" around their houses. A buffer of about 100 feet between the structure and the



ROB NIKOLEWSKI U-T

Brian D'Agostino of SDG&E points to a monitor that shows one of 17 mountaintop cameras that help reduce wildfire risk in its service territory.

grass, trees and shrubs can protect homes from catching fire from flames, embers and even radiant heat.

"They should be clearing out all of that brush," fire chief Stowell said. "A lot of people let stuff grow right up against their homes and if that catches, it gets into the eaves and can certainly be an ignition source for their home."

SDG&E is hosting Wild-fire Safety Fairs in the upcoming weeks for residents in areas prone to wildfire risk. Firefighters and SDG&E officials will discuss how to prepare for emergencies heading into peak fire season. Emergency kits will be also handed out. Admission is free.

This year's first fair was Saturday at Mountain Empire High School in Pine Valley.

The fairs will also discuss Public Safety Power Shutoffs — the practice in which investor-owned utilities such as SDG&E turn off circuits in a defined area when conditions are dry and windy to reduce the risk of a power line falling and igniting a wildfire. The shutoffs disproportionately hit customers in rural and backcountry areas where blustery conditions are common.

SDG&E instituted five Public Safety Power Shutoffs in 2018 and five in 2020. But the numbers dropped to one in 2021 and none in 2022.

"We are doing a lot more fire hardening and I've seen concrete examples where areas that have been fire-hardened are not experiencing Public Safety Power Shutoff like they would have" in the past, D'Agostino said.

Back in 2007, the Witch Creek, Guejito and Rice wildfires destroyed more than 1,300 homes, killed two people, injured 40 firefighters and forced more than 10,000 to seek shelter at Qualcomm Stadium. One of the fires was caused by a tree limb that fell onto an SDG&E line during high winds.

Since then, SDG&E has spent about \$3 billion in ratepayer dollars on programs to fight and prevent wildfires.

In areas at most risk for wildfires, the utility has placed about 45 percent of its infrastructure underground. About 80 miles will be placed below grade this year and about 1,500 miles will go underground through 2031.

D'Agostino heads a team of six meteorologists at SDG&E that monitor 131 cameras that stream views of high-fire-risk areas. Some 222 weather stations measure wind speed, temperatures and humidity every 10 minutes.

"Just like if you lived in southern Florida, you would never go a year without a hurricane plan," D'Agostino said. "We have to have that same mentality here in Southern California. We can never go a year without a fire plan and being ready. Because the reality of where we live is that any year we can be prone to a catastrophic wildfire."

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Rep. Sara Jacobs is advocating for safety around reproductive rights and data privacy.