



# The San Diego Union-Tribune

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Mike Brown of New Zealand begins to pack for his journey of more than 2,600 miles on April 20 at Camp Lockett Event & Equestrian Facility in Campo. Brown started the Pacific Crest Trail hike on his 52nd birthday. ANA RAMIREZ / U-T PHOTOS

## THE GREAT JOURNEY NORTH

Hikers from all over the world are hoping to complete the Pacific Crest Trail, a 2,650-mile route connecting the northern and southern borders of the U.S.

By Maura Fox

A majestic oak tree offers cool shade to Mike Brown as he rests in his gray, two-person tent on a late Friday afternoon in April.

Brown, a 51-year-old from New Zealand, is about 15 hours away from starting the Pacific Crest Trail, the 2,650-mile route that travels from eastern San Diego County — where the U.S. meets the border with Mexico — to the Canadian border. He's camping for the night at the Camp Lockett Event & Equestrian Facility, or CLEEF for short, in Campo, where, for the past four years, an official campground has operated for Pacific Crest Trail hikers before they start the trek.

Around him, more than a dozen other hikers have set up their own tents. With birds chirping and the sun on the verge of making its daily western descent, the setting is peaceful, yet tinged with anticipation.

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The Pacific Crest Trail takes most hikers about five months to complete, starting at the U.S.-Mexico border and heading north to the U.S.-Canada line. The trail passes through nearly 133 miles of San Diego County.

## Progress reported in Gaza truce talks

But Israel downplays chances of ending the war with Hamas intact

By Sam Mednick & Jack Jeffery

TEL AVIV, Israel — A Hamas delegation was in Cairo on Saturday as Egyptian state media reported “noticeable progress” in cease-fire talks for Gaza. But Israel hasn't sent a delegation and a senior Israeli official downplayed prospects for a full end to the war while emphasizing the commitment to invading Rafah.

Pressure has mounted to reach a deal halting the nearly 7-month-long war. A top U.N. official says there is now a “full-blown famine” in northern Gaza, while the United States has repeatedly warned close ally Israel about its planned offensive into Rafah, the southernmost city on the border with Egypt, where more than 1 million Palestinians are sheltering.

Egyptian and U.S. mediators have reported signs of compromise in recent days, but chances for a cease-fire deal remain entangled with the key question of whether Israel will accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying the militant group Hamas.

Egypt's state-owned Al-Qahera News TV channel said that a consensus had been reached over many disputed points but did not elaborate. Hamas has called for a complete end to the war and withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza.

A senior Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing negotiations, played down the prospects for a full end to the war. The official

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## Conditions in city workers' asbestos suit echo Ash St.

Staffers contend they were exposed to health threats during high-rise renovation

By Jeff McDonald

A downtown high-rise riddled with asbestos. Hundreds of San Diego city employees toiling away during a monthslong renovation. A lawsuit accusing city officials of knowingly exposing their staff to cancer-causing fibers.

101 Ash St.? Hardly. This litigation dates back to 2019, months before city employees were moved into the former Sempra Energy headquarters on nearby Ash Street and then quickly evacuated due to repeated asbestos violations.

While lawsuits accusing the city of wrongly exposing workers to asbestos inside the still-vacant 101 Ash St. tower are still pending in San Diego Superior Court, an unrelated case raising similar allegations is just weeks away from trial.

According to the complaint filed by dozens of city workers, San Diego officials let hundreds of employees remain at work for months while construction crews reno-

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## Zoning loophole triggers neighbors' feud

Backyard dwellings being built right up against property lines

By David Garrick

A San Diego zoning loophole is pitting neighbors against one another in Crown Point and making every coastal community in the city, from Ocean Beach to La Jolla, vulnerable to similar battles.

All across the city's coastal zone, large backyard apartments can be built directly next to a neighboring property with no setback or buffer zone — even though the City Council outlawed doing so more than two years ago.

Because the new rule can't take effect in the city's coastal neighborhoods without a



An accessory dwelling unit is being built up against Marc Umemoto's property in Crown Point on Thursday in San Diego. His neighbor says the build is perfectly legal. ANA RAMIREZ / U-T

second approval from the California Coastal Commission, it has so far only taken effect in inland neighborhoods east of Interstate 5.

So backyard apartments — which many call granny flats, and which city officials call accessory dwelling units — are still being built directly on prop-

erty lines in coastal neighborhoods, including at least three in Crown Point.

The loophole is creating so much angst at one location in Crown Point that a homeowner is refusing to allow his neighbor's contractor to enter his yard to finish the exterior of an ADU being built directly on the property line.

And the property owner, Marc Umemoto, is installing cameras in case the contractor sneaks in and completes the work at night or some other time.

Umemoto says the new ADU will wall off his yard like a prison, keeping natural light and air out and changing the entire character of his home just a few blocks from Mission Bay.

“The city is pitting neighbor against neighbor,” he said last

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STEVEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

# Public service vies for worst job in the country

Some jobs are notoriously hard to fill in industries ranging from health care to manufacturing to public safety. Financial news and opinion company 24/7 Wall St. constructed an occupation index to identify the worst jobs in America, considering three equally weighted measures — projected employment growth, wages, and nonfatal injury and illness rates.

Their analysis yielded an occupation index score between zero and 100. The lower the score, the worse the job. A total of 495 occupations were considered.

Welding machine operators fared worst (14.7), followed by nursing assistants (26.0).

I would add public servants to the list. Those jobs that have become harder to fill and increasingly dangerous.

Consider Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who was the target of a foiled kidnapping plot in 2020. A total of 14 men were accused in the scheme, nine of whom were convicted or pleaded guilty. Prosecutors said the plot was motivated by rumors that the 2020 presidential election would be stolen and opposition to COVID-19 restrictions imposed

by Whitmer's administration.

The threats against Whitmer have continued, often in the form of social media posts.

Last year, Rachel Locke, director of the Violence, Inequality and Power Lab at Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at University of San Diego, and Carl Luna, director of their Institute for Civil Civic Engagement, published a study on the growing problem of harassment against public officials here in San Diego.

The pair surveyed more than 300 elected officeholders, conducted interviews with some of them and analyzed hundreds of thousands of social media posts. Their report contained some sobering data.

Seventy-five percent of survey respondents reported receiving threats and harassment — half of them on a monthly basis. Sixty-six percent said the incidence has increased over their time in office. It has caused half to consider leaving public office altogether, a sentiment that's twice as strong among women as men (61 percent, compared with 32 percent).

This aggression has become an unfortunate part of our societal

fabric. It's created a culture of fear — not just among elected officials, but everyday people, too.

Consider the jurors: In the criminal hush money trial involving former President Donald Trump, a seated juror was excused when she expressed fear her identity had been exposed. CNN's Kristen Holmes reported that the juror told the judge in the case she felt intimidated and uncertain she could serve fairly.

Consider the librarians: Book bans across the country have put librarians in the crosshairs, fearing personal harm and reputational risk. They have been taunted on social media, confronted by angry parents, and even reported to law enforcement officials.

Libraries are no longer the safe space I remember: Earlier this year, the Antioch (Calif.) Community Library was closed after repeated incidents of criminal behavior.

Consider the poll workers: According to Brookings Institution, as many as 1 million regular Americans serve as temporary election workers in a presidential election. Because they interact most directly with voters, poll

workers are considered essential to our election infrastructure.

Brookings observed that filling these roles may become more difficult, saying: "Heightened scrutiny and even harassment by citizens and activists who doubted the legitimacy of the (2020) election put poll workers in an uncomfortable, defensive position." In a 2022 Election Administration and Voting Survey, more than half of jurisdictions reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to recruit poll workers.

Luis Lozada believes that businesses can and should help, encouraging employees to participate in elections as voters and poll workers — even inspiring them to run for public office. Lozada is CEO of Democracy Works, which co-founded (with the Creative Artists Agency Foundation) a nonpartisan coalition of businesses called Civic Alliance. Its 1,300 member organizations share a commitment to safe, accessible and trusted elections.

Ashley Virtue, director of external relations at the National Conflict Resolution Center, recently interviewed Lozada for our "Navigating the Uncharted"

webinar series. Lozada made a clear distinction between politics (which most companies try to avoid) and civic engagement, which he called a "deposit" to ensure a healthy economy and durable democracy.

You can find their conversation on our website, along with other resources — like NCRC's "10 Tips for Navigating the Political Divide" — to forge your own path forward, in your workplace or at the dinner table. Visit <https://ncrconline.com/mediation-conflict-resolution/training-services/navigating-a-polarized-workplace>.

There are reasons why certain jobs are hard to fill. But public service — be it running for office or assisting voters on Election Day — advances the ideals of a public good and a robust society. Let's commit to making these the best, most sought-after jobs in America.

*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](https://ncrconline.com).*

## SMOLENS

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be a unifying issue for a Republican Party that has been beset by dysfunction within its House majority, and a distraction from the legal challenges facing Trump, the expected GOP nominee.

For his part, Trump has called the protests a threat to the nation and, with no small irony, praised New York City police for clearing out and arresting protesters who had taken over a building at Columbia University. Such a laudatory view was lacking from the former commander-in-chief regarding the police who were overrun and injured by his followers in their riotous assault on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

While contending the pro-Gaza protesters are subversive and acting illegally, Trump and Republicans in Congress continue to downplay the violent effort to overturn President Joe Biden's legitimate victory in 2020.

GOP campaign committees recently began running ads against vulnerable Democrats, criticizing them for both the campus protests and student debt relief action by Biden.

The ads are specifically targeting Democratic Sens. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, Sherrod Brown of Ohio, Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, Jon Tester of Montana and Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., according to Axios. Slotkin on Wednesday joined

an overwhelming House majority voting in favor of a bill aimed at antisemitism on college campuses. The measure, which as of Friday had not been taken up in the Senate, would update the definition of antisemitism used in federal anti-discrimination laws.

Among the five-member San Diego House delegation, Democrats Mike Levin of San Juan Capistrano, Scott Peters and Juan Vargas of San Diego, and Republican Darrell Issa of Bonsall voted for H.R. 6090. Democrat Sara Jacobs voted against it.

"As a Jewish woman, I've experienced antisemitism all my life," Jacobs said in a statement. "... Conflating free speech and hate crimes will not make Jewish students any safer... (the bill) would distract from real antisemitism and our efforts to address it."

Republican leaders for the most part have a straightforward approach of condemning the pro-Palestinian protests and seeking to punish the schools that don't stop them.

Democrats are fragmented. Biden's support for Israel during the fighting in Gaza has drawn criticism from progressives who want the administration to press the U.S. ally harder to end hostilities that have resulted in tens of thousands of civilian deaths and injuries in Gaza.

On Thursday, the president addressed the protests saying "order must prevail" on college campuses and that he is responsible for protecting the "rule of law"



Pro-Palestinian UCSD students protest the war in Gaza on Wednesday at an encampment on campus. The GOP sees political capital in the nationwide unrest. **HAYNE PALMOUR IV / FOR THE U-T**

as much as freedom of expression — but that his policies regarding the conflict have not changed.

The Oct. 7 massacre of about 1,200 mostly Israeli citizens by Hamas that lit the fuse for what's happening in Gaza and on the campuses receives scant attention these days.

The spreading protests have drawn comparisons to campus unrest more than a half-century ago during protests against the Vietnam War, which divided Democrats and involved a violent clash between police and demonstrators at the party's 1968 national convention in Chicago.

That November, Republican Richard Nixon, the former vice president, was elected president over Hubert Humphrey, the sitting Democratic vice president.

Despite some similarities, caution is warranted in applying lessons of protests from one era to another on vastly different subjects.

Nevertheless, there have been recent polls that suggest Biden needs to shore up support among young voters, and the current protests will make doing that even more challenging. Palestinian supporters on campuses and elsewhere are angry with

Biden's support for Israel, and some Jewish students say they no longer feel safe at school.

A lot can happen between now and November. The war in Gaza could end or a cease-fire could take hold. Trump's trials regarding hush money to cover up a sexual encounter, holding classified documents and election malfeasance could darken the cloud of criminality hanging over him. Republicans in Congress could continue their fighting. The economy could go up or down.

Palestinian supporters could come to conclude that Gaza might be worse off with Trump as president, or the campus protests could dissipate with the end of the spring semester.

But maybe the situation becomes worse, with ongoing civilian casualties in Gaza. Or the Middle East could erupt into a full-scale war.

Protests would certainly continue and not just on college campuses. If demonstrators descend on the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August, the comparison with what happened there in 1968 and the election may be all too apt.

### WHAT THEY SAID

National Park Service (@NatParkService) on X.

"There's nothing wrong with following your heart, but it never hurts to check the map too."

*michael.smolens@sduniontribune.com*

## RANCH

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"The trustees have decided that, since the patriarch of the family is no longer with us, that it's probably time to sell," said trustee and former San Marcos City Manager Rick Gittings. "He was very involved in the ranch and the ministries, and the rest of the generational family is not that interested."

But, Gittings added, de Jong made it clear that the ranch should not turn into another housing subdivision.

"It's not been offered to any development firms or anything along those lines," Gittings said. "Arie was very specifically focused on either governmental agencies or private nonprofits that are in the business of transforming lives."

But transforming lives long has been the mission of Green Oak Ranch.

Green Oak Ministries has operated a Christian

drug and alcohol recovery program for men on the property since the late 1990s, and that work, which will be consolidated on a 28-acre parcel that is not for sale, will continue.

Exactly how it will continue remains an open question.

The bulk of the grounds at the ranch — acres not covered by protected sagebrush, anyway — are covered with cabins, meeting halls and even a small RV park, allowing the property to serve as a flexible venue for everything from weddings and big birthday celebrations to summer camps and weekend getaways for Girl Scout troops.

Fees collected from these functions, said Hannah Gailey, the ministry's executive director, fund 85 percent of the recovery program's operations, which symbiotically operates a work therapy program, getting enrolled men to perform a wide range of functions, from grounds

maintenance to food preparation, at a low cost. "Thousands of kids from all over Southern California and beyond come to Green Oak Ranch each summer, and that is how we keep program costs low," Gailey said.

The county's preliminary plan discusses gradually adding buildings for drug, alcohol and mental health treatment in areas now occupied by the services used by camps and gatherings, though specific locations of future development are not clearly delineated.

Gailey said her understanding is that camp-focused uses will be displaced, and that, she said, is a difficult idea to accept given that the recovery program is self-sufficient through its give-and-take relationship with the property's substantial recreational assets.

"We believe in what the county is doing; we just don't think that social services should harm other organizations in their quest to help

people," Gailey said.

And, she added, the recreation that occurs at Green Oak Ranch is not just for middle- and upper-class kids having fun away from their parents. One of the biggest returning participants is a summer camp for foster children. And that avenue of rehabilitation actually has been the property's longest-running use.

"That model really goes back to 1950, when the Union Rescue Mission of Los Angeles owned the property, and they would do camps for inner-city boys living in Los Angeles," Gailey said.

During Tuesday's presentation, Desmond said that the ministry program and its operations may have some sort of ongoing relationship with the county if the purchase goes through.

"I think there's an opportunity for us to continue with that effort if we so choose," Desmond said.

Is there some sort of hybrid plan that can keep

summer camps and other recreational uses active on the property while also allowing the county to build what's needed for mental health care and drug and alcohol treatment?

A spokesperson for Desmond's office said by email that "the details of the

usage are still flexible, this is just preliminary."

It is not likely anything will happen immediately. Health care-related construction generally takes years to plan and construct.

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## MAYOR

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In 2015, McCann opened the McCann Legal Defense Fund committee to defend himself from the anti-SLAPP lawsuit, according to the committee filing.

As permitted under state and local law, McCann used the fund to accept monetary contributions to cover the legal fees.

But McCann and his wife, Mylissa McCann, who served as the committee's treasurer, first loaned the legal defense fund more than \$90,200 from their property investments and then began accepting contributions for the committee to

repay themselves from 2016 to 2021. The committee had accepted donations ranging from \$1,000 to \$12,000 from various developers and companies, including Republic Services, Chula Vista's lone waste hauler.

In March 2021, the committee was terminated after the loan was fully repaid.

Complainants argued that McCann's legal defense fund violated election laws because he was not a defendant, but rather a plaintiff who had lost an anti-SLAPP motion.

According to state campaign regulations, legal defense funds may be used only to pay attorney fees and other related legal costs

"related to the defense of the candidate or officer," and not to file a lawsuit.

Also, concerns were raised that the use of funds by the legal defense fund created a conflict of interest for McCann, a sitting member of the City Council.

The allegations were referred to Coronado lawyer Roger Geddes, who was acting as special counsel in the matter.

Geddes quickly determined that McCann may have violated state election law and referred the matter to the FPPC.

Former City Attorney Glen Googins, who also reviewed the matter, determined his office had "no jurisdiction" over the issue,

according to a July 2021 letter he sent to the FPPC.

At the time attorneys reviewed the issue and the FPPC took on the complaints, the issue already had been outside of the five-year statute of limitations for the FPPC's enforcement and outside of the city's four-year statute of limitations.

Gilbertson did not provide a thorough explanation of the investigation nor how the FPPC arrived at finding insufficient evidence. A spokesperson for the Commission said, "(T)he letter speaks for itself. Insufficient evidence is fairly clear."

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## Life Tributes

Everlasting memories of loved ones



### Carole Mall

November 4, 1938 - February 26, 2024  
San Diego, CA

Carole Suzanne Mall, 85, of San Diego, California, passed away on February 26, 2024, in San Diego, California. She was born on November 4, 1938. Carole was a beloved school teacher at Alpine Elementary, known for her friendly, outgoing, and warm personality.

Outside of her career, Carole pursued her passions as an avid photographer, outdoorswoman, and nature lover. She found joy in capturing the beauty of the world around her through her lens.

Carole is survived by her children Theresa Russell, Denise Woodcock, Mitchell Paup, Charles Ehrlich, and Sharon Ehrlich, her brother Larry Mall, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her parents Walter Baylor Mall and Lois Mall, her brother Richard Mall, and her sister Lois Mall.

Carole will be deeply missed by all who knew her. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to the Sierra Club in memory of Carole Mall.

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