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Nurse Rosie Crowder helps treat Nicole Baca for severe heart palpitations and fainting spells Tuesday at Scripps Mercy Hospital San Diego. Baca contracted COVID in June 2020 from a patient in her previous nursing job. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T PHOTOS**

COVID: FIVE YEARS LATER

El Cajon nurse can't shake COVID's unrelenting grip

17M Americans suffer symptoms for months, years

By Paul Sisson
UNION-TRIBUNE

Five years after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, registered nurse Nicole Baca still visits an infusion center every week to have a mixture of water and other nutrients injected into her bloodstream. "The treatments help increase my blood volume, and that's what helps keep me from passing out," the El Cajon resident explained. Such visits would have been



Baca, 40, is among those who have developed life-limiting symptoms after an encounter with pandemic coronavirus.

Q&A WITH LONG COVID RESEARCHER

Biologist Julia Moore Vogel has coped with long COVID since mid-2020. She answers questions about the condition. **A8**

unthinkable in 2019, when she went to the gym three times per week and regularly traveled, backpacking from one destination to the next.

Today, she's grateful if she can take a walk at Ocean Beach with her husband, an act that requires meticulous pre-planning to avoid the racing pulse that can make her dangerously dizzy.

"Once, I had an episode where I almost passed out in a neighbor's driveway," she said. "I bent down to pick something up that was on the ground, and everything started to turn white."

Baca, 40, is among those

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San Diego grew last year, only because of migrants

Immigration from other countries offset exit of locals from the county

By Lori Weisberg & Roxana Popescu
UNION-TRIBUNE

San Diego managed to eke out a modest population gain in 2024, even as the county saw a continued exodus of tens of thousands of residents leaving for other parts of the country. Credit a surge in immigration that grew by 22% in just one year.

While the county's natural growth from more babies being born yielded a net 12,600 new residents, it wasn't nearly enough to make up for the almost 24,000 more people who left the county than moved in between July 2023 and July 2024, newly released census data shows.

Making up for that loss — and a little more — was the county's net gain of 24,226 immigrants, who came into the country both legally and illegally.

The county's population now stands at 3,298,799, which represents an increase of 0.4% over the previous year and is just shy of the 3.3 million people who called San Diego home just as the pandemic was starting five years ago.

The latest population estimates underscore a trend that is being repeated up and down the state, most notably in larger coastal counties, and across the nation where growth in foreign-born arrivals was the primary driver of population growth in more than 2,000 counties, census officials reported.

In California, nearly half of the 58 counties would have seen their populations

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ARTS & CULTURE

Spring arts preview

A new crop of artists is writing the next chapter of arts and culture in San Diego. Meet the makers and creatives making their mark this spring and beyond. **E1**



Wartime law invoked to spur expulsions

Federal judge temporarily blocks Trump's use of Alien Enemies Act to deport Venezuelans

By Tim Balk
THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Trump administration on Saturday published an executive order to deport Venezuelan gang members under a rarely used wartime law that could allow removals with little due process.

A federal judge quickly ordered the administration to cease use of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport Venezuelans.

In a hastily scheduled hearing Saturday evening, James E. Boasberg, a federal judge in Washington, said that he did not

believe the law offered grounds for the president's action, and he ordered any flights that had departed with Venezuelan immigrants under the order to return to the United States "however that's accomplished — whether turning around the plane or not."

"This is something you need to make sure is complied with immediately," he directed the government.

Boasberg said he needed to issue his order immediately because the government already was flying migrants it claimed were newly deportable under President Donald

Trump's proclamation to be incarcerated in El Salvador and Honduras. El Salvador agreed this past week to take up to 300 migrants that the Trump administration designated as gang members.

"I do not believe I can wait any longer and am required to act," Boasberg said during a Saturday evening hearing in a lawsuit brought by the ACLU and Democracy Forward. "A brief delay in their removal does not cause the government any harm," he added, noting they remain in government custody.

Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the American Civil Liber-

ties Union, said in an interview after the hearing that he believed two flights were "in the air" Saturday evening. During the hearing, Boasberg said he was ordering the government to turn flights around given "information, un rebutted by the government, that flights are actively departing."

A lawyer representing the government, Drew Ensign, told the judge that he did not have many details to share and that describing "operational details" would raise "national security issues."

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S.D. students, faculty fear for campus free speech

Trump administration threats against universities, effort to deport student activist called 'a code red'

By Kristen Taketa
UNION-TRIBUNE

San Diego college faculty and students say they fear the Trump administration's plans to investigate UC San Diego and other universities, and its attempts elsewhere to deport student activists and assert control over academic programs, mark the start of a broader erosion of civil and human rights.

Last weekend, federal agents detained and tried to deport a Columbia University student for his role organizing pro-Palestinian protests. On Monday, the U.S.

Department of Education said it was investigating 60 universities for alleged antisemitism amid such protests. And on Thursday, the Trump administration threatened to withhold all future funding from Columbia unless it cedes control of its Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies department to the government, on top of other demands, and intensified an ongoing effort to deport student protesters.

To many academics, students and free-speech advocates in San Diego and beyond, more than individual free speech is at stake. They say such moves by President



Protesters rally against federal funding cuts at UC San Diego on March 7. Some say free speech is under fire. **HAYNE PALMOUR IV / FOR THE U-T**

Donald Trump and his administration represent an attack on everyone's academic freedom and First Amendment rights.

They particularly worry such arrests and other crackdowns may soon come to UC San Diego, which is among the universities the Trump administration says it is investigating over allegations of antisemitism. And some of them worry about how the university will respond.

"This is what fascist regimes do, and it's kind of a code red for our universities," said Adam Aron, a psychology professor at UC San Diego who is Jewish. "This is maybe the beginning if we don't stand up and oppose this."

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STEVEN P. DINKINS A PATH FORWARD

Celebrating peacemaking during country's divided times

If you think Americans are divided as never before, join the club. A Gallup survey last year found that 80% of us believe our country is split on the most important values. The values were not defined for respondents but left to their own interpretation.

What may be more astonishing is that 18% of us believe the country is united.

In companies and organizations around the country, divisiveness has become debilitating. At the National Conflict Resolution Center, we field calls daily from leaders feeling frustrated and unsure how to move forward. We launched two new curricula — Communicate to De-escalate and Dialogue in Divisive Times — to give them skills to navigate in our divided times.

It's worrisome, even if you're not a worrier by nature.

But April 5, my worry will turn into optimism for the future. That night — my favorite of the year — NCRC will host the annual Peacemaker Awards dinner, where we recognize individuals and organizations working with purpose toward a better future for all Americans.

Our headliner — who will receive the National Peacemaker Award — is Bryan Stevenson, a public-interest lawyer who is founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Ala. EJI is committed to protecting human rights for vulnerable people in American society by providing them with legal representation.

EJI is also committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in our country. This aligns with NCRC's work to end the school-to-prison pipeline, a system that pushes youth out of school and into the criminal justice system.

Bryan has won numerous awards for his work, includ-

ing a prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius grant." His bestselling book, "Just Mercy," was adapted in 2019 as a major motion picture starring Michael B. Jordan and Jaime Foxx.

If you read "Just Mercy" or saw the movie, you may recall the story of Walter McMillian, a Black man from Alabama who was sentenced to death for the 1986 murder of a White woman. Bryan took on the case, seeing evidence of police misconduct and perjury. He persevered despite his own encounters with racial bias. In 1993, McMillian was exonerated and released from death row.

I look forward to hearing more stories from Bryan at the Peacemaker dinner.

Our Local Peacemaker honoree is the Monarch School Project. Since 1987, Monarch has provided a sense of belonging and community for thousands of unhoused youth and their families. The K-12 school is operated in partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education.

Monarch uses a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach that empowers youth — not only to overcome the challenges they face, but to define their own path to achievement. It provides comprehensive academic, social and emotional support to ensure postsecondary success and self-sufficiency. The school's graduation rate is 90 percent or higher.

Monarch's success has been noted by educators and nonprofit leaders who are grappling with homelessness in their own communities. Under the direction of CEO Afira DeVries, the school is launching its Nexus Center of Training and Innovation. It will offer a multi-day program to immerse participants in the Monarch model. Afira will accept the Local Peace-

maker Award on behalf of the Monarch School Project.

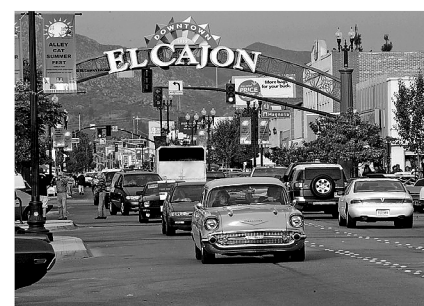
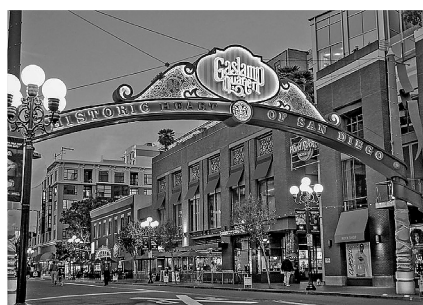
San Diego entrepreneur and technology visionary, Frederic Luddy, will receive our Philanthropy Award. I met him last week and must say: If there is a peacemaker mold, he fits it. Fred is someone who sees an opportunity to make things better and seizes it. He is generous and humble, attributing his success in life to a series of "serendipitous screw-ups" and the people who picked him up along the way.

At Indiana University, Fred worked for the dean of economics to earn his way through school. He moved to California to pursue his passion for computers. Years later, Fred founded Service-Now, a cloud-based computing company that had more than \$10 billion in revenue last year.

Fred's philanthropy is far-reaching. His gift to Indiana University catalyzed construction of the Luddy School of Informatics, Computing, and Engineering. He supports Kimera Orphanage in Uganda, which teaches kids how to play tennis — a sport that Fred loves for instilling values like honesty and decorum. Here in San Diego, he supports numerous organizations dedicated to health and well-being, including Moores Cancer Center and Rady Children's Hospital.

Our goal for the dinner is to inspire the audience and convey hopefulness. Beyond the contributions of our honorees, we are all empowered to be peacemakers — to ease the discord and divisiveness in society today.

That's something worth celebrating. NCRC's Peacemaker Awards dinner honoring Bryan Stevenson, the Monarch School Project and Fred Luddy will be held on Saturday, April 5, 2025, at 5 p.m. For information, or to register, visit NCRConline.com.



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