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As they support the families of the deceased and return to the Islamic Center of San Diego for prayers, local Muslims are on a long road to recovery



Imam Taha Hassane of the Islamic Center of San Diego leads community members in prayer during Eid al-Adha at the San Diego Convention Center. "Hate speech has been the very bullet murdering innocent people," he said. **LUKE JOHNSON / U-T**

'We must find a greater love'

COMMUNITY HOPES TO HEAL IN WAKE OF DEADLY MOSQUE ATTACK

By Roxana Popescu, Karen Kucher & Lori Weisberg | UNION-TRIBUNE

As they support the families of the deceased and return to the Islamic Center of San Diego for prayers, local Muslims are on a long road to recovery

Since the attack, she has had trouble sleeping. Her mind kept playing back the shocking things she saw. But she has also found ways to start to heal. Volunteering. Helping others. Crying. Talking. Hoping.

to prayers. They are reviewing security protocols and reaching out to elected officials. District Attorney Summer Stephan and Rep. Sara Jacobs recently toured the center.

See **MOSQUE** on Page A8

Millions in vacation rental tax still owed to county

About 1,200 properties are registered, but additional 700 not paying fair share

By Kristen Taketa UNION-TRIBUNE

Hundreds of owners of vacation rental properties across unincorporated areas of San Diego County are failing to pay the taxes they owe. That's costing the county around \$10 million every year in unrealized revenue, officials estimate — money that if collected would nearly triple the size of a long-controversial county grant program.

See **RENTALS** on Page A12

North County contest to help decide control of Congress

Well-known Republican faces three contrasting Democrats in the redrawn 48th District

By Lucas Robinson UNION-TRIBUNE

Across inland North County, three very different Democrats are making their final pitch to voters in the final days of a primary that will shape one of the year's most important battles for control of Congress. They're among a crowded field looking to advance to the general election alongside one Republican who appears to have a November berth locked down — leaving voters to consider not just their records and policies but also their overall electability in what could be a tough race.

See **CONGRESS** on Page A10

Will court settle county agencies' dispute?

Probation Department, oversight board at impasse over law on releasing personnel records

By Kelly Davis & Jeff McDonald UNION-TRIBUNE

A protracted tug-of-war between the San Diego County Probation Department and its civilian oversight board is stalling the public's business and posing potential new costs, with neither side able to agree on how to interpret a new state law.



Tamika Nelson, right, chief probation officer for San Diego County, speaks to the Citizens' Law Enforcement Review Board in 2025. The two bodies are at loggerheads over a new state law on releasing personnel records. **ARIANA DREHSLER / U-T FILE**

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A PATH FORWARD STEVEN P. DINKIN

After Islamic Center tragedy, still thinking about path forward

May 18 was a tragic day for our city and country. Three men were killed at the Islamic Center of San Diego: Amin Abdullah, 51, a security guard; Nadir Awad, 57, a neighbor whose wife teaches at the center's school; and Mansour Kazih, 78, a staff member.

The horrific crime was perpetrated by two local teenagers, who livestreamed the attack and then took their own lives. The pair left behind a 75-page makeshift manifesto that was filled with vitriol aimed at Muslims — but also, women, immigrants, Jews, Latinos, the LGBTQ+ community, and other groups. They wanted to spark a civil war.

If not for the bravery of Abdullah, Awad and Kazih, the outcome might have been even worse. As many as 140 schoolchildren were in the building at the time of the attack. They held each other's hands as they left the building in search of safety.

For most of us, it is impossible to comprehend such a senseless act — or the hatred that fueled it.

Nor can we begin to imagine the sadness and loss that families, friends and community members will feel for years to come.

For staff at the National Conflict Resolution Center, the tragedy hit close to home. One employee lives near enough to the Islamic Center to have heard shots being fired. Another was inside the building for morning prayers. Imam Taha Hassane, the center's director, served on the NCRC board of directors for several years.

Once, I went to the center to meet with Imam Taha. Turning into the parking lot, I was greeted by a large, vested man with a (plainly visible) gun. It was Amin Abdullah. I told him my name and the reason for my visit. He gave me a broad smile that belied his otherwise imposing presence.

In the aftermath of May 18, I find myself replaying that interaction, but also, reflecting on two things.

First, I think about the work NCRC is doing in school districts across San Diego County. It's predicated on a belief, backed by

research, that belonging is a critical success factor for students, academically and socially. Even a connection to one caring adult can make a difference in their lives.

Clearly, the teenage perpetrators considered themselves outsiders with a grudge and a mission: to make America White again. They formed an imagined community of Nazis and mass shooters, following incidents of bullying and rejection.

I can't say with certainty that Abdullah, Awad and Kazih would be alive today had the two young men learned and felt what it means to truly belong. But I can say that an administrator at a large school district wanted to meet with me just days after the shooting, to learn more about NCRC's programming. She canceled all her other meetings.

The second thing I am thinking about is this column. It will be my last, for a while.

I've had the privilege of writing for The San Diego Union-Tribune for nearly 10 years. In my first

column, "Mediate This," I gave a mediator's take on resolving everyday disputes.

The tragic events of 2019 inspired a new direction. Following a mosque burning in Escondido and murder of a congregant at the Chabad of Poway synagogue, NCRC brought together interfaith leaders and community members searching for hope, strength and courage to move forward, together.

The convening spawned a series of community conversations, one of which was hosted by the Islamic Center of San Diego. We called these conversations — which drew hundreds of San Diegans — "A Path Forward." This column was born.

Since then, I have never wondered what to write about. There's been no shortage of challenging issues — some fleeting, others enduring (and seemingly unsolvable). More than sharing my perspective on them, my goal has been to offer a path forward — even at the darkest times, when

nothing makes sense.

I'm saddened by the symmetry that bookends this column: hate crimes perpetrated at places of worship, taking the lives of our neighbors.

There has never been a more important moment for us to focus on peacemaking, community building and bridging divides. We stand in support with our friends at the Islamic Center and the broader San Diego community as we once again search for hope, strength and courage to move forward, together.

Steven P. Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based organization that is working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrcnline.com, and while "A Path Forward" is paused, you can stay up to date on NCRC's work by signing up for their newsletter at ncrcnline.com/newsletter.

LAGOON

From Page 1

Jones said Thursday, and, "I want to see a living, breathing lagoon again."

Big steps have been taken toward the lagoon's restoration, but more work is needed before construction can start and restore the wetlands that were designated California's first ecological reserve in 1968.

Even if all the money were suddenly obtained, construction remains several years away, Smith said at Thursday's meeting of the Buena Vista Lagoon Joint Powers Committee.

The joint powers committee consists of the mayor, one city council member, and one community member each from Carlsbad and Oceanside. It reviews matters related to the lagoon and advises the cities, the county and other agencies associated with the lagoon, which is owned by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Finishing the designs and obtaining the permits needed from various local, state and federal agencies for dredging, grading and replanting the lagoon will take three or four more years, Smith said. Construction then is expected to take about two-and-a-half years.

State and regional agencies worked with residents and property owners for more than 20 years to develop a basic plan for the project.

A key result of their discussions was an agreement to remove the weir, a low dam near the mouth of the lagoon that keeps the water a few feet above sea



Plans are progressing to remove the weir and restore the wetlands at Buena Vista Lagoon in Carlsbad. LUKE JOHNSON / U-T

level and prevents the tides from entering. The barrier, first added in the 1940s and replaced several times, keeps the water at a near-constant level, unlike other lagoons in the region, and makes it coastal San Diego County's only freshwater lagoon.

SANDAG's board of directors approved a final environmental impact report for the restoration in 2020, a significant milestone for the project.

That cleared the way for the planning, design and long list of agency approvals now in progress. The agency received \$4 million in 2021 and '22 from the state Wild-

life Conservation board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to advance the plan.

Anyone looking for lagoon enhancements a little sooner can watch for a smaller, separate restoration project coming from the Buena Vista Audubon Society.

The Audubon Society purchased 3.5 acres of degraded wetlands in 2016 at the edge of the lagoon, across South Coast Highway from the society's nature center in Oceanside. The land had been partially filled with imported soil for a proposed hotel that was never built, and was covered with trash, invasive

plants and eroded, random footpaths.

"It's in very poor shape and it's getting worse," said society Executive Director Natalie Shapiro.

The group's plans for its wetlands project have progressed steadily and should be ready for construction in 2028, Shapiro said.

An initial design has been completed, and the society is fine-tuning some details at the request of the state Fish and Wildlife Department.

"An important part of our project is to engage resource agencies throughout the process to ensure we aren't missing anything in our

design details that is important to wildlife and coastal wetlands functioning," Shapiro said.

Fish and Wildlife officials looked at how long-term changes to the lagoon would affect the Audubon Society's land. Although SANDAG's restoration is still years away, when finished it will significantly affect the preserve.

Removing the weir will lower the entire lagoon's water level by several feet and restore the ebb and flow of ocean tides to the basin. That will create more mud flats, but also leave more of the Audubon preserve as dry land. Then, over the

decades and centuries ahead, sea-level rise is expected bring back the higher water levels, eventually above areas that are dry today.

"In review of our early design concepts, the agencies urged us to build more space in the design for future wetlands, to allow 'wetlands migration' as sea level rise occurs," Shapiro said.

"This helps ensure there are wetlands in the future when current wetlands are lost as oceans rise due to climate change," Shapiro said. "Our team agreed to the redesign suggestion, noting it would make the project more resilient to climate change and provide for better wetlands functioning and habitat for wildlife."

The restored wetlands will serve as an ecological buffer between the lagoon and nearby urban development. The site also will help preserve endangered native species such as a plant called the southwestern spiny rush and a bird known as the light-footed Ridgway's rail.

"It will be a place for birding and slow recreation," Shapiro said, adding that a chicane gate, which forces people to slow down as they pass through, will be added to discourage cyclists from speeding through.

Planning for the society's restoration has been partially funded by a \$600,000 grant from the state Coastal Conservancy and a \$380,000 donation from the Dorrance Family Foundation.

A budget is being developed for construction, Shapiro said. The amount needed has not been determined, and additional grants will be sought.

POLICE

From Page 1

to cover up Ferraro's abuse.

According to the lawsuit, they did so even though they knew that video footage, 911 calls and witness interviews showed there was no basis for any criminal charges against Ding and that the district attorney would not prosecute him if he were arrested.

"The news that an off-duty SDPD officer had screamed a racial epithet and body-slammed a federal officer, knocking him out, would be a public relations nightmare," the lawsuit alleges. "The assembled officers, the PR office and the supervisor believed that the only way they could keep Mr. Ding quiet was to charge him with a felony."

According to the complaint, police did not

immediately book Ding into San Diego County jail.

Instead, he was taken to a police substation, where he says he was denied food, water and medical care for more than six hours and forced to write an apology to Ferraro.

"SDPD took Mr. Ding into custody at 3 p.m., but held him so long he did not get pain medication at the emergency room until 9:30 p.m.," the lawsuit says. "The injured Mr. Ding remained in tight handcuffs behind his back the entire time he was in their custody."

Once doctors were finished treating Ding, police took him to jail. It was close to midnight when he was formally booked into custody — a move that alerted DHS, which monitors jail bookings — and the federal agent bailed out a short time later.

"Even with the fabricated evidence, the district attorney rejected the charges. But the damage was already done," the lawsuit says. "Mr. Ding suffered significant injuries to his head and shoulder and harm to his reputation."

"He suffered the humiliation of being forced to write a letter of apology to the man who assaulted him."

In addition to naming four new defendants and adding an allegation that police wrongly denied Ding medical care, the lawsuit argues the San Diego Police Department has a history of officer misconduct and command staff covering up those breaches.

It cites a 2010 case in which officers proceeded with a traffic stop even after learning they had misread a license plate. The officers ended up using pepper

spray and a stun gun on two people before taking them into custody on suspicion of resisting arrest.

A judge later determined that the two officers had unlawfully detained the occupants of the car. The Internal Affairs office took no action against the officers, the lawsuit said, and both were later promoted.

Five years later, another officer shot and killed a man from 17 feet away less than five seconds after exiting his patrol car. No criminal charges were filed.

The officer initially admitted the man was unarmed, but his lawyer stopped all questioning. Five days later, police allowed the officer and his lawyer to review the video in private for 20 minutes before restarting the interview and claiming for the first time that the dead man

had been armed.

One year later, the same officer accidentally fired his service weapon into a baby's crib during a probation search but avoided any discipline, the Ding lawsuit said.

"This has been the ongoing pattern and practice within the department in which officers who engage in misconduct are given several days to meet with their lawyers, view all footage of the incident and come up with a story to justify charging the victim with resisting arrest or being a threat," the complaint says.

It also alleges that department leaders routinely undermine the Commission on Police Practices, a civilian oversight board approved by voters in 2020 after years of complaints about excessive use of force and other misconduct.

"In response, the city of

San Diego dragged its feet, taking years to set up the commission," the lawsuit says. "Despite the clear mandate of the public, to date CPP still has no power to conduct independent investigations because of the delays involving the police union."

The federal complaint now includes 11 separate claims and eight defendants, not including defendants whose names are unknown.

The city, which did not prevail in its earlier motion to dismiss the case, has yet to respond to the updated court filing.

Lawsuits alleging San Diego police misconduct and negligence cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. Late last year, the City Council approved a \$30 million settlement with a family of a teen who was fatally shot by police while fleeing gunfire.

UPSKILLS

From Page 1

memorizing the specific cleaning requirements for the many types of clamps, scissors and other devices used to perform everything from tumor biopsies to heart transplants.

Miles Mahon said he worked as a room service attendant, delivering meals to patients at UCSD Hillcrest Medical Center before starting the program. He made it clear that he and his fellow newly minted sterile techs understand the gravity of their new jobs, even though they will be performed behind the scenes, often managing autoclaves, the industrial

furnaces that use heat and pressure to kill any contaminants present after procedures are performed.

"Every instrument we handle, every autoclave cycle that we monitor and every tray that we wrap is a direct line to protecting a human life," Mahon said. "We carry an immense responsibility, and this program has prepared us to meet it with absolute precision and accountability."

On average, upskilled workers are said to reap a starting wage increase of \$3 per hour.

Upskilling is a growing trend, especially in "allied" health care, a field projected to grow 93% by 2038, according to the U.S. Health Resources and Services

Administration. Ranging from physical and occupational therapists to medical technologists, these workers handle all of the support services needed to carry out the wide range of health care activities that doctors order and oversee.

Teddy Martinez, vice president of strategic and policy initiatives for San Diego Workforce Partnership, noted that a similar upskilling effort is underway in behavioral health care, with San Diego County's \$75 million "ELEVATE" program announced last year aimed at training 3,000 workers over five years. The plan both helps train entry-level workers to be substance-use counselors, case managers and commu-

nity health workers and also offers zero-interest forgivable loans to workers already in those jobs. This funding helps those who already have experience pursue master's degree-level training that allows them to become clinical social workers, licensed professional clinical counselors and marriage and family therapists.

"A lot of times, we know that the people are already here, they just need the on-ramps, and so, where we can, we should be building these kinds of programs that can accomplish quick upskilling or on-the-job training," Martinez said.

The UCSD sterile processing technician program, he said, is a good example of what's needed in the larger

workforce, an ability to directly match quick-turnaround training to specific needs. And, he added, while the need for more nurses tends to get most of the attention, the need for a wide range of technicians is also quite large.

"We need to keep options that mesh with demand based on employers' particular situations, and we want to scale them both for folks who need pathways to get to work quickly and for employers that need roles filled," Martinez said.

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