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Civic leaders speak out about San Diego's homeless mess

Bill Walton, Dan Shea and Drew Moser call attention to the homeless problem and seek credible solutions.
See more on **PAGE 8**



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COVER STORY:**NBA Hall of Famer Bill Walton is Mad as Hell**

The long-time sports hero and San Diego resident is carrying on angry exchanges with San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria over the city's growing homeless problem, and partnering with businessman Dan Shea and Lucky Duck Foundation Executive Director Drew Moser to call attention to the problem and seek credible solutions. It's the policymakers responsibility to fix it, says Shea. Page 8.



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San Diego County's 2022 Men of Accomplishment

Here are some of the men in San Diego accomplishing notable achievements in their profession and the community.



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The San Diego Team**Pioneering California's Red Flag Law.**

"Red Flag" laws have been slow to take off in many places, but San Diego's program shows how advocates hope gun violence restraining orders can be used to prevent tragedy

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Education Matters: Parent Group Researched by Teachers Union

Recently uncovered emails reveal that the California Teachers Association engaged in research, some have called it spying, on the local bipartisan Parent Association group.

Gomez Trial Attorneys
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ON BEING NAMED ONE OF SD METRO'S

Men of Accomplishment

About Our Founder:

John Gomez graduated from Yale University Law School and went on to clerk for a federal judge, work for the internationally-recognized firm of Latham Watkins, and serve as an Assistant U.S. Attorney. He decided he wanted to dedicate his career to representing the people in court, and since then, he has had a storied career as a trial attorney.



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Rendering of the Natilus N3.8T aircraft. (Courtesy of Natilus)

Autonomous aircraft manufacturer Natilus selects Pratt & Whitney to supply engines for cargo aircraft

Natilus, a San Diego-based company producing the world's first purposefully designed and manufactured autonomous aircraft for air freight transport, has selected Pratt & Whitney Canada to supply the engines for the first of the Natilus family fleet: the N3.8T.

The company is initially producing the N3.8T as a prototype and as long-term short-haul air cargo feeder. The first N3.8T aircraft is under production and is scheduled to fly in 2024.

"Natilus has designed and developed a blended-wing autonomous aircraft that can offer services at a fraction of the cost of today's transport, while reducing negative impacts on our environment. We wanted to select an engine supplier that shares our vision of

innovation, safety and efficiency," said Aleksey Matyushev, Natilus co-founder and CEO. Pratt & Whitney Canada is recognized and respected for their worldwide support of customers, while the PT6A engine is the benchmark in reliability and has an unmatched history of performance with low TBO (Time between Overhauls)."

"The selection of the PT6A-67D to power Natilus' innovative cargo aircraft further asserts the dependability, versatility and flexibility of the PT6 turboprop engine family, the world's most popular engine in its class," said Nicholas Kanellias, vice president of general aviation for Pratt & Whitney Canada.

Researchers link bladder cancer to tobacco smoking

Researchers at the University of California San Diego have for the first time discovered a pattern of DNA mutations that links bladder cancer to tobacco smoking. The discovery was made possible thanks to a powerful new machine learning tool that the team developed to find patterns of mutations caused by carcinogens and other DNA-altering processes.

The work, published Sept. 23 in *Cell Genomics*, could help researchers identify what environmental factors, such as exposure to tobacco smoke and UV radiation, cause cancer in certain patients.

Each of these environmental exposures alters DNA in a unique way,

generating a specific pattern of mutations, called a mutational signature. If a signature is found in the DNA of a patient's cancer cells, the cancer can be traced back to the exposure that created that signature. Knowing which mutational signatures are present could also lead to more customized treatments for a patient's specific cancer.

In this study, researchers found a mutational signature in the DNA of bladder cancer that is linked to tobacco smoking. The finding is significant because a mutational signature from tobacco smoking has been detected in lung cancer, but not yet in bladder cancer.

New arts-focused apartments unveiled in Vista

Paseo Artist Village to house 60 apartments and retail

Affordable housing developer Community HousingWorks is opening Paseo Artist Village, a 60-unit residential/retail development that will serve as a catalyst for a new arts and culture district in Vista. A grand opening ceremony was held Thursday. Paseo Artist Village was created to ensure that a variety of long-term families and individuals are able to afford to stay in Vista.

Paseo Artist Village is a pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented mixed use affordable development with 60 apartments of 1, 2 and 3 bedrooms. The apartments are available to local Vista residents, artists, and veterans earning 30 percent-59 percent of the area median income.

As part of the Paseo Artist Village development, approximately 2,000 square

feet of retail space is located on the corner of South Santa Fe Avenue and Guajome Street.

Reflecting the City of Vista's vision for an Arts and Culture District and consistent with the city's strong artist tradition, Paseo Artist Village is a gateway to this art neighborhood and a catalyst for vibrant new development along the South Santa Fe corridor.

The property includes approximately 2,100 square feet of on-site artist workspace and art gallery showcased via windows facing South Santa Fe Avenue. Two art pieces were commissioned for Paseo: a glass and neon piece by San Diego native Brooke Bartlebort and an aluminum sculpture by Matt Devine, who has multiple pieces on display in San Diego County.



Paseo Artist Village

John Gomez Trial Attorneys opens plaintiffs law firm in Tampa, Fla

"Go West, young man, go West."

Having already conquered the West, John Gomez is taking his highly successful Gomez Trial Attorneys firm to the East Coast.

He has announced the opening of Gomez Zwibel, a national plaintiffs trial firm, in Tampa, Fla., which will be led by managing partner Elizabeth Zwibel. Gomez Zwibel will be a division of Gomez Trial Attorneys.

"This venture is more about who than where," Gomez said. "Liz is one of the very best trial attorneys in the country and her values align perfectly with ours."

Zwibel said, "I've always admired John as a trial lawyer and the more I learned about his law firm, the more I wanted to be part of that and create something special."

The move also establishes a bi-coastal and national presence for Gomez Trial Attorneys, one of the most decorated and fastest growing plaintiffs trial firms in the country.

Zwibel has been a practicing trial attorney for three decades and has been a partner at Swope Rodante P in Tampa. Two of her jury verdicts have been in the top 100 jury verdicts in the United States, receiving verdicts of \$53 million and \$28.5 million, respectively.

She earned her bachelor of science degree from Boston University and her juris doctor from the George Mason School of Law.



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Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS LAW, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego-School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class.

He was recently presented with the following awards:

- | | |
|--|--|
| · San Diego Metro Magazine-Best Attorney 2016 | · Martindale Hubbell's-AC Preeminent Rated 2014, 2015 & 2016 |
| · San Diego Magazine-Top Attorney 2016 | · San Diego Daily Transcript-Top Attorney 2014 & 2015 |
| · San Diego Business Journal-Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016 | · San Diego Metro Magazine-40 Under 40 - 2015 |



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There's a new No. 1 crop in San Diego County

San Diego County has a new No. 1 crop for the first time in 12 years. Bedding Plants, Color & Perennials, Cacti & Succulents increased 13.1 percent in value to \$488.4 million in the 2021 growing season — the highest value ever for a top crop in the county.

The previous No. 1 crop, Ornamental Trees and Shrubs, dropped by 11.5 percent to \$382.4 million, according to the county's new crop report.

The report noted, however, that total crop and commodity values fell for the first time from the previous year since 2018, by nearly 3.2 percent from \$1.8 billion. And it reported a historic decrease in value for one of San Diego's most famous crops, avocados, which fell below \$100 million in value for the first time in Crop Reports dating back 25 years to 1996.

Avocados shrank by 46 percent, from roughly \$153 million to \$82.8 million, driven by hot, dry weather according to the report. In addition to dipping below \$100 million for the first time, avocados also dropped out of top four of the Top 10 crops for the first time since 2003.

The commodity that earned the biggest increase in value in the new report was Livestock and Poultry products, which jumped by 36 percent.



Cal State San Marcos to build new affordable housing and dining facility on campus

Cal State San Marcos plans to build a new affordable housing and dining facility on campus as the university does its part to alleviate the burden of the region's housing crisis on students and lower their expenses to help them achieve their educational goals.

The University Village Student Success (UVSS) Housing and Dining Project will construct a 205,200-square-foot traditional student housing community with space for 600 residents along with a 19,481-square-foot dining hall with affordable meal plans and seating for 320. The ground-breaking for the facility is tentatively scheduled for February 2024.

The project is designed to reduce overall costs for students and

thereby increase access to an education at CSUSM. It also will help support the smart-growth and environmental goals of the university and San Marcos by reducing student commutes from across the county and beyond.

The project will be funded in part by \$91 million that CSUSM is receiving from Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Legislature in their \$300 billion budget for 2022-23. Of the \$497 million being allocated for student housing projects on nine California State University campuses, CSUSM is being given the second-highest amount.

Port of San Diego set to welcome 460,000 cruise ship passengers this season

The Port of San Diego's new cruise season has begun, with 140 cruises scheduled, up 45 percent from last year, with all sailings at or near capacity and serving 460,000 passengers. It is poised to be the Port's busiest season since 2010.

"The Port of San Diego's cruise business is definitely experiencing a rebound and we expect continued growth," said Port of San Diego Chairman Dan Malcolm. "We're pleased to be welcoming our cruise customers back to San Diego and to share how wonderful our port is to our cruise passengers. This season's business will be a great boost to our regional economy."

The new cruise season began with the arrival of Silversea Cruises' Star Breeze, cruising to Papeete, Tahiti on a 13-day voyage.

Disney Cruise Line is more than doubling its sailings from San Diego this season, moving from 16-24 per season to 51. Princess Cruises is also adding new business to San Diego with 13 sailings and will be homeporting here for the first time ever.

The full schedule features long-term Port of San Diego partners Holland America Line and Disney Cruise Line, as well as Princess Cruises, Silversea Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, and Norwegian Cruise Line. Voyages from MSC Cruises, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, Scenic Luxury Cruises, Oceania Cruises, and American Queen Voyages are also on the calendar.

Itineraries featured include voyages to the Mexican Riviera, Hawaii, the Panama Canal, and the California Coast. For true cruise aficionados, there is a 20-day Mexican Riviera and Central America cruise; a 25-day Pacific crossing to Japan; and a 35-day voyage to Hawaii, Tahiti, and the Marquesas.

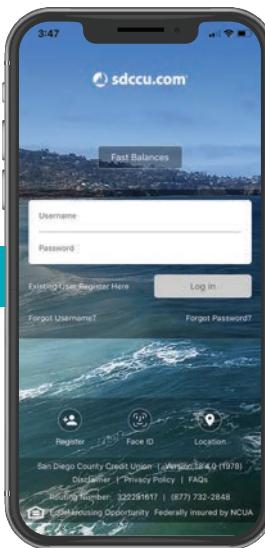


Cruise ships in port in San Diego. (Courtesy of Port of San Diego)

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A SD METRO SPECIAL REPORT:

NBA Hall of Famer and San Diegan Bill Walton is Not Standing by Silent any Longer



The Homeless Problem

As the economic hardships of the pandemic and global health crisis continue to challenge our region, with a disproportionate impact on our most vulnerable people, San Diego continues to see an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. This cannot be ignored. The status quo is no longer acceptable. It's time for sweeping changes.

It is time for the San Diego region, starting with its largest city, San Diego, to embrace wholeheartedly a whatever-it-takes attitude to tackle the many issues that impact homelessness and to bring homelessness, and all the peripheral problems it brings to our region, to an end. The streets cannot be a waiting room for the unsheltered to have a roof – any roof – over their heads.

At a widely-broadcast press conference held at the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice NBA Hall of Famer and native San Diegan who

grew up in La Mesa – went to Helix High School - Bill Walton said of San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria: "You speak of the rights of the homeless, what about our rights? We follow the rules of a functioning society, why are others allowed to disregard those rules? Your lack of action is unacceptable, as is the conduct of the homeless population, particularly those who are not held accountable for their crimes. I completely understand and have great compassion for the people who have nowhere to turn except to the streets and parks, but there's another element to this

**HOW DO WE FIX IT, YOU ASK? IT'S NOT THE PEOPLE'S JOB TO FIX IT. IT'S THE POLICYMAKERS RESPONSIBILITY TO FIX IT.
- DAN SHEA**

problem - it's the homeless criminals who commit horrendous acts of violence and those who are in possession of the deadliest drug in the U.S. - fentanyl. These criminals are killing people."

Because of Walton's disgust over inaction from the mayor, and as a long-time supporter of Lucky Duck Foundation, he joined with the non-profit group at its press conference so he could show support for the foundation's "Shamrocks & Shipwrecks" initiative and to also voice his own, personal outrage over the homelessness issue in San Diego. "Shamrocks & Shipwrecks" is an initiative that intends to hold regional elected leaders accountable on all issues related to homelessness. The ongoing initiative will publicly highlight political will and efficacy

of elected leaders and their jurisdictions when addressing homelessness throughout San Diego County. The first shamrocks and shipwrecks will be announced December 8. "Homelessness throughout San Diego County has reached crisis levels. We call on regional elected leaders to take immediate action to shelter and provide critical services to the thousands of unsheltered San Diegans suffering from

homelessness. And we are glad to accelerate their efforts by funding a multitude of strategies," said Drew Moser, Executive Director of the Lucky Duck Foundation. "The level of action must escalate meaningfully and with a sense of urgency."

Shamrocks & Shipwrecks Scoring Process

The scoring system will be fact-based and is designed to emphasize high-impact programs and tangible action steps as well as call out missed opportunities and inaction of San Diego County's elected leaders and their jurisdictions. The purpose is to showcase what is working so it can be replicated, and what is not working so it can be corrected or avoided. Strong actions that drive progress will earn "Shamrocks," while ineffectiveness and inaction will earn "Shipwrecks." Particular consideration will be given to tangible action taken to add urgently needed shelter beds; create and implement an annual inclement weather shelter plan; meaningfully address veteran and youth homelessness; and pursue and deploy government funding sources to increase the number of housing opportunities for homeless families.

Additionally, Lucky Duck Foundation will continue to partner and help accelerate the efforts of regional elected leaders by funding a variety of strategies, including but not limited to underwriting the cost to purchase and construct a bridge shelter to shelter hundreds of individuals; underwriting the cost to purchase pallet homes; helping convert underutilized government-owned properties; and a multitude of other efforts such as food & water outreach, employment and job training opportunities, and more. The public is encouraged to visit shamrocks.luckyduckfoundation.org to learn more and recommend which programs and which elected officials should earn a "Shamrock" or a "Shipwreck."

Lucky Duck Foundation and Civic Leaders Join Forces to Combat Homelessness

When Lucky Duck Foundation founders Pat and Stephanie Kilkenny noticed a growing and urgent need for programs and services to alleviate the suffering of San Diegans experiencing homelessness, businessmen Peter Seidler and Dan Shea were simultaneously calling upon business and civic leaders, community members, politicians, and other key stakeholders to join them in taking action to address the issue in a best-in-class, fact-based manner. After extensively studying homelessness and collaborating with Peter and Dan, Pat and Stephanie knew LDF could have an even greater impact if they focused the Foundation's efforts squarely on homelessness, so the separate endeavors were merged for the sole purpose of focusing on the crisis as a unified entity. They decided to do so, and shortly after pivoting, LDF purchased several large industrial tent structures to function as bridge shelters which sleep more than 650 individuals. And ever since, LDF has funded and activated several high-impact programs that alleviate the suffering of homelessness.

Shea, a San Diego business and civic leader and board member of the Lucky Duck Foundation, said he and Seidler, owner of the Padres, have been urging government leaders to take decisive, measurable action towards correcting San Diego's homeless situation, so "the sheer frustration over the lack of action, accountability, and fact-based results towards solving homelessness spans years of political powers in both parties." He says that for years they urged then-Mayor Kevin Faulconer to take more serious action to address the issue. Shea also said that he and Seidler talked to Faulconer for three years about opening up Golden Hall to house the unsheltered. "This issue has gone on for way too long," said Shea. "Obviously, whatever they say is being done is not working, period. It's time to change course and right the ship."

Additionally, Shea said that Lucky Duck Foundation reached out to the Mayor Gloria's office a week prior to going public

with the press conference to announce the "Shamrocks & Shipwrecks" initiative. The approach at that point was not to call out any one city, but to announce the initiative that would hold all 18-San Diego County cities accountable for the ways in which they address homelessness in their own jurisdictions. "We need an initiative that supports cities who are stepping up to serve their unhoused neighbors," said LDF executive director Drew Moser. But he said that the day before the press conference, the mayor's office sent a communication to the group outlining his achievements toward the homeless crisis which had unverified and questionable "facts" and a lot of rhetoric. So, we are asking for clarity, not calling anyone a liar.

Mayor Gloria's press staff issued a statement saying in part: "Today's 'news conference' was simply a tantrum full of self-aggrandizing hyperbole and outright lies." Together, Walton and Shea said the if they are getting things wrong, they will absolutely "correct the record," and asked only that the mayor provide information to support his statement that he has "dramatically increased and diversified the City's network of shelter beds ...". In one Twitter post, the mayor stated that he got 150 beds placed in the Midway district, when in fact those 150 shelter beds are on county property.

After the press conference to announce Lucky Duck Foundation's "Shamrocks & Shipwrecks" initiative, Walton said he appreciated the "incredible outpouring of kindness, support, encouragement and gratitude" he received. He said that the announcement was also, unfortunately, met with a "shameless and childish" attack on Lucky Duck Foundation from Mayor Gloria, calling both Walton and Shea 'liars.' "Lucky Duck Foundation, an all-volunteer organization, and its programs work, and they're willing to help, and I'm proudly with them, but they do not control the levels of enforcement power, nor the purse strings of our once great city," said Walton.

The Hall of Famer started off the press conference by stating that he is "a native



Outreach workers.



Downtown scene.

San Diegan, resident, engaged citizen, voter, and taxpayer.” He said he moved to the North Park/Hillcrest neighborhood 43 years ago, when he was just 26 years old. He said it was “his dream. A place with an expansive park with open, green space, spectacular views and all the encompassing wonders of nature and life.” He says that beloved public park has amassed an entirely unmanageable and unacceptable encampment of homeless individuals and is calling on public officials to “provide us with a safe, secure, healthy, and clean place for San Diegans to live, work and play. He says, and photos seem to prove, that there are no other parks in San Diego with the massive homeless encampments as seen in Balboa Park. Walton said that he reached out to the mayor on numerous occasions and only had one response from him via a 45-minute phone call and nothing was accomplished. He provided a link to all his correspondence to Mayor Gloria:

As a now-disabled individual, Walton said that he has been “attacked and assaulted daily” during his bike rides throughout the park – the bike which he calls his “wheelchair and lifeline.”

Lucky Duck Foundation and Bill Walton came together to say, “we cannot allow people to continue living on the streets, in the parks, at the schools, on the sidewalks, or on bike paths, many of whom are committing serious crimes.”

When asked about what needs to be done to address this crisis, the first response

was to say, “it’s not up to citizens to activate policies and legislation that will fix this, it’s up to our elected officials.” However, they did put forth areas that have been woefully neglected as a temporary solution, including:

- Opening up the city’s parking garages at City Hall and surrounding public buildings
- Opening all the other enormous array of properties – buildings, parking lots, industrial space vacant land for Bridge Shelters
- Create a region-wide application for the extraordinarily successful Stand Down program for veterans – replicate to include the general homeless population
- Close Balboa Park from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. every night (many other parks do it, with great success)
- Real and equal enforcement of laws – the laws apply to everyone, and when politicians claim that the law does not allow them to enforce the law then they should change the law

Walton, Shea, and Lucky Duck Foundation said in a joint statement: “There’s a lot of misunderstanding about compassion with this issue. We have always taken a very compassionate view, especially for those who do not want to be homeless. But the misunderstanding is we do not have compassion for criminals. We do have compassion for people who are on the streets for all kinds of different reasons, including mental health issues. But we also

need compassion for the citizens of San Diego who walk up and down the streets and are frightened about the behavior that goes on. We applaud the county for putting up a 150-bed mental health facility, which is one of the facilities the foundation owns. It was the right thing for the county to do. But it’s not enough. There’s talk that ‘we’re going to put up 20 beds here, 30 beds there, but we’re never going to get the job done with that kind of approach. We need to find other ways to put beds up and get people off the street. We’re here to advocate for those who can’t advocate for themselves. We’re here to correct the record that it is not about compassion for drug dealers, people selling fentanyl on the street, people who make San Diegans feel unsafe. We’re told that possession of illicit drugs among the homeless is not enforceable. Then that needs to be changed too. It’s time to recognize the difference between now-legalized marijuana and deadly fentanyl in terms of ‘possession.’ These criminal acts must be punishable. The citizens of the region deserve more compassion than the criminal element who terrorize people who work hard to create a life for themselves and their families.”

Walton and Shea put forth the following points in response:

- Gloria did not do the work to secure the land for use. The County, specifically Supervisor Fletcher, did the initial work. It is a 150-bed mental health facility owned by Lucky Duck Foundation and is “on loan”

to help address this crisis.

- The mayor's gratuitous attack on LDF comes after a good two-year relationship in which he saw the foundation as part of the potential solutions to come and he appeared pleased with the foundation's funding of multiple programs to help towards a better San Diego. He never voiced anything negative about LDF until his defensive statement to change the narrative.

- We never said, "nothing has been done." This is myth created by the Mayor's PR people paid for by the taxpayers to make him sound good, but it is not factual. We said, "not enough has been done," and that is clear by simply looking at the streets surrounding downtown, Balboa Park, Mission Hills and elsewhere.

- The mayor claims LDF did not put up a penny of the \$5M "he" provided, which is technically correct. But what he fails to mention is the use of the foundation's \$1M asset at no cost to government and the fact that we helped fund the construction of the

asset in order to have those 150 beds on-line.

- He claims that he has done more than anyone on this issue for which we say he has not proven anything other than he claims he has so therefore it must be true? We are asking for clarity on the numbers, not just claims about numbers. However, we are not calling anyone "liars," we are simply asking for "clarity." Show us the math, from start to finish, how that is an accurate statement. Show us the math, don't make statements, and then expect everyone else to do the work to prove you right or wrong. Share the math so it can be publicly verified.

- Gloria claims the shelter beds "he" has created far out strips what LDF has done, so please verify that as we cannot produce how you get to your "claims." We would like to see that so we can applaud you, but your math is not clear. Please clarify. Not by PR people making (so far) unsubstantiated claims, but by actual facts. Reporting what you say does not make for facts, only that you said it. Let's use real life data, and then

we can lay this issue to rest.

The leadership and volunteers of Lucky Duck Foundation, and now Walton, do not think it is too much to ask of not only Mayor Gloria, but all the mayors, supervisors, and state elected officials to step up their game and turn the ship around for our homeless citizens. Walton citing, "It has never been about 'not in our backyard.' It has always been about shining a light on the need for real progress; it has always been about compassion for our fellow San Diegans; it has always really been about making San Diego America's Finest City again. Getting reelected should not be the primary goal. Solving problems should be the primary goal."



HAHN LOESER CONGRATULATES PARTNERS JIM HEFFNER & GABE WRIGHT

on their inclusion in *SD Metro Magazine's* list of 2022 Men of Accomplishment.

This selection is a true reflection of commitment to their profession and community. Congratulations to Jim and Gabe and all of the Men of Accomplishment recognized by *SD Metro Magazine*!

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S 2022 Men of Accomplishment



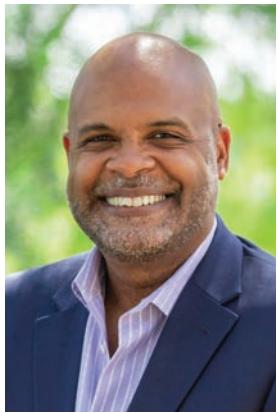
JOHN GOMEZ

John Gomez, the founder of Gomez Trial Attorneys, is one of the nation's leading trial lawyers. Among his significant trial results are a \$106 million wrongful death jury verdict arising out of San Diego's infamous "American Beauty Murder," a \$16.5 million verdict against El Pollo Loco for a slip and fall, a \$10 million jury verdict against Pizza Hut for the conduct of one of its delivery drivers, an \$8.5 million verdict against DuPuy and Johnson & Johnson for a defective hip implant and a \$6.5 million verdict against Omni Hotels for a coffee burn. He also represented the surviving members of CHP Officer Mark Saylor in their wrongful death case against Toyota, and the parents of San Diego legend Junior Seau in their wrongful death case against the NFL. He is a graduate of the University of San Diego where he was an All-American football player, and the Yale University Law School.



MICHAEL A. RIZZA

Passionate, driven, technical. Combined together you get one of the most approachable engineers you've ever come across, Michael Rizza. As cofounder, principal, and president of Rizza Engineering, Michael builds and maintains client relationships (a major company and client asset). A career spanning more than 26 years in electrical engineering, complimented by a background in electrical contracting and an extensive education in Architectural Engineering, he fully understands building design and construction. He leads the design team to craft turn-key designs for clients by blending his technical knowledge of power, lighting, low voltage, and renewables with his unique ability to visualize final installations. In addition to his Professional Engineering License, Michael has also earned the RCDD, CTS-D, and LEED AP designations. Coupled with his dedication to Rizza Engineering, Michael also finds time to spend with his family and serve his community by raising money for Habitat for Humanity, Junior Achievement, Shakti Rising, Promises2Kids, Toys for Tots, Poway Little League, and the ACE Mentorship. He has held several leadership positions including, past president of the Illuminating Engineering Society (SD Chapter), Cubmaster for the Boy Scouts of America and currently serves on the Advisory Council for the Architectural Engineering Department at Kansas State University, of which he is an alumnus.



SEAN SPEAR

Sean Spear is actively working to create a more equitable San Diego by driving the efforts of Community Housing Works (CHW) to combat housing insecurity, arguably one of San Diego's most prominent social issues. In his two years as president and CEO of CHW, a nonprofit affordable housing development firm, he has already made his voice heard through hard conversations with elected officials, local task forces and community organizations, all in an effort to find realistic and long-lasting solutions to housing insecurity. He leads the way in finding new solutions for problems that San Diego has faced for decades. He is chair of the advisory board for the San Diego Regional Task Force for the Homeless. CVHW's newest housing community, the Keeler Apartments, recently won the San Diego Housing Federation's Ruby Award for New Construction Project of the Year. Spear has served as lead partner in both the Neighborhood Next proposal to redevelop the Midway area and 13509 Front (State Office Building site) proposal in Little Italy. He secured \$41.4 million in tax exempt bond authority from the State of California for the Kimball Highland Master Plan in National City. He is a graduate of Cornell University.



Congratulations Steve O'Connell



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NATHAN SCHMIDT

Nathan Schmidt is a dedicated, influential and innovative leader with over 20 years of financial services management and marketing experience. He is responsible for strategic planning, brand marketing, product development, business development and community and media relations and the overall customer experience at San Diego County Credit Union (SDCCU), the 18th largest credit union in the country by assets and the largest locally-owned financial institution in San Diego. A cornerstone of Schmidt's dynamic leadership is an unwavering focus on continually raising the bar on creativity, service, strategy and execution, resulting in exponential growth for SDCCU and impacting the overall credit union movement. Whether he's implementing a marketing campaign or sponsoring a community organization or event, his ideas are big and his thought process is innovative. Under his leadership SDCCU's unique blend of products and services is leading the way for overall credit union success. SDCCU proudly supports hundreds of community events or activities through San Diego, Orange and Riverside counties. The credit union has grown to \$11.5 billion in assets and has over 434,000 members, a more than 92 percent increase in the nine years Schmidt has served as an executive vice president. He is a graduate of Sacramento State University and holds an MBA degree from St. Mary's College.



RONSON SHAMOUN

Ronson Shamoun is San Diego's leading tax attorney. He is the founder and chief executive officer of RJS Law firm. His practice includes federal and state taxation with an emphasis on criminal tax defenses, tax controversy, international tax, bankruptcy, and estate planning. He recently received the University of San Diego Mother Rosalie Clifton Hill Award for Service. The award is presented to a USD alum who personifies the spirit and philosophy of the university. He has generously contributed to the university with an annual scholarship to the USD Law School and to the School of Business. As an adjunct professor in the USD School of Law, he teaches Tax Practice and Penalties and Federal Tax Procedures and Policies. He co-founded the USD-RJS Law Tax Controversy Institute which brings together tax attorneys, CPAs, enrolled agents and tax preparers to discuss the latest changes in tax law. He has been named a Man of Accomplishment and one of San Diego's top attorneys for several years running. He has received USD's Distinguished Alumni Award. RJD Law has been recognized as one of San Diego's Most Innovative law firms. Shamoun holds three degrees from the University of San Diego: an undergraduate in accountancy, a master's of law in taxation and his juris doctor from the USD School of Law.



STEVE O'CONNELL

Steve O'Connell is president and chief executive officer of North Island Credit Union. Under his leadership for the past 10 years, North Island has achieved outstanding financial performance and introduced numerous innovations to achieve significant transformation, growth, and member service enhancements across every area of operations. Under his guidance, North Island's 2021 financial performance was stronger than most peers in its industry. He serves as board member of the San Diego's Classroom of the Future Foundation, an organization that bridges technology gaps for at-risk youth and provides school funding through private industry. Through his direction, North Island Credit Union contributed more than \$600,000 in 2021 to assist hundreds of local schools, educators, military families, and community-based programs. Over the past five years under O'Connell's leadership North Island has invested over \$2 million in local communities, awarded \$145,000 in 290 teacher grants, and provided \$355,000 in college scholarships. North Island has new partnerships with the Boys & Girls Clubs of San Diego to support multiple programs. He is a graduate of Cal State Northridge.

CONGRATULATIONS

to Community HousingWorks President and CEO [Sean Spear](#) for being named one of San Diego Metro's 2022 Men of Accomplishment.

Founded in 1988, Community HousingWorks provides quality affordable housing to more than 10,000 residents throughout California, layering in powerful programs, services and connections to resources to help people attain financial stability, improve their health and overall well-being, and set school-age children up for success in the classroom and beyond.

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GABE P. WRIGHT

Gabe Wright is a partner at Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP and chair of the firm's litigation practice group, and serves on the firm's finance, strategic planning and diversity equity and inclusion committees. His litigation practice is specifically focused on complex and class action litigation, commercial litigation, and real estate litigation in which he zealously advocates for his clients, treating their business interests as if they were his own. He is skilled at protecting his clients' business interests, defeating multi-million-dollar lawsuits and class actions. He is often called upon to come into complex cases to develop trial and settlement strategies to further clients' interests. He defeated class certification of a California statewide class action alleging violations of the Rosenthal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and Business & Professions Code against his client. He is an alumnus of the Louis M. Welsh Chapter of the Inns of the Court. He has earned the James Martindale Hubbell's top peer view rating of AV Preeminent. He is a graduate of the Washington & Lee University School of Law..



WILLIAM EIGNER

William Eigner, a partner at Procopio law firm, has been called the "go to guy" for mergers and acquisitions and emerging companies. He serves as a catalyst for his clients' success. His clients have grown from his involvement from a two-person start-up to public companies or acquisition targets in Silicon Valley, Europe and Asia. He serves as a director of EvoNexus and has been active in San Diego Venture Group and the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. He serves or has served on the boards of advisers of Encore Semi, eSub, Solyahealth, 3+2 Pharma LLC, Acenda and other companies. Eigner is a trustee emeritus of the San Diego Police Foundation, a former trustee and chairman of the La Jolla Town Council. His practice emphasizes M & A, venture capital, angel financing, seed capital and the financing, governing, operating, buying, selling and merging of growing and established companies. His practice includes work in various sectors, including telecommunications, software, cybersecurity, electronics, commerce/internet energy, clean technology life sciences, and medical devices. He holds an undergraduate degree from Stanford University and a law degree from the University of Virginia.



JIM HEFFNER

Jim Heffner is a partner at Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP. He has a passion for learning, is hard-working and a strong and supportive mentor to the colleagues who surround him. He has gained recognition for winning case strategies in complex commercial litigation matters. Notably, he successfully defended a major class action brought by a former San Diego city attorney in both Superior Court and the Court of Appeals resulting in an award of defense fees of over \$1 million. He was recruited to Hahn Loeser to help establish its first office in California. He has been instrumental in growing Hahn's San Diego's office, which now includes over 20 lawyers who carry on the firm's reputation for excellence. He is a board member of the La Jolla Bar Association, the county bar association and the Association of Business Trial Lawyers. He has been recognized as a Rising Star by Super Lawyers and has earned James Martindale Hubbell's top peer review rating of AV Preeminent. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from Arizona State University and is a magna cum laude graduate of the University of San Francisco School of Law.

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Michael Rizza





Assault weapons, multiple high-capacity magazines, pistols, and other weapons seized from the home of homicide suspect Vu Thai, who was arrested June 5, 2022, in connection with a fatal shooting in San Jose. (Photo courtesy of the San Jose Police Department via AP)

THE SAN DIEGO TEAM PIONEERING CALIFORNIA'S RED FLAG LAW

By Alexei Koseff | CalMatters

"RED FLAG" LAWS HAVE BEEN SLOW TO TAKE OFF IN MANY PLACES, BUT SAN DIEGO'S PROGRAM SHOWS HOW ADVOCATES HOPE GUN VIOLENCE RESTRAINING ORDERS CAN BE USED TO PREVENT TRAGEDY.

There were four more requests for gun violence restraining orders on Jeff Brooker's desk when he arrived at the San Diego City Attorney's Office that July morning.

Officers had responded to a minor car crash at a mall where the driver, who carried a replica firearm, was rambling delusionally and threatening to kill the "one-percenters" and a public official. Another man, during an argument outside a family member's home, had pulled a gun out of his waistband and pointed it at someone's head as several others looked on.

It was not an unusual number of new cases for the department's eight-member gun violence restraining order unit, which Brooker oversees. In an average week, they triage 30 referrals from local police, reviewing scenarios in which officers believe a resident is at risk of committing gun violence.

About a third of the time — in those instances when the person clearly poses a danger to themselves or others, and they aren't already prohibited from possessing weapons for another reason — the office will petition a judge to temporarily seize their firearms, under a six-year-old California statute that was among the country's first "red flag" laws.

More than 1,250 times since the end of 2017, when San Diego City Attorney Mara Elliott launched the pioneering unit, Brooker's team has successfully filed a gun violence restraining order, leading to the seizure, as of April, of nearly 1,600 firearms from 865 people — far more than any other agency in the state. An estimated one-third of the weapons, most of which are handguns, have since been returned to the owners.

"Do you believe this person should have

a gun? Your own sense is the best test," said Brooker, who employs a cable television thought experiment to illustrate how he tries to depoliticize the highly charged red flag law: If a case hypothetically turns into a major news story, how might it be covered by both liberal MSNBC host Rachel Maddow and conservative Fox News anchor Sean Hannity?

"If this is a case they can agree on, this is the kind of case we're going to file," Brooker said.

These red flag laws, touted by advocates as one of the best tools available to prevent gun violence, received a renewed push this summer after a mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, left 19 students and two teachers dead.

Congress responded by passing rare gun safety legislation, with bipartisan support, that could provide hundreds of millions of

dollars to help states adopt or expand their own red flag laws. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia already have laws, but a recent analysis by the Associated Press found that many of those are barely used.

In California, which ranked seventh in number of cases per capita, San Diego has been a model.

With many jurisdictions still slow to adopt the use of gun violence restraining orders, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services announced in July that it would provide \$1 million to the San Diego City Attorney's Office to expand its training efforts to other law enforcement groups.

"We must work together to make sure our gun safety and red flag laws are being used to protect our communities. They're being underutilized," Attorney General Rob Bonta said at a joint press conference with Elliott last month. "Others should take San Diego's lead — be aggressive, use the tool that is there."

A pioneering program

While the California law allows police, close family members, housemates, employers, co-workers and school officials to seek a gun violence restraining order for someone they believe poses a danger to themselves or others, nearly all cases in the state are initiated by law enforcement. Assembly Bill 2870, now before Gov.

Gavin Newsom, would expand the list of eligible petitioners to include more family members and people who are dating or share children with the gun owner.

A judge can immediately order the person to relinquish their guns and declare them ineligible to purchase firearms and ammunition for three weeks or, after a hearing, extend the ban to as long as five years. The person can then petition once a year to lift the order and have their weapons returned.

Under Elliott, San Diego has invested in its red flag program like nowhere else in California, with close coordination between the city attorney's office and the police department to streamline the process for obtaining an order. Brooker's team includes three attorneys, a paralegal, a legal secretary, a police officer and two retired police officers who work part-time as investigators, preparing cases for review.

Petitions for orders arrive around the clock, Brooker said. While police can obtain an emergency order directly from a judge to take someone's firearms for 21 days, the city attorney's office steps in to decide whether to pursue a longer-term seizure of a year or more. Brooker's team is in court every morning filing paperwork and conducting hearings for new cases or existing orders that are expiring.

The investigators had already been in for several hours when Brooker arrived at their fifth-floor office, overlooking Civic Center Plaza in downtown San Diego. Informational packets were ready for several new petitions that had come in overnight.

Brooker's corner office overflows with "Star Wars" memorabilia, including a signed poster of Princess Leia and an Obi-Wan Kenobi T-shirt sharing a coat rack with his jackets and ties. On his bookshelf, a tome about the original Star Wars trilogy abuts Shakespeare's collected works and a copy of the Constitution.

His team's goal is only to remove guns from a situation until it can be made safe, Brooker said, so sometimes they work with a person on a plan to return their firearms, rather than requesting to extend the order.

This is more common for threats of suicide, when the gun violence restraining order can provide someone with time to cool off and stabilize. If drug or alcohol abuse is involved, or if a person seems to have deeper mental disorders, Brooker said his team will likely ask for a longer seizure of their weapons.

"They're not all bad people or criminals," he said. "Some of them are just going through a period of crisis."



Jeffrey Brooker, the San Diego supervising deputy city attorney, works in his office in San Diego on July 13, 2022.
(Photo by Raquel Natalicchio for CalMatters)

Taking a cautious approach

The most common types of cases depend on what's happening in the world. Brooker said that domestic violence, suicide, child abuse, protest threats and social media threats all picked up during the coronavirus pandemic. Around holidays, there are more domestic violence and suicide cases, while after any mass shooting, there are many potential copycats.

"If there was ever a time I was rethinking my life and career, it was in that month after Uvalde," Brooker said. Schools were going into lockdown every day, graduations were being threatened and his team was out every night executing search warrants for weapons that a judge had ordered removed.

Brooker said he takes a cautious approach to filing cases, because he is concerned about blowback from gun rights advocates. Every petition is investigated by the retired police officers to ensure that the potential threat is not based on unvetted evidence or an old history of violence.

"I know they're waiting for us to file one bad case so they can jump all over us," he said. "That's the case that's going to bite us."

Though the red flag law has not encountered widespread resistance in California, it does remain deeply controversial with gun rights activists. Critics argue that the law violates due process rights by allowing a judge to order someone's firearms removed before they've ever had a chance to defend themselves and by requiring that person to go to court to get their weapons back. Groups across the country are eyeing new legal challenges to red flag laws, which have been consistently upheld in court, following a summer Supreme Court ruling that strengthened gun rights.

Sam Paredes, executive director of the advocacy group Gun Owners of California, called the law an "insincere" attempt to deal with gun violence, without dealing with the underlying mental health issues or other dangerous situations.

"We don't have an issue with trying to

deal with people who are identified as a danger to themselves or others. We have an existing procedure to deal with that all the way," Paredes said. "Gun violence restraining orders or red flag laws are nothing more than a political football that is being thrown around the field."

Considered in court

When Brooker and a colleague arrived at the county courthouse at 9 a.m., they were ushered into the courtroom by the bailiff, who informed Brooker that none of his respondents had checked in yet.

"Good, because I've got two dismissals and a continuance today," Brooker replied.

While Superior Court Judge Adelaida Lopez led the parties and witnesses through an oath, Brooker was on his phone, writing notes about how he expected the cases to go and taking another quick read of the files to be prepared for any questions. In between, he checked his email and snuck a peek at a few photos from his son who had just moved to Switzerland for college.

Brooker's cases were among the first to be heard. In one, a man had told police he was trying to drink himself to death. While he didn't have any firearms that the officers knew of, they wanted to obtain a gun violence restraining order to prevent the man from legally buying one in a moment of desperation.

Brooker asked for another continuance, giving his office more time to serve the defendant with a notice of the hearing.

"We tried him using soft contacts first for officer safety and obvious reasons, so there is due diligence, I can assure you," Brooker said.

Lopez granted another 21-day continuance. Then Brooker moved to his next case, where the defendant had also been put under a mental health hold, which would prohibit him from possessing firearms and make a gun violence restraining order unnecessary.

"I think we can take it off the calendar. And will that result in a dismissal?" Lopez said. "Item 32 is dismissed. That protective

order is dissolved."

"Very good. Thank you, Your Honor," Brooker said. The whole proceeding took less than five minutes.

It's not always so quick. Brooker said his team once sought an order for an IT worker who was suspected of scoping out the hospital from which he had been fired, setting off fears that he was planning a mass shooting. The man hired high-powered lawyers, and there were five days of witness testimony before the judge ultimately agreed to grant the gun removal order.

Back in the office after court, a colleague informed Brooker that she had received a call from the nearby Carlsbad Police Department. Officers had obtained a gun violence restraining order for a man and served it to him during a vehicle stop, which is considered safer than doing it at home. But the man was refusing to give them the combination to the gun safe in his car, so the officers had detained him.

Brooker told his colleague to send the officers a template for a search warrant. When he checked back in with the Carlsbad police later — each text message to his phone arriving with the sound of Darth Vader breathing — he learned that the officers had ultimately kept the safe and let the man go, while they waited for approval of the search warrant to open it.

"They're actually treating him well by letting him go, rather than detaining him for hours or even taking him down to jail and booking him," Brooker said. "The purpose of this is just to get the gun. We're not trying to put someone in a worse position."

Slow to embrace red flag law

Nearly a third of all gun violence restraining orders issued in California last year — 435 out of 1,384 — came from San Diego County, according to data from the Department of Justice. By comparison, Los Angeles County, with three times as many people, had just 54. Two dozen counties reported no orders at all.

The slow and highly regional adoption of

California's red flag law has baffled and frustrated gun safety advocates, who point to research that has found the approach is an effective tool for reducing suicides and preventing mass shootings. Some states that passed red flag laws more recently — particularly Florida, which acted following the 2018 high school shooting in Parkland — quickly surpassed California in their use of the orders.

"I'm mystified," said Brooker, who blames some combination of a lack of resources and a lack of motivation.

"We live in a society and a day of reaction, not pro-action," he said. "They don't want to do it until they have to do it. And usually they have to because there was a shooting and there's all of the attention on it."

But as promotion of gun violence restraining orders — and pressure to use the law — has grown, Brooker and his team have become a resource for the entire state. Brooker said people call him from agencies and departments like a customer support line; more than 100 from outside San Diego County have reached out to him for help since January.

Just that morning, he had spoken with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service about filing an order for a San Diego-based sailor who was hospitalized for homicidal and suicidal thoughts. NCIS wanted to remove the man's firearms now that he was being released from the hospital, but the unit had no jurisdiction to seize the weapons off base.

Brooker's team also regularly conducts training for law enforcement agencies across the state — the requests always pick up after another mass shooting.

Many officers are intimidated at first, Brooker said. They think they don't have time to follow all of the steps, or they get lost in the weeds the first few times and it sours them on the law. That's why he believes a dedicated team like his, which can work hand-in-hand with the local police every day, is critical to success.

"There's cops that want to do them.

There's cops that try to do them. But if you don't have support from the command and resources, it's going to fall short," Brooker said. "Now there's weeks I wish they wouldn't send me so many."

Yet even as an evangelist for California's red flag law, Brooker worries that policymakers, through bills like the one currently sitting on Newsom's desk, are expanding it in counterproductive ways.

He considers it too dangerous for anyone but law enforcement to remove someone's guns. But a gun violence restraining order that a judge grants a family member or other civil petitioners is served by a process server, giving the recipient 24 to 48 hours to turn in their weapons — and, Brooker fears, retaliate against the petitioner, creating just the sort of shooting that the red flag law is trying to prevent.

"Just call the police," he said. "I have yet to see one of these filed by a school or a workplace, and I'm grateful for that."

Spreading the word

A day earlier, Brooker and his colleagues led a training session for the police department in neighboring National City.

Sgt. Darren Pierson, who runs the department's training division, thought that if he could get one or two officers to start using gun violence restraining orders, others would see it was not that difficult. He had made the training mandatory for supervisors.

"There needs to be a culture of encouraging it," Pierson said.

In a large conference room at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, about 30 attendees, some from other local law enforcement agencies, sat at folding tables, filling in from the back like students who hoped the teacher wouldn't call on them.

The training began with a body camera video of a 2017 case where an officer was shot breaching the house of a man later found to have mental health issues. Brooker wondered aloud if the situation could have been avoided if they had first been able to confiscate the man's weapons with a gun

violence restraining order. The city's program was not yet in place at the time.

"Could it have stopped something like this hypothetically?" Brooker asked the room. Then over the next several hours, he ran through dozens of scenarios where his team, through trial and error, had found California's red flag law to be useful.

A man in the middle of a contentious divorce who, after a confrontation with his estranged wife, threatened to buy a gun and "shoot the bitch" if prosecutors didn't file domestic violence charges against her. "He's probably venting, but what if he's not?" Brooker said.

A man who posted videos on "dark web" channels practicing shooting tactics and quick reloads from different rooms at the same hotel in downtown San Diego, sparking concerns from the FBI that he was planning a mass shooting. "Looking at that video, did anybody see a crime? Especially because he's got registered guns," Brooker said. "Just another way a GVRO can be applied to a case where you may not have another way in, because you do have firearms and you do have danger."

A man who regularly dressed as Gandalf, the wizard from "The Lord of the Rings," and then entered traffic, putting down a staff and declaring, "You shall not pass," prompting some drivers to beat him up in road rage incidents. Knowing that he owned firearms, police sought a gun violence restraining order so that the man would not be able to potentially fire back.

Brooker argues that the effectiveness of the approach favored by the San Diego City Attorney's Office is self-evident: 1,600 guns taken off the streets in risky situations where people were "charging hard down" the path to violence but had not necessarily committed a crime.

"Now I see all the cases where the cops' hands are untied," he said. "We see fewer cases in the news because of us."

Education Matters: Parent Group Researched By Teachers Union

By Marsha Sutton

Recently uncovered emails reveal that the California Teachers Association engaged in research, some have called it spying, on the local bipartisan Parent Association group.

Initially focused on the San Dieguito Union High School District, the Parent Association was founded in late 2020 to reopen schools when most public schools were closed for pandemic reasons.

The nonprofit PA group expanded almost at once to include parents representing the San Diego County unified school districts of Carlsbad, Oceanside, Poway, San Marcos and Vista, and now is a statewide organization that supports and helps empower parents as the best advocates for their children.

In February 2021, the group successfully challenged union efforts to keep schools closed by filing a lawsuit to reopen them.

"We are parents who knew that prolonged school closures were harmful for children," PA co-founder and San Dieguito chapter director Allison Stratton wrote in an email. "We knew it at the time and we have certainly been proven right."

"We weren't organized before the pandemic, and we certainly did not have any money in our coffers. We came together to fight for our children's lives."

Today, those efforts by the Parent Association extend well beyond pandemic-related school closures and mask mandates.

The PA advocates for independent school board members who put students' needs first, something PA organizers say the unions do not do.

Teachers unions advocate for teachers, not students. Sometimes those interests overlap — but certainly not always.

Whatever one's personal leanings, it's nevertheless a remarkable story of how desperate the money-heavy CTA and local teachers unions were to fight an organized effort by parents to advocate on behalf of their children.

The California Teachers Association was established in 1863 and is one of the largest and most powerful teachers unions in the state with over 300,000 members, according to the CTA website.

Money from unions is often used to influence the election of

The San Dieguito Union High School District offices in Encinitas.
(Google Street View photo)



union-supported school board candidates who then support pro-union policies and expenditures.

After controlling the school board for decades, the San Dieguito Faculty Association union became agitated when in 2020 voters elected a third independent board member who joined two others not endorsed by the union.

The Parent Association's involvement in support of those three (of five) independent trustees, and the PA's successful lawsuit to reopen schools, apparently drew the attention of the CTA.

In emails provided to the PA through a public records request, CTA strategic research specialist Ann Swinburn sent an email to San Dieguito residents and union allies asking for assistance for information on the Parent Association.

"Thank you for reaching out," wrote back attorney Michele Macosky, whose office is located in Carmel Valley. "We have been collecting information and would be very happy to share/collaborate."

She then asked if other parents could be included in the discussion.

Swinburn replied, "As long as they are folks you all trust, I'm good."

San Dieguito activists Heather Dugdale, Holly Butte and Adam Fischer (listed in the revealed emails as reported and linked by the New York Post) were then invited to connect with Swinburn and Macosky via a livestreamed meeting.

The purpose of the meeting, according to Macosky's email, was "to share information" and uncover "some of the ideological leaning of groups that are funding the reopen lawsuits."

Email requests for comment have gone unanswered as of publication time from Dugdale, Macosky and Swinburn.

The story, covered by numerous media outlets, "has gone viral," PA co-founder Stratton stated. "It has captured the outrage parents feel knowing that a political organization conspired against parents who knew that schools could and should have opened fall 2020."

"We were horrified to see the extent to

which the CTA and their allies malign parents who advocate for their children's well-being," Parent Association co-founder and executive director Ginny Merrifield said. "Long-term school closures revealed how little the union cared about the children."

Merrifield and Stratton said they believe the CTA was trying to uncover any connection between the Parent Association and ultra-right-wing ideology.

Merrifield said the PA has no ties to any political group and that parents wanted only to look out for their children's best interests and get them back in school.

"Parents want nothing more than to have a seat at the table," she said. "They want a school board that represents family's interests and doesn't just rubber stamp the union agenda."

Parents united and came together and created a threat to the union agenda, she said. And that "has a chilling effect" on public education.

Lance Christensen, candidate for California Superintendent of Public Instruction, said in a statement on his home page: "Conducting opposition research is a common practice in political campaigns. But to have the teachers union dedicate personnel to politically target moms and dads protecting their own children and expressing their first amendment rights is both startling and disgusting.

"Entrenched special interests have used their war chests over the last two and a half years to intimidate and threaten anyone who dares to challenge their ineffective reign over public education. This must end.

"School closures demanded by these unions have single-handedly resulted in decades of learning loss, declining public school enrollment, and the lowest literacy rate in the nation. The good teachers in California want to focus on reading and writing, not cloak and dagger operations that further divide our communities."

Christensen is running against current state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, who is backed by the

union.

Parents weren't represented before, when everything was "going well" and school board members were union-aligned, Merrifield said, emphasizing that independent school board members present a threat to the unions and are more important now than ever before.

At San Dieguito, losing the union-backed board majority has been a fierce focus of the union, which Parent Association leaders say has resulted in orchestrated efforts to destabilize the district and employ tactics aimed at disrupting board meetings and reframing issues.

In 2020, the San Dieguito school board "shifted from a body that had long had a majority of trustees backed by the teachers union to one with a majority not supported by the union," reported a July 2 article in The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Duncan Brown, president of the San Dieguito teachers union, said in the Union-Tribune article: "The union is not responsible for district's ongoing problems."

His quote from that article, which essentially admits that the union and its allies are indeed responsible for the district's turmoil, says it best: "When we don't have candidates that view things similarly (as the union), we have the chaos that we're now seeing."

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