

# San Diego Newsline

Downtown San Diego news — the budget, public safety, business, and the civic life of America's Finest City

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## COUNTY

# San Diego County's 25 Most Remarkable Teens Honored for Accomplishments



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The San Diego County Public Defender's Office collaborated with the San Diego Public Library to name and recognize the 25 Most Remarkable Teens from around San Diego County at a special ceremony Tuesday.

The 25 teens were selected from 98 nominated by the community for their inspiring contributions and efforts in categories such as community empowerment, activism for the environment, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ community, innovation in STEM, robotics and technology, science, arts and culture and health advocacy.

The program recognizes youth ages 13 to 19 for their accomplishments. Every nominee was interviewed by the San Diego County Public Defender staff and its Youth Council panel. All nominees received a certificate of recognition.

"Our office is proud to recognize the extraordinary resolve, spirit and achievements of these teens, who can only serve as an inspiration to other youth in San Diego County and other regions. These shining stars are on their way to greater accomplishments in their young lives," said Public Defender Paul Rodriguez.

County and City officials joined the public defender in presenting the awards at the San Diego Central Library. This is the seventh year the program has honored teens.

The 25 Most Remarkable Teens for 2024 are:

Alex Battikha, a senior at Westview High School won in the Robotics category. He is a young innovator dedicated to merging technology with community impact. Alex has a pending patent for a unique robotics project developed with mentors from Johns Hopkins University. He leads his high school robotics engineering club and guided them to a first-place victory at the FIRST Tech Challenge. He is committed to solving real-world issues. Inspired by his grandfather's health challenges, he developed a HELP button for wheelchair users to easily request assistance. A passionate advocate for environmental issues, Alex co-founded a non-profit focused on water conservation, collaborating with a U.S. senator on legislation to protect water resources, and has an upcoming role as a U.S. delegate at an international environmental conference. Alex envisions a career in environmental engineering where he can integrate robotics and sustainability to make a lasting impact both locally and globally.

Arianna Alvarado , a senior at Lincoln High School, won in the Mental Health Advocacy category. She is an inspiring mental health and community advocate with a vision to uplift underserved communities through her work to destigmatize mental health issues

and raise awareness of local mental health resources. She will join young leaders from across the nation as a new member of the ACLU National Advocacy Institute to study social justice and advocacy. Her advocacy work includes testifying on policy issues and supporting her peers in navigating challenges with empathy and resilience. Arianna dreams of a career in law, hoping to work in politics to advocate for underserved communities and those who face systemic obstacles. With her sights set on a future of service, Arianna is a role model and beacon of hope for her peers, inspiring them to embrace their potential and work toward a more equitable society.

Arya Bosworth, a senior at Poway High School, won in the Tech for Good category. Arya is a powerful advocate for tech accessibility and a role model in the field of STEM education. She founded Mechanical Advantage, a non-profit focused on bringing STEM education to underprivileged areas. She founded the first robotics club at a high school in South San Diego, where she taught classes over Zoom during the pandemic, overcoming significant challenges to help students discover their potential in STEM. Arya's dedication to promoting tech access extends across borders, teaching robotics to girls in

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

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San Diego County’s 25 Most Remarkable Teens Honored for Accomplishments

Afghanistan. Her efforts have also raised over \$80,000 to support STEM initiatives, ensuring resources for schools and communities in need. Arya serves as the president of her school’s Society of Women Engineers Next club and is the captain of her robotics team.

Ava Farr , a junior at Del Lago Academy, won in the Community Healing and Trauma Support category. She is a compassionate leader committed to helping others navigate life’s challenges. Inspired by a friend who struggled with homelessness while transitioning to college, Ava founded One Step with You, a non-profit that provides support and care packages for students facing similar hardships. Ava’s organization involves 30 students across multiple schools, delivering essentials like pillows, blankets and sewing kits to those in need. She has created a network of empathy and support ensuring that vulnerable students feel cared for and seen. Beyond her non-profit, she has initiated peer support groups and organized workshops focused on emotional well-being and resilience within her school community. Ava envisions a future where mental health resources and trauma support are accessible to all and aspires to study psychology or social work.

Ella Aldridge , a junior at the San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts, won in the Excellence in Creative and Performing Arts category. She is a dedicated musical theatre major and ta confident artist. Her proudest accomplishment to date is the original song she wrote and performed for the Bonitafest Melodrama. The experience of overcoming her shyness to connect

with an audience has fueled her passion for theatre as a tool for self-expression and empowerment. She recognizes that she is fortunate to attend a school focused on the arts and wants to ensure other young people have similar opportunities. Ella believes that safe spaces for performance are essential for character development and hopes to bring such spaces to underfunded schools in the future. Ella envisions a future where she uses her talents to create positive change, making her a rising star in the world of performing arts.

Emma Weibel , a senior at La Jolla High School, won in the Environmental Activism category. Emma wrote a powerful Climate Action Poem in seventh grade that won accolades at the state level. She founded an environmental action club in high school and is a leading voice in the fight for sustainable policies within the school district. Emma is the student lead for the school district’s electrification campaign. She rallied support for a resolution to eliminate fossil fuels in the district, organizing a petition, educating her peers and speaking at board meetings to advocate for clean energy. The resolution was passed unanimously. She is one of 18 youth plaintiffs in a lawsuit seeking to hold the government accountable for its role in climate change. Emma received the prestigious SanDiego350 “Planet’s Choice” Award and the District 77 Environmental Hero Award from Assemblymember Tasha Boerner. With her eyes set on a future in environmental law, Emma is committed to fighting for a sustainable world and inspiring her generation to take meaningful action.

Frahiwot Legess , a senior at Hoover High School, won in the Courage to Overcome Adversity category. She has overcome personal

and societal challenges to advocate for inclusion and cultural representation. In 10th grade, Frahiwot’s choice to wear a hijab was a powerful act of self-empowerment and identity, allowing her to embrace her faith and cultural heritage openly and fearlessly, despite facing vocal disapproval from her father. Frahiwot also revitalized the Muslim Student Association at Hoover High, growing its membership and creating a welcoming space for Muslim students to connect and share their experiences. She led efforts to organize inter-school events, bringing together students from various backgrounds to foster awareness and understanding of Muslim culture. She has significantly contributed to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment at her school. Frahiwot plans to study neurobiology, inspired by her younger sister with special needs.

Frances Aguilar , a junior at the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, won in the Disability Activism category. She draws inspiration from her older brother, her best friend, who has cerebral palsy and requires full-time care. She has developed a unique perspective on inclusivity and empathy that she brings into all areas of her life. Frances founded a Best Buddies chapter at her high school to create meaningful friendships between general and special education students. Frances has built a welcoming community, where differences are celebrated and every student feels valued. Beyond her school’s borders, Frances volunteers in transition classrooms at Abraxas High, helping students with community-based skills like using public transportation, grocery shopping and budgeting. Frances envisions a world where empathy and support for people with disabilities are the norm.

Glendy Hernandez Orduna , a senior at Madison High School, won in the Community Empowerment category. As the oldest of four children in a family of immigrants from Mexico, Glendy has embraced her role as a trailblazer, setting an inspiring example for her siblings and peers. She is the founder of the First Gen Scholars Club, an organization that provides support to first-generation students navigating the complexities of college applications and scholarships. Through this initiative, Glendy has helped her peers overcome barriers, empowering them to pursue higher education and achieve their dreams. She is making the most of her parents’ sacrifices, striving to honor the opportunities they have worked hard to provide. Glendy aspires to study law or political science, with hopes of becoming an immigration or criminal justice lawyer to combat injustices she has witnessed and making systemic change possible.

Hayden Crocker , a senior at Canyon Crest Academy, won in the Innovation category. He is an ambitious student leader and the co-founder of Go Greenish, a student-led initiative advocating for sustainability in schools. Starting in 2022, Go Greenish has grown into a nationwide movement, with over 500+ student volunteers across 22 school districts. Hayden has raised over \$43,000+ for efforts such as recycling, composting, food diversion, and air sensors across schools in San Diego and beyond. A passionate advocate for climate action, Hayden is deeply involved in local policy as a San Dieguito Union High School District Student Board Member and the Chair of the Youth Commission on the Solana Beach Climate Action Commission. Hayden intends to drive change through education, innovation, and collaboration for a

more sustainable and equitable future.

Hudson Kim , a senior at Westview High School, won in the STEM Stewardship category. He is known for his dedication to robotics, space exploration and community impact. His passion led to an internship with NASA, where he developed software to aid in wildfire monitoring. Locally, he has built a community around STEM, sharing his knowledge with thousands of young students through summer camps and workshops, raising over \$50,000 to support these programs. Hudson recently designed a smart device for a friend who has Spinal Muscular Atrophy, allowing his friend to communicate more easily with his caretakers. An award-winning competitor, Hudson revitalized his school’s robotics team after a challenging start, leading them to victory in the 2024 championships. Hudson sees climate change as his generation’s biggest challenge and hopes to continue developing solutions that benefit both people and the planet.

Izayah Ringfield , a senior at Chula Vista High School, won in the Community Organizing category. As ASB President, Izayah has transformed his school’s student government into an inclusive platform, ensuring that every voice is heard and every student feels represented. His commitment to civic engagement goes beyond his school’s walls—he is the founder and president of his school’s Black Student Union and has spearheaded numerous voter registration drives, helping register over 1,500 people. His voter outreach work is one of his proudest achievements, allowing him to turn his passion for civic engagement into meaningful action. Izayah is driven by a vision of equal representation and social justice, which he

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**San Diego County’s 25 Most Remarkable Teens Honored for Accomplishments**

hopes to pursue as a future attorney extending his advocacy beyond Chula Vista to communities across the nation and the world.

Jeremy Liew , a junior at Pacific Ridge High School, won in the Social Media Innovation & Creativity category. With aspirations of furthering his impact through social media, Jeremy envisions a future where digital platforms are used to foster support and connection among young people. He founded the non-profit Teenage Handbook, a platform aimed at helping teenagers navigate life’s challenges through articles, videos and podcasts that cover topics ranging from mental health to academic success. His approach has earned him widespread recognition, including from Lady Gaga for his mental health advocacy and a first place win in the UNESCO Youth Multimedia Competition. Jeremy is also a co-host of a popular podcast and a digital storyteller. Jeremy has also completed an internship with NASA, an experience he considers a pivotal achievement.

Kenia Cruz Solano , a senior at Gompers Preparatory Academy, won in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Advocacy category. She is committed to breaking down cultural and social barriers within her community. Her work includes supporting students from immigrant backgrounds by providing resources and fostering an inclusive environment. Kenia has spearheaded initiatives at her school to address mental health stigmas, particularly within the Latinx community. Inspired by her family experiences and the loss of a cousin to mental health struggles, she launched Be Well Wednesdays at her school, where she promotes open dialogue about mental

health. She’s also worked with her school to bring therapy dogs on campus. Her advocacy extends to public policy. She is actively working on legislation to support sexual health resources for marginalized communities and recognizing illiteracy as a national health crisis.

Kiera Latulippe , a senior at Valley Center High School, won in the Public Safety Advocacy category. As the lone survivor of a tragic DUI accident that took the lives of her family members, she is determined to make a difference by raising awareness about the dangers of drunk driving. She brought the impactful Every 15 Minutes program to her school, a two-day event sponsored by the California Highway Patrol that educates students about the consequences of impaired driving. Kiera shared her story hoping to prevent similar tragedies in her community. She openly speaks to her peers about her experiences, offering support and inspiration to those who may face their own challenges. Kiera’s advocacy, determination, and leadership make her a remarkable voice for public safety, reminding her community that every effort to save a life is worth it. Her goal is to become an educator like her father.

Kimmy Dang , a first-year college student at Yale University, won in the Perseverance category. As a first-generation college student and the eldest of three siblings, Kimmy embraced the role of role model and caretaker after the passing of her father when she was in eighth grade. Kimmy helps her family with tasks like translating and managing paperwork, all while balancing her academic aspirations. She sought out numerous scholarships during high school to fund her college education— allowing her to attend Yale without financially burdening her

mother. She founded a first-generation college club to support other students in navigating the college application and financial aid process and helped many of her classmates achieve college acceptance, fostering a supportive network for future first-generation students. Her resilience shines as she continues to inspire her family and community, proving that circumstances don’t define one’s potential.

Kristan Laureta, a senior at Morse High School, won in the LGBTQ+ Activism category. As a proud transgender and Filipina woman, Kristan has taken an active role in championing LGBTQ+ rights within her school and community. Her advocacy includes organizing awareness campaigns and speaking to peers and teachers about the importance of safe spaces for self-expression, especially for those exploring their gender and sexual identities. Kristan uses social media to spread messages of self-acceptance, often posting videos aimed at uplifting school spirit and reminding her peers to persist in their passions. Her own journey through bullying and adversity has made her a resilient voice for others in similar situations. Kristan is committed to creating a future where all youth can feel safe to be themselves. She dreams of becoming an architect, designing spaces where inclusivity is built into every corner.

Leanne Fan , a senior at Westview High School, won in the Scientific Innovation category She is celebrated for her groundbreaking work in the field of biomedical engineering. Her passion for improving healthcare accessibility led her to develop a unique light-therapy technique aimed at accelerating wound healing, an achievement that earned her the Senior Division Grand Award at the Greater San Diego

Science and Engineering Fair. This led to an invitation from NASA to expand her research into the effects of microgravity on wound healing, exploring how light-therapy can be adapted to the unique environment of outer space where injuries pose a significant challenge due to delayed healing. Leanne’s research offers promising solutions to enhance astronaut care during missions. She mentors younger students, volunteers in local STEM outreach programs and encourages her peers to explore the impact they can make through science.

Milan Shah , a senior at Westview High School, won in the category of Civic Engagement. Milan has established himself as a prominent voice for social justice in his community. Currently serving as the Chair of the San Diego Youth Commission, Milan advises city council members and works to empower his peers, ensuring that youth perspectives are represented in local government. As the only youth commissioner on the Human Relations Commission, he played a pivotal role in rewriting its bylaws to promote respectful civil discourse, an achievement that has fostered inclusivity and strengthened community dialogue. He also works as a youth attorney for the Community Youth Court and addresses generational issues such as drug use and mental health challenges. Additionally, Milan contributes to research on California immigration policies in collaboration with UCSD. He uses film as a platform for connecting communities and amplifying underrepresented voices. Milan is motivated to continue pushing boundaries and advocating for positive change.

Samuel Pardo Improta , an eighth grader at Roosevelt International Middle School, won in the

Most Promising Teen category. He is a young leader with a passion for social justice, community advocacy and innovation. He aspires to launch his own prosthetics company, creating accessible solutions for those in need. Samuel has already begun designing prosthetic models, showcasing his commitment to improving lives through technology. Inspired by his mother’s resilience and her dedication to social causes, Samuel is a proud member of the Chavez Club, where he engages in meaningful discussions on issues like human trafficking and mental health. His community involvement started in seventh grade and continues to shape his identity and goals. Samuel envisions a future filled with impact and purpose.

Santos Hidalgo Aguero , a senior at Gompers Preparatory Academy, won in the Community Service category. Santos is recognized for his commitment to giving back, especially to the younger generation. As a soccer coach for a local girls’ team, he finds joy in mentoring and supporting kids. At school, he serves as ASB president, where he works to strengthen school spirit and foster a supportive environment for his peers. Identifying as bisexual, he initially struggled with acceptance within his conservative family but he learned to embrace his identity and focus on self-acceptance in his sophomore year. From coaching to cheerleading—where he’s the only male on the varsity team—Santos’s courage and determination are evident in every role he takes on.

Siddharth Yelisetty , a student at Mt. Carmel High School, won in the category of Community Collaboration. Siddharth has made it his mission to provide resources, mentorship and opportunities to young students eager to explore robotics and computer

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science. Siddharth founded Keep It Simple, a robotics team that has since grown into a successful program where he mentors younger students, encouraging them to engage with STEM in accessible, practical ways. He has reached over 1,200 students and families in San Diego with his program, inspiring many to pursue their interests in technology. As an Eagle Scout, he embodies the values of service and leadership, and has engaged with city leaders, including San Diego’s mayor, to discuss the importance of STEM in future workforce development.

Sophie Zeng , a student at The Bishop’s School, won in the Social Conscience category. A native San Diegan with a passion for environmental stewardship, Sophie co-founded Project Arise, a non-profit organization dedicated to combating invasive species and reducing the impact of wildfires. Her project partners with park rangers, local agencies and peers to raise awareness and provide innovative solutions for preserving San Diego’s natural beauty. She believes in the power of

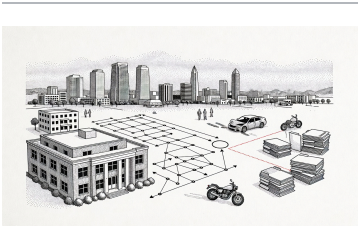
collaboration and has worked tirelessly to show that teens can make a significant impact on their communities. A talented filmmaker, Sophie uses her documentaries to shed light on important social issues. Her first documentary, Priceless Pride, critically examines corporate practices during Pride Month, exploring how companies engage with the LGBTQ+ community. Sophie envisions a future where young people lead with empathy and a sense of responsibility toward their communities and the environment.

Vibha Yadav Ganji , a junior at Del Norte High School and a twin, won in the Cultural Representation category. Vibha draws strength from her Indian heritage, which she proudly honors while navigating life in the United States. Having moved from India at a young age, Vibha’s upbringing is enriched by her family’s customs, language and values, which she strives to keep alive in her daily life. This motivates her dedication to ensuring that diverse cultural identities are recognized, respected and celebrated. Vibha cofounded the non-profit STIGMA Today to address societal issues often overlooked or stigmatized, promoting

open conversations that build bridges between cultural and social perspectives. Through her work, Vibha encourages young people to embrace self-acceptance and take pride in their cultural backgrounds, helping them find their place while honoring their roots.

Vidha Ganji , a junior at Del Norte High School and Vibha’s twin, won in the Public Health Advocacy category. Driven by a love of writing and a passion for health, Vidha cofounded the non-profit, STIGMA Today, aiming to dismantle stigmas and educate communities about critical health issues. Her work spans research projects, advocacy and community engagement, where she merges her interest in epidemiology with her commitment to public wellbeing. Vidha says one of her proudest moments is completing a piece of writing knowing it has the potential to inform and inspire others. Her greatest challenge, she notes, has been learning to communicate effectively with diverse groups, a skill she’s actively honing through her advocacy efforts. In a perfect world, Vidha envisions a future where mental health is widely recognized and self-acceptance becomes easier for her generation.

County of San Diego news release · Nov 20, 2024



Illustration

COUNTY

County Receives Grant to Improve Data Reporting in Traffic Fatalities

The County Department of the Medical Examiner received a \$600,000 grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to enhance toxicology data reporting for cases involving motor-vehicle related deaths. The grant program runs through September 2025.

Grant funds will pay for toxicologist training as well as method development and validation for newly purchased toxicology equipment. This equipment will be used for the analysis and identification of alcohol and drugs in postmortem specimens from cases involving motor-vehicle related deaths.

The Medical Examiner toxicology laboratory currently processes approximately 4,500 cases annually, with around 300 cases directly related to motor-vehicle fatalities. This grant will enhance the laboratory’s ability to assist in the determination of the cause of death with greater accuracy and efficiency.

Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

County of San Diego news release · Nov 14, 2024

COUNTY

County Receives \$250,000 for Child Safety Seat Education Program

The County’s Health and Human Services Agency received a California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) grant to support its efforts to educate parents and caregivers about the importance of child safety seats. The grant program runs through September 2025.

“We are thrilled to receive this funding to support our child safety seat education program,” said County Health and Human Services Agency Community Operations Officer Barbara Jiménez. “Proper use of child car seats can dramatically reduce the risk of injury or death in a crash. With this grant, we can provide hands-on training, resources, and support so that every family has the knowledge and tools to keep their children safe.”

Grant funds will be used for a variety of community outreach events, education classes, distribution of child safety seats, and training on the installation and use of child safety seats. The car seat safety program includes:

Child safety seat inspection events and education classes.

Child safety seats at no-cost for families in need.

Partnering with local organizations on car seat safety community outreach efforts in underserved communities.

Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

County of San Diego news release · Nov 14, 2024

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

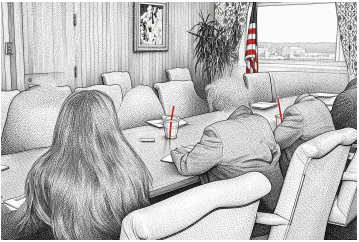


Illustration from a photo by Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of the Chief Human Capital O · Wikimedia Commons, Public domain

BUSINESS

Small Business Resilience Workshop

The Small Business Resilience Workshops are part of the Chamber’s Small Business Series, designed to empower small businesses with the tools and resources they need to thrive in today’s ever-changing landscape.

The Chamber’s last Small Business Resiliency Workshop of the year took

place on November 20 th and featured local, state, and federal experts who provided invaluable insights and guidance on a variety of topics aimed at enhancing the resilience and success of small businesses. Attendees heard from the California Office of the Small Business Advocate, the National Federation of Independent Business, and the County’s Office of Labor Standards and Enforcements.

Remember : Small Business Saturday is November 30 th , just in time for holiday shopping! Support your local businesses and shop small. Information about Small Business Saturday can be found here.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Nov 20, 2024

BUSINESS

State Proposition Recap

While there’s a lot of election news to digest, good news included that the three propositions that the Chamber weighed in on are trending in the directions we advocated for. Chamber-opposed Proposition 33, the measure to repeal bans on local rent control, has officially failed. It had brought forward infeasible proposals to solve our housing crisis and would have otherwise increased challenges by expanding rent control throughout the state, with the potential to greatly

affect housing production. Proposition 33 was a revisit of the failed Proposition 10 that voters overwhelmingly rejected in 2018 and 2022.

Chamber-supported Proposition 35 and Proposition 36 have both passed. Proposition 35 ensures much-needed funding will continue by permanently extending the Managed Care Organization (MCO) tax, a tax on health insurance companies, and will dedicate spending to Medi-Cal. It addresses our most urgent health care priorities by securing dedicated, ongoing funding to protect and expand access to care. Proposition 36 both reforms Proposition 47 and adds new penalties for drug

use and a broad range of theft offenses, as well as new sentencing enhancements that would apply to any type of crime. Proposition 36 will contribute to making our communities safer and will hold repeat retail theft and drug traffickers accountable. Chamber Executive Director of Public Affairs, Justine Murray, participated in local efforts to promote Proposition 35 and Proposition 36, including speaking at and attending, press conferences in support to ensure the San Diego chamber’s voice is heard on state measures.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Nov 18, 2024

BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

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| <b>BUSINESS</b><br><b>Chamber Meets with U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar</b><br>On November 19, the Chamber hosted a meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Ken Salazar, and U.S. Consul General in Tijuana, Christopher Teal. The Ambassador’s visit was in follow-up to the Chamber’s delegation trip to Mexico City last month, where the Chamber was joined by over 120 business and community leaders in continued joint efforts to champion U.S.-Mexico relations and advance issues critical to the success of the binational business community. Read about the Amabassador’s visit in the San Diego Union-Tribune here .<br>The Chamber looks forward to continued collaboration with stakeholders on both sides of the border to enhance our region’s global competitiveness and advocate for the projects and policies that are vital to our businesses and community.<br><small>San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Nov 19, 2024</small> |  |
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THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Taxpayers get the bill for teen praise

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

Opinion — the views of the writers named, not news reporting

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| <b>ABOUT THIS PAPER</b><br>San Diego Newsline covers downtown San Diego first — | City Hall, the Gaslamp Quarter, East Village, Little Italy, Barrio Logan and the waterfront — and the county around it. Every item names its source; read the originals | and our standards at sandiegonewslne.com. |  |
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MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

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| <b>COUNTY</b><br><b>Estrella Provides Nearly 100 units of Affordable Housing in San Marcos</b><br>Dozens of people and families, all who have up to 80% of area median income , are moving into Estrella, the newest affordable housing development in San Marcos.<br>Partnering with the City of San Marcos, Affirmed Housing Group and others, the County helped fund the project with \$2.64 million from the HOME program, which allocates federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the County to support affordable housing developments.<br>“The County is all in on increasing affordable housing across our region” said David Estrella, director of the County’s Housing and Community Development Services (no relation to the housing). “Having an affordable place to live in all parts of the region gives families the opportunity to live near their kids’ school and recreation areas, helping these families and North County thrive.”<br>The Estrella development sits on land that used to house the aging 70-unit Mariposa Apartments. The County worked with Affirmed Housing to demolish the old building and redevelop the site with two complexes, Alora and Estrella, offering a combined 196 affordable units.<br>Estrella broke ground in April 2023. For waitlist information please call 1-800-801-8440, Ext. 7151.<br>Since 2017, the County has invested more than \$314 million into affordable housing, using excess land, its Innovative Housing Trust Fund, and other state, federal, and local funding sources administered by the County. Those funds have helped open doors to nearly 2,500 homes with 3,100 more on the way.<br><small>County of San Diego news release · Nov 20, 2024</small> |  |
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MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

COUNTY  
Three Flu Vaccine Myths as Flu Season Ramps up in San Diego County

Flu cases are on the rise in San Diego County. Last week, 116 cases were recorded compared to 77 the week before. To date, 1,209 cases have been tracked this year, up from 733 at this time last flu season.

Starting in late October 2024, data from wastewater testing is showing increases in influenza virus detection. Wastewater monitoring is used to provide additional information about the presence or spread of disease in our community.

“We are going to have a busy flu season. With holiday gatherings approaching it is especially important to be vigilant by covering your cough, washing your hands and getting vaccinated against the flu,” said Dr. Ankita Kadakia, interim County public health officer. “Additionally, whenever possible, it is important to refrain from going to any gathering when you know you are sick.”

The flu vaccine has for decades been the best protection we have against the virus. In that time, it has also generated some myths that are important to address.

Flu Vaccine Myth #1 – The flu isn’t that serious. I don’t need the vaccine

It’s true that many people get the flu and feel better within a week or two. But some people can, and do, get seriously sick and even die. Last flu season nearly 20,000 people got the flu, 1,500 were hospitalized and 60 San Diegans died including two infants. The flu vaccine can help protect you and your loved ones who are most at risk of getting seriously sick like young children or older adults.

Flu Vaccine Myth #2 – The flu vaccine will give me the flu

The flu vaccine cannot make you sick with the flu. It is made of inactive or dead viruses. The nasal spray vaccine is made of weakened viruses. You may have some

side effects from the flu vaccine or nasal spray vaccine like a sore arm or even a headache, muscle aches or a runny nose. These symptoms should not last long and are much less severe than actually getting the flu.

Flu Vaccine Myth #3 – I had the vaccine and still got the flu, so it doesn’t work

Scientists spend a lot of time predicting which flu strains should go into the vaccine each year. Flu viruses can change or mutate similar to other respiratory viruses. Some individuals may pick up a strain that is not in the vaccine however most strains that are active during a flu season are in the vaccine. Even though you may still get sick, you are more likely to have milder flu symptoms. It takes about two weeks to build up the antibodies that protect you. Even with a chance you will still get sick, it is still really important to get the vaccine each year and improve your chances of avoiding getting sick, and maybe even accidentally giving it to the people around you.

If you want to learn more, the County Health and Human Services Agency publishes the Respiratory Viruses Surveillance report, which tracks key flu, COVID-19, and RSV indicators and summarizes respiratory virus surveillance in the region.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a flu shot every year. The CDC also indicates you can get a flu and COVID-19 vaccination at the same time, including a booster dose. The COVID-19 vaccine does not work against the flu or vice versa.

The flu vaccine is especially important for people at higher risk of having serious complications from the virus.

People with chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and lung disease, even if symptoms are under control

People who live with or care for others who are at higher risk

The influenza vaccine is

available at doctors’ offices and retail pharmacies and is covered by medical insurance. People with no health care coverage can get vaccinated at one of the County’s six public health centers or a local community clinic. To find the nearest location, visit the County’s Flu Vaccine Locations page or call 2-1-1 San Diego.

In addition to getting vaccinated, people should also do the following to avoid getting sick:

Use hand sanitizers, if unable to wash hands;

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;

If you are sick, stay home and avoid contact with others.

County of San Diego news release · Nov 20, 2024

COUNTY  
Toys for Tots Time Returns at 5 County Airports

The hap-happiest season of all is here again. And nothing makes the holiday season happier than putting smiles on the faces of children.

You can get that happy feeling with the help of the U.S. Marine Corps and County of San Diego.

All you have to do is drop off a new, unwrapped toy in a Toys for Tots donation box at one of five County airports.

Donation boxes are out and will remain up until Saturday, Dec. 14 at those five airports: McClellan Airport in Carlsbad, Gillespie Field in El Cajon, Fallbrook Airpark in Fallbrook, Ramona Airport in Ramona and Borrego Valley Airport in Borrego Springs.

All donations will be given out to children in San Diego County communities. Pilots are welcome to fly in to deliver their donations at the airports.

Donations being accepted are new, unwrapped toys, bikes, games, dolls, stuffed animals and other things to play with that will help brighten up a child’s holidays.

As they have done in past years, Fallbrook Airpark and Ramona Airport will hold special Toys for Tots collection events in

December. Uniformed Marines will be at those events to personally collect your gifts.

The first event is scheduled to be held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 7, at Ramona Airport, located at 2450 Montecito Road in Ramona. The second is scheduled to take place from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. the next weekend, Saturday, Dec. 14, at Fallbrook Airpark, located at 2155 Air Park Road in Fallbrook.

So, get that good holiday feeling! Join the County of San Diego and the U.S. Marine Corps and put smiles on the faces of local kids by dropping off a new toy for a child.

Borrego Valley Airport: 1820 Palm Canyon Dr, Borrego Springs, CA, 92004.

Fallbrook Airpark: 2155 South Mission Road, Fallbrook, CA 92028.

Gillespie Field: 1960 Joe Crosson Drive, El Cajon, CA, 92020.

McClellan Palomar Airport: 2192 Palomar Airport Road, Carlsbad, CA, 92011.

Ramona Airport: 2450 Montecito Road, Ramona, CA, 92065.

County of San Diego news release · Nov 18, 2024

COUNTY  
County Hears from Nearly 2,000 People on Impacts of Tijuana River Valley Pollution

Nearly 2,000 people who live, work or play around the Tijuana River Valley and South San Diego County beaches have completed the federal Assessment of Chemical Exposures (ACE) survey about how the pollution has impacted their lives.

The County had set a goal of hearing from at least 2,000 people through the ACE survey and plans to leave the survey open through Nov.22 to encourage those who have not yet completed the survey to do so.

The County is particularly interested in gathering additional information about exposures children may have experienced while living,

going to school or playing in the South Bay.

“We are delighted to reach nearly 2,000 surveys already, but we know there are so many more people impacted by the sewage crisis in the area and every one of their voices is really important,” said Dr. Ankita Kadakia, County Interim Public Health Officer. “We’re not just collecting important data, we’re hearing directly from people about how their everyday lives have changed and that’s important as we look at further steps in addressing this crisis with our partners.”

The Assessment of Chemical Exposures (ACE) survey is for people who work, live or have visited the areas most impacted by the sewage pollution. It asks about physical and mental health effects, health services used and medical history. Pet health is also included in the survey.

The ACE survey is available online and takes about 20 minutes to complete. Parents or guardians should complete the survey for themselves and each of their children under 18 years old. For older adults and others who need assistance, call (800) 339-4661 to complete the survey over the phone.

The County opened the ACE survey on Oct. 21. in partnership with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry which is a federal public health agency within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

County teams have been doing outreach at community events, through social media and newsletters, and with its partners in schools, businesses, health centers and community organizations.

The ACE survey followed the CDC’s Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response or CASPER , a household survey focused on the Imperial Beach and Nestor communities that took place the weekend of Oct. 17.

County of San Diego news release · Nov 15, 2024

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