

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# MAY DAY: AN IMPORTANT BUT UNCELEBRATED HOLIDAY HERE

The first of May — May Day — is a holiday that marks the start of spring. But it's also a day of worker solidarity and protest. While May Day is an official holiday in 66 countries around the world — and unofficially celebrated in many more — you may be out of luck if you're looking for May Day festivities here today. It's rarely commemorated in the U.S.

Still, May Day is an important part of our history, dating back to the Industrial Revolution. Working conditions were deplorable then, and hours were long; thousands of men, women and children died every year as a result. Labor unions came together to demand an eight-hour workday, organizing a nationwide strike. It happened on May 1, 1886.

More than 350,000 workers walked out of their jobs across the country. In Chicago, the action was part of what became known as the Haymarket affair, a protest that turned violent and deadly. In its aftermath, eight men labeled as anarchists were convicted in a controversial trial. May 1 was declared an interna-

tional holiday for labor by the International Socialist Conference.

President Grover Cleveland — fearing the holiday would build support for communism and other radical causes — moved Labor Day to the first Monday in September. President Dwight Eisenhower later named May 1 “Loyalty Day.”

Nearly 150 years after Haymarket, worker unrest continues. In the last year, labor unions have organized 40 strikes at companies including Kellogg's and John Deere, seeking better pay, working conditions and retirement benefits. The “Great Resignation” saw a record 47.4 million people voluntarily quit in 2021, emboldened by the large number of jobs that are unfilled. The trend is still going strong.

In California, legislation is working its way through state government to reduce the standard workweek to 32 hours for companies with more than 500 workers. There would be no corresponding cut in pay; employees who work additional hours would be compensated at a rate no less

than 1.5 times their regular hourly wage.

The legislation responds to an outcry from workers seeking better work-life balance — certain to be one of the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And while it's not a bread-and-butter issue, many more people today want to work for a company that has a conscience. Afzel Aziz, who runs a global brand purpose consultancy, wrote a 2020 article in Forbes called “The Power of Purpose.” In it, he cited two studies. One found that two-thirds of millennials — who will make up 75 percent of the workforce by 2025 — won't take a job if their employer doesn't have a strong corporate social responsibility policy. Another study described the next generation, Gen-Z, as “the first generation to prioritize purpose over salary.” They want their employer's values to match their own.

We saw corporate consciousness play out in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder and nationwide protests two years ago. Companies acknowledged they needed to take a more active

role in confronting systemic racism; the largest among them pledged nearly \$50 billion to begin addressing economic inequality and other disparities.

In Florida, The Walt Disney Company has found itself in the thick of a culture war after deciding to speak up about the state's “Parental Rights in Education” bill, better known as the “Don't Say Gay” measure. The company was quiet (as a mouse) when the legislation was under consideration; when it passed, Disney workers staged walkouts in protest.

Disney's chief executive swiftly apologized to employees for not taking a stronger stand. Then, the company released a statement saying that its goal is for the law to be repealed by the legislature or struck down by the courts. Disney employs roughly 80,000 people in the Orlando area and produces \$75.2 billion in annual economic impact to central Florida.

In response, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a law last week that revokes Disney's self-governance status — an enticement given

to the company by the state in the 1960s to build Disney World there. But the language that established the so-called Reedy Creek Improvement District says it can't be dissolved unless the state pays off its outstanding bond debt, currently about \$1 billion.

One congressman has said he will fight extension of Disney's Mickey Mouse copyright, which comes up on Jan. 1, 2024, in part because of the company's “hypocritical, woke corporate actions.” Escalation seems inevitable: The idea of DeSantis and Disney coming together to discuss their differences is as imaginary as Mickey himself.

It's uncertain which side will win this latest battle in the Florida culture wars. But for now, we can celebrate a day that's given voice to our workers. It's a voice that still needs to be heard.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com)

## VALENTA • Community and region's fire departments rallied to support the family

FROM B1 she said.

“It's not fully understood why firefighters have a higher risk for melanoma but it's being recognized more,” she said.

While numerous studies have been conducted over the past three decades on the cancer in firefighters, Valenta said more could be done on the prevention side. She hopes that through the Andy Valenta Melanoma Foundation (AVMF), her late husband's name will be remembered not for how he died but for how his foundation saves future lives.

“The impact of this loss will ripple through the rest of my life and my girls' lives,” she said. “The thought of other families going through this, when it's something we may be able to prevent, breaks my heart. Andy was such an incredible person who made such an impact during his life. Through this foundation, his tragedy will

be able to transform lives and continue to have a positive impact in this world. I'm so proud to honor him in this way.”

The Valentas met 13 years ago at Hennessey's Tavern in Carlsbad. Andy was there to celebrate his new job with the Vista Fire Department. Caylie was there on vacation from her home in Michigan. By the end of the evening, Andy told Caylie he would marry her someday. That day arrived on Feb. 7, 2014.

She describes her late husband as an athletic, energetic man who saw firefighting as his calling. Caylie works as a physician's assistant. She's also a melanoma survivor and she lost a family member to melanoma. But when her husband began experiencing severe headaches and uncontrollable vomiting in December 2020, the Valentas — and the doctors he met with — didn't immediately suspect cancer.



A portrait of Vista firefighter Andy Valenta, his wife, Caylie, and daughters Lily and Grace.

Then in early January 2021, he felt some enlarged lymph nodes in his armpits. A subsequent CT scan revealed what they feared: stage 4 melanoma had caused dozens of tumors throughout his body, from his liver and lungs to his spine and chest cavity. He underwent aggressive treatment to battle the disease

and the tumors in his body shrunk, but they multiplied and grew with rapid and unchecked progress in his brain. He went into hospice and died at home on April 25, 2021.

During his cancer battle, the community and fire departments throughout the region rallied to support the

family, doing fire truck brigades to the Valentas' home in Temecula and raising nearly \$150,000 on GoFundMe. Caylie Valenta used some of the money raised from that campaign to launch the foundation.

Working with a group of firefighters and friends, she launched AVMF earlier this year. Valenta is now looking for medical professionals who would be willing to volunteer their expertise doing skin screenings for melanoma. Her first goal is to set up annual screenings for firefighters at every fire department in North County, as a start. Then she would like to expand the service to San Diego fire departments and beyond. She asks any medical professionals looking to volunteer to reach out to her directly at [contact@avmelanoma.org](mailto:contact@avmelanoma.org).

She said response among firefighters to the foundation's mission has been universally positive. Although

nothing can replace the loss of her soul mate, Valenta said the creation of the foundation has helped her cope with her grief.

“This has really helped a lot,” she said. “I wouldn't say it's providing closure. There will never be closure from a loss like this. You don't get over it, you just grow with it. I want his name to live on and have a huge space in our girls' hearts.”

The kickoff fundraiser will take place from 4 to 9 p.m. Monday at Belching Beaver Brewery & Tavern, 302 E. Broadway, in Vista. Belching Beaver is brewing up a new batch of True Grit, an India Pale Ale it created last year in collaboration with Vista firefighters, to raise money for the Valenta family. Beer and T-shirt sales will benefit the Andy Valenta Melanoma Foundation. For details, visit [avmelanoma.org](http://avmelanoma.org).

[pam.krager@suniontribune.com](mailto:pam.krager@suniontribune.com)

## BOARD

FROM B1 experience leading fundraising campaigns, managing budgets, strategic planning and building partnerships to leverage community and government resources for schools.

She said she would focus on closing opportunity and achievement gaps by training effective principals and creating more community schools — schools that provide health, housing and other services for students and families.

She said she would also prioritize improving the district's transparency and communication with stakeholders. She cited parent outrage over issues such as the district's bungled mental health day last fall and Patrick Henry High's elimination of several advanced courses as recent examples of the district's shortfalls in communication. Patrick Henry has since restored some courses.

“As I talk to every stakeholder ... nobody is happy about the district's communications, nobody feels like the district is being transparent nobody feels like they're part of the conversation, and everyone feels like an afterthought,” Hazan said.

### GODWIN HIGA

**Neighborhood:** Talmadge

**Political party:** Democratic

**Priorities:** Develop trauma-informed, restorative justice schools

**Endorsements:** Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice Executive Director Jesse Kohler; San Diego Cultural Arts Alliance CEO Linda Sheridan; Van Ness Feldman Native Affairs Attorney Dan Press; Harvard Law School professor Mike Gregory; Hawaii state Rep. Lisa Kitagawa; former Hawaii area superintendent Ann Mahi; retired San Diego Unified teacher Linda K. Williams

Godwin Higa, 69, is an Oahu native who worked as a teacher, vice principal and principal for San Diego Unified for 27 years. He is now retired from public education but teaches at Alliant University and consults with schools on implementing restorative justice programs.

Higa said restorative justice in schools is his

passion. The idea is to help students deal with trauma in their lives — trauma that may come from poverty, abuse or other factors — that may be causing them to act out at or miss school, rather than punish them for doing so. Higa said as a former principal, he knows how to create a positive and supportive school environment, which he said is needed for higher attendance, teacher retention and higher academic performance.

Higa was last principal at Cherokee Point Elementary. He said he worked with San Diego State University to have student teachers work at Cherokee Point and learn classroom management strategies so that teachers don't have to resort to suspensions. He also had San Diego State social work students train at Cherokee Point. The school provided food, shoes, backpacks and other resources for families.

Under Higa's leadership, Cherokee Point eliminated student suspensions by the time he left the school in 2017.

“We asked (students), ‘Hey, what's happening to you?’ Not, ‘What's wrong with you?’” Higa said. “Instead of suspending students, we gave them resources.”

### JOSE VELAZQUEZ

**Neighborhood:** Mission Valley

**Political party:** Republican

**Priorities:** Overhaul ethnic studies curriculum, improve reading and math proficiency

**Endorsements:** San Diego County Republican Party; Lincoln Club of San Diego County; San Diego Asian Americans for Equality

Jose Velazquez, 48, has two children who graduated from San Diego Unified in 2020 and 2021. For about 11 years he served in the U.S. Navy, where he was an instructor, and he now works as a vehicle service technician.

Velazquez echoed arguments from some conservatives who oppose school ethnic studies programs. He said he thinks San Diego Unified's ethnic studies curriculum is racially divisive and tells White students that they did something



Shana Hazan



Godwin Higa



Lily Higman



Cody Petterson



Jose Velazquez



Becca Williams

Diego Education Association; San Diego Unified School Board Trustees McQuary, Richard Barrera and Sabrina

Bazzo; former board trustee John Lee Evans; San Diego County Democratic Party; several Democratic clubs; several Democratic elected officials including state Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins, county Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, county Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer

Cody Petterson, 46, was born and raised in La Jolla and went to San Diego Unified schools. He has two children who attend Torrey Pines Elementary.

He manages intergovernmental affairs for county Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer and is an anthropology lecturer at UC San Diego.

For five years he has advocated at the federal, state and local levels on progressive issues related to education and the environment. He has also worked for five years with a local group called Educate for the Future that supports and trains school board members.

He said his priority would be to advocate for more state and federal funding for schools.

As a member of Torrey Pines' school councils, he said he has seen how the school has received less money from the district in recent years to cover many needs such as substitute teachers, counselors and visual performing arts classes.

“We need additional per-pupil funding. That is self-evident to anybody who's engaged in our education system. That reality's obvious to any teacher,” Petterson said.

Petterson also said the district needs to do more to help schools deal with the pains of downsizing amid declining enrollment, which he said is largely driven by San Diego's lack of affordable housing.

Other things Petterson wants to do include increasing the district's environmental sustainability, creating more community schools, expanding pre-kindergarten, increasing student representation in gifted education, and improving district communi-

cation with families. **BECCA WILLIAMS**

**Neighborhood:** Pacific Beach

**Political party:** Republican

**Priorities:** Improve student reading and math proficiency

**Endorsements:** San Diego County Republican Party; Let Them Breathe Founder Sharon McKee-man; Coronado Mayor Richard Bailey; El Cajon Mayor Bill Wells; county Supervisor Joel Anderson; Californians For Equal Rights Foundation President Frank Xu; Lincoln Club of San Diego County; California Women's Leadership Association

Becca Williams, 31, is a Wisconsin native who moved to San Diego from Texas in 2019. Williams has two children, a 3-year-old and 1-year-old, who are not yet in school. She is a manager with the K-12 curriculum company Kingfisher Education.

Williams, who was a classroom teacher for one year, founded a network of three charter schools in 2016 called Valor Public Schools in Austin, Texas. The network focuses on classical education and liberal arts.

Williams said she is running for school board because she sees more families opting out of district schools in favor of other options like private school. She said parents left because they were frustrated that San Diego Unified kept schools closed for 18 months at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She said the side effects of the closures, such as online abuse, were more harmful to kids than COVID itself.

Parents are also leaving, she said, because they don't like what San Diego Unified is teaching about race. She said she thinks the district is teaching ethnic studies in a way that views all of history through the lens of race, makes people admit they are part of racism, and divides people based on their race.

If she is elected, she wants to make sure the district spends money on basics of reading, writing and math instead.

“When I talk to parents, there's a concern about political ideologies replacing the classic basics of learning, how to read and write,” Williams said.

[kristen.taketa@suniontribune.com](mailto:kristen.taketa@suniontribune.com)