

# Local

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**DIANE BELL**

Columnist

## Shell garden house owner celebrates 101st birthday

For decades, a seashell garden on Rosecrans Street in Point Loma has attracted curiosity seekers.

Strangers would walk up to the front door of the house owned by **Frank and Elisa Mendes** and ring the doorbell. They would ask about the “garden” — an intricate creation of seashells carefully cemented together in shape of exotic plants.

Frank died in 1997 at age 75 and, for years, Elisa continued to greet the surprise visitors and answer their questions.

Advancing age has taken its toll and, lacking the mobility of days gone by, Elisa stopped opening the door in recent years.

On Tuesday, the Portugal-born great-grandmother turned 101. She lives with a caregiver now but still resides in the house with the seashell garden that she has occupied for 70 years.

Due to COVID-19, her family couldn't have the big celebration planned to mark her 100th birthday last March and had to settle instead for a more modest drive-by salute. So this year, her extended family gathered to celebrate at her house and at the Point Loma home of her son, **Dan Mendes**, a retired tuna fisherman like his late dad.

The garden was Elisa's husband's idea and hobby after he retired from more than three decades of tuna fishing in the Pacific Ocean, often in the Galápagos Islands region off the coast of Ecuador.

On his return from voyages he brought an assortment of shells — clam, periwinkle, limpet, conch, abalone — and coral, long before the Galápagos Marine Reserve was created to protect it.

Frank removed the grass and most plants from their front yard at 222 Rosecrans St. and began constructing his work of art.

“He liked to work with his hands. He could build things and repair things and create things,” Dan says. “The garden was all in his imagination. He never drew anything. He just created it.”

SEE **DIANE BELL** • B10

## HEARING ON ASH ST. SUIT SET FOR FRI.

Ruling will help define what happens next with downtown high-rise

BY **JEFF MCDONALD**

### SAN DIEGO

San Diego resident and taxpayer John Gordon says in a lawsuit that the lease-to-own contract city officials signed for the former Semptra Energy headquarters at 101 Ash St. is illegal and tens of millions of dollars in payments should be refunded.

City Attorney Mara Elliott says the Gordon complaint should be rejected because the city filed its own case against the building's landlord — even though that suit does not demand the agreement be canceled or that money be returned.

The two sides are scheduled to square off at a San Diego Superior Court hearing Friday, and the ruling from Judge Joel R. Wohlfeil will go a long way toward defining what happens next with the troubled downtown high-rise.

“The city has a mandatory duty to protect the right of San Diego vot-

ers to approve city debt,” states a motion filed last week by Maria Severson, one of Gordon's lawyers. “The California Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the electorate before a municipality may incur an obligation more than its yearly revenue,” she wrote, referring to the project's revenue.

Lawyers defending the city argue that Gordon has no business bringing a lawsuit, in large part because Elliott filed a case of her own against the landlord and its lender two months after the Gordon complaint landed in court.

“The city is already pursuing litigation in this court against the defendants named by Gordon here regarding the same transaction and events,” attorney John Schena wrote Friday in a demurrer, which is an objection to a complaint based on an alleged lack of validity.

“Accordingly, Gordon does not have standing to usurp the city's exercise of discretion and insert his discretion as to how to pursue the litigation,” Schena wrote.

Elliott adopted a different strategy in the suit her office filed.

SEE **ASH ST.** • B5



JARROD VALLIERE • UT

**Bob Dominguez**, who attended Chicano Park Day every year as a boy, created the photo book chronicling its foundation and events.

## PHOTOS TELL CULTURAL STORY

Second edition of ‘La Tierra Mia: A Chicano Park Story’ shares images, memories of park from those who love it

BY **ANDREA LOPEZ-VILLAFANA**

### SAN DIEGO

For those who grew up in Barrio Logan and several surrounding communities, it's a given to participate in one of the largest celebrations in the area — Chicano Park Day.

Chicano Park is nestled under the San Diego-Coronado bridge in Barrio Logan, a community located south of downtown. The freeway's concrete pillars over the park, a national historic landmark, are covered with dozens of colorful murals

that depict Chicano culture, leaders and movements.

Chicano Park Day is an annual celebration that typically takes place in April. There's music, food and Aztec dancers. It's a celebration of the anniversary of the park's “takeover,” a protest held by activists and residents who fought to keep the city from building a highway patrol station at the site in 1970.

Former Logan Heights resident Bob Dominguez was one of thousands who attended Chicano Park Day every year with family and friends when he was a little boy.

The memories of the park have stayed with him over the years, and they were the driving force behind “La Tierra Mia: A Chicano Park Story,” a photo book that chronicles the park's foundation and numerous celebrations over the last 50 years. Dominguez is set to release a second edition next week. It will include additional images and short notes from individuals in the photographs.

“Having a physical archive of Chicano resistance, pride, and joy is ultimately something I think can have a lasting cultural impact, par-

ticularly in a world where so many things are fleeting,” Dominguez said. “Maybe through these artifacts of the past we can start to formulate some idea for how we build our future within the community and beyond.”

Dominguez collaborated with dozens of activists, artists and residents to build a collection of photographs for the book. Some of the images are from 1970 and were provided by special collections and archives belonging to muralists and activists.

SEE **STORY** • B5

## S.D. SEWER RATES MAY GO UP 28% FOR SOME

Increases over four years would be for single-family homes

BY **DAVID GARRICK**

### SAN DIEGO

Sewer rates for San Diegans in single-family homes would increase nearly 19 percent next year and a total of 28 percent over the next four years under a new city proposal.

But rates for most businesses, condominiums and apartments would go down next year and remain mostly steady over the next four years under the proposal, which is based on a comprehensive new analysis of future sewer system costs.

The analysis found that single-family homeowners are not paying nearly enough to cover the overall maintenance and expansion costs of the city's sewer system, which will soon begin purifying treated sewage.

SEE **SEWER** • B3



COURTESY OF EMILIE LEDIEU

**The caretaker's cottage, completed in December, will be part of the tours on James and Anne Hubbell's Santa Ysabel property.**

## HUBBELL HOME TOURS BACK FOR EXPANDED TIME FRAME

Tickets for tours of sculptor's compound, art on sale

BY **PAM KRAGEN**

### SANTA YSABEL

Before the pandemic, on every Father's Day for 36 years, famed artist-sculptor James Hubbell and his wife, Anne, opened up their historic Ilan-Lael home and art compound in Santa Ysabel for an open house that drew admirers from around the world.

Last year's Father's Day tours

were canceled, but this spring, the Hubbells will welcome in-person visitors once again. To accommodate both pent-up demand and new social-distancing rules, the docent-guided group tours have been expanded from one day to 12, with a combined 16 tours on Fridays, Saturdays and Mondays from May 7 through June 19.

Hubbell, who turned 89 in October, SEE **HUBBELL** • B5

## San Ysidro gallery honors the everyday heroines in our lives



**KARLA PETERSON**  
Columnist

When the pandemic shut down most of California's cultural life last March, the members of the Front Arte & Cultura center in San Ysidro had an eye-opening epiphany. While they were not essential workers, they were doing an essential thing. They just had to figure out how to keep doing it.

“People sometimes think that the arts don't do anything important, but what we heard was, ‘We need music. We need workshops. We need to paint. We need activities for our kids,’” gallery director Francisco Morales said during a recent phone interview. “For us, working during the pandemic was a challenge, but it was also an exercise in creativity and communicating with with our community in different ways.”

In the following months, the Front was a buzzing hive of activity. There were podcasts featuring new electronic music. There were Zoom art workshops for kids, teens and adults. There was the “Walls” mural program, a joint project with the Municipal Institute of Art and Culture of Tijuana and A Reason to

Survive (ARTS) that had artists from both sides of the border creating murals on walls around West San Ysidro Boulevard.

There were virtual dance and music performances and online dance and movement classes. There was “Nattiva,” a photography exhibition that was projected on the gallery's facade, making it possible for viewers to see the exhibition from across the street. There were workshops on how to make pan de muerto for Day of the Dead and how to connect with people while staying 6 feet apart.

There was art. There was culture. There was life.

“San Ysidro was one of the neighborhoods that was hardest hit by the pandemic in the whole county, so doing our work became an act of hope,” Morales said. “So if people were going out to buy groceries, they could see the murals. If they turned on their computers, they could see our photographs and our videos.”

“The activities that we kept doing became a light for people. It became a window that showed that some sort of normality could be possible.”

The Front's newest offering is the continuation of cultural tradition. It is the 14th annual Día de la Mujer exhibition, which was

SEE **PETERSON** • B7



The unique seashell sculpture garden in front of a home on Rosecrans Street in Point Loma has long attracted curious admirers.

## DIANE BELL

FROM B1 as he saw it in his mind.” Elisa was content to let him pursue his passion.

“It was always a work in progress,” adds Dan. “We didn’t have to worry about watering the front lawn any more.” They also don’t have to mow the grass, although they do have to contend with an occasional light-fingered passerby absconding with a canister of shell “foliage” as a souvenir.

The fantasyland of mollusk bushes, flowers and cactus-like spires has been written up in newspapers, magazines and sightseeing brochures over the years as one of the most unusual U.S. gardens.

But the shell plants have begun to show wear — cracks, breaks and splinters — after 30 to 40 years in the outdoor elements.

Dan says a guy once approached him with an offer to lift up the entire garden and transfer it to a safer place inside his private museum in Los Angeles.

“I didn’t give him permission,” he says. “It would have left us with an empty dirt lot.”

Even after his mother no longer lives there, the house will stay in the Mendes family and, for now, its unusual garden will stay with it, Dan notes. “It belongs to the house.”

**Peacemakers:** Dr. Anthony Fauci is a lot of things: a medical doctor,



Dr. Anthony Fauci will receive an award.

scientist, immunologist and, as chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden, a national spokesperson for the COVID-19 pandemic. Now he is about to become a nationally recognized “peacemaker.”

At its May 15 virtual awards ceremony, the San Diego-based National Conflict Resolution Center will give its highest honor to the medical specialist who has become the voice of the ever-evolving coronavirus crisis.

The center’s previous National Peacemaker award recipients include Father Gregory Boyle founder of HomeBoy Industries; late Congressman John Lewis; past White House presidential adviser David Gergen; and former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano who, as UC president, steered the University of California through some divisive issues.

Lest anyone wonder why Fauci would be classified as a peacemaker, center head

Steve Dinkin explains: “He has worked across multiple administrations during his career, under both Democratic and Republican leadership.”

Fauci has served under seven presidents, yet, Dinkin maintains, manages to remain neutral and apolitical while acting in the best interest of the American people. He also inspires confidence and calmness in a time of crisis.

Despite being in demand across the country and engulfed in the complexity of the ongoing COVID-19 battle, Fauci was pleased to be chosen, Dinkin reports. “We sent a formal invitation to his office and, within a day, he accepted. It was really pretty remarkable.”

The center’s Local Peacemaker award will go to sisters Ekene and Nene Okolo, students whose Instagram posts focused attention on systemic racism within the Poway Unified School District. Their activism resulted in district policy changes and more diversity in hiring.

The Jewish Community Foundation, Rancho Santa Fe Foundation and San Diego Foundation also will be recognized for their philanthropic support to small businesses and others in need.

“All three played a critical role to lift up the community in these times,” Dinkin says, referring to the pandemic.

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# What's sizzling in San Diego real estate?

# HOT PROPERTY

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