

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# LET US RESOLVE TO BE MORE SELFLESS IN 2023

The turn of the year provides a unique opportunity for reflection before the chaos of our daily lives takes over. Service providers seem to know we are drawn to this sort of year-end accounting and are obliging us with all kinds of usage data.

Digital subscribers to the Union-Tribune, for instance, received a year-end report showing how many articles they read in 2022, with a comparison to other readers. GrubHub has gotten into the act too, with its list of the 10 most delivered foods, topped by burritos.

Last week, I took time to review my 2022 columns. More than a year of conflict (of which there was plenty), it was a year of contrasts — especially in personalities. Two types stood out: the selfish and the selfless.

Among the selfish, I wrote about tennis star Novak Djokovic, who was comfortable putting others at risk when he insisted on playing in the Australian Open — but wouldn't abide by the country's COVID policy, requiring vaccination.

Media personality Alex Jones tortured the families of children murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., saying for 10 years it was a government-staged hoax to curtail gun rights — just to sell merchandise to his devoted audience of conspiracy theorists.

Robert Sarver, owner of the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury, created a toxic work culture for his personal pleasure. Sarver screamed and cursed at his subordinates, joked about sex acts, and used racially insensitive language.

Their selfishness was without real consequence. Jones' salary was reduced by two-thirds, to \$20,000 every two weeks. Djokovic has continued playing and winning tournaments; he tops the ATP career prize money list and ranked No. 2 in 2022. And Sarver will collect his own prize this year, with the Suns and Mercury expected to sell for a record \$4 billion.

Throughout the year, we saw parents of school-aged children taking their turn at selfishness —

lashing out at school board meetings, orchestrating book bans, and advocating restrictions that would hurt transgender youth. Their stated motivation — to raise their children as they see fit — rang a little hollow.

As someone who always looks for lessons, I learned more writing about the selfless. Among them: Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, an organization that's helped more than 150,000 migrant children and families at the border. Pimentel isn't critical of immigration policy; instead, she talks about the need to change our thinking about and treatment of people who risk it all to come to our country.

After all, Pimentel says, we are part of the same human family — words to keep in mind as we read stories of migrants being "dumped" at San Diego-area bus stations by federal officials, as reported in last Sunday's Union-Tribune.

In May, the U.S. Soccer Federation announced a landmark

collective bargaining agreement that equalized pay for the women's and men's national soccer teams. It righted a disparity that saw the women's team earning nearly \$2 million in bonuses for their 2015 World Cup victory, while the men's team — which was eliminated — earned more than \$5 million.

It was the men who paved the way for a deal, agreeing to pool their World Cup prize money with the women's and to share it equally. They schooled us all on the importance of fairness, especially when it comes to pay. Following the recent tournament in Qatar, where the men's team reached the round of 16, female players each earned more than \$250,000.

My look back reminded me that there is no shortage of selfless San Diegans. Last January, I wrote about Malin Burnham, our city's unofficial collaborator-in-chief. Burnham's mantra — community before self — was informed by his years as a competitive sailor, when he learned that teamwork wins races. Burn-

ham reminds us that building connection is the best way to counter polarization.

And in April, I wrote about Mary and Rolf Benirschke, who were honored for their philanthropy at the National Conflict Resolution Center's Peacemaker Awards. The couple has raised and personally donated millions of dollars to local and national causes. But more than writing checks, the Benirschkes have given their time — Rolf, to patients battling Crohn's disease; Mary, to people experiencing homelessness.

And so, if I can offer a resolution for all of America, it's to practice a little more selflessness this year. Balance your own needs with the needs of others. And show more compassion. Our society will be stronger for it.

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 [ncronline.com](http://ncronline.com)

## STORIES TO WATCH

FROM B1 trains. The 1.6-mile stretch of tracks goes between the city's Seagrove Park and the overhead bridge at Torrey Pines State Beach.

Also in 2023, SANDAG will continue its preliminary work for moving the tracks off the bluffs to a new route through an inland tunnel beneath the city of Del Mar. The bluff stabilization projects are intended to keep the tracks safe where they are until the tunnel is finished, possibly as soon as 2035.

Repairs under way on a different trouble spot, a recurring landslide in San Clemente, are expected to be completed in February. Passenger train service between Ocean-side and San Clemente has been suspended since Sept. 30 because of the slide and will resume when the stabilization work is finished.



GETTY IMAGES

### An ambitious climate plan takes shape

San Diego County will keep working to cut climate pollution through its regional decarbonization framework, a sweeping plan to become carbon-neutral before mid-century. The framework maps out ways the county and its cities can achieve net carbon zero — the point at which the amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere equals the amount emitted.

It was introduced in 2021 with detailed proposals for scaling up renewable energy, expanding an electric vehicle charging network, electrifying buildings and using open space and agricultural land to capture and sequester carbon.

Amid concerns about the environmental impacts of large solar farms in East County, an updated report in August added more options for using already developed land for clean energy production. Those include installing more rooftop and urban solar, purchasing power from solar, wind or hydrothermal plants in the Imperial Valley and building new energy facilities on toxic brownfields.

This spring, county supervisors will consider even more nuts-and-bolts actions in the decarbonization playbook, which will spell out steps to scaling up renewable energy and cutting carbon, in coordination with local cities, universities and industry. They'll also consider how workers can transition from fossil-fuel jobs to renewable energy jobs, and how public agencies can help build that workforce.



EDUARDO CONTRERAS U-T

### COVID's long arm to extend through new year

Three years in, the coronavirus response is set to shift into a lower gear in 2023, with Gov. Gavin Newsom saying in October that he will follow the lead of the federal government and allow the emergency declaration first made in early 2020 to expire on Feb. 28.

Already, local government spending has dropped in 2022 with tracking and tracing activities and food assistance scaled back.

But viruses don't have brains and are incapable of comprehending that emergency label. Virologists such as Dr. Davey Smith at UC San Diego Health do not expect this particular pathogen to stop evolving anytime soon.

The latest round of Omicron subvariants, Smith noted, do not appear to present the kind of threat that the first versions did.

"I don't see a variant on the horizon that I'm terribly worried about at the moment," Smith said. "Yes, they're going to increase the number of infections, but, like the other Omicrons we have experienced, they don't look that deadly."

On the other hand, county records list 1,080 COVID-19-related deaths through mid-December. While it's less than half the 2,717 who died in 2021 in San Diego County, it's still an average of nearly three per day, generally those who are older than age 60 with other complicating medical conditions present when they become infected.

It's a grim price and one that Davey said no one should expect to go away as the virus continues to evolve in 2023.

"We're still probably going to have another 1,000 COVID deaths, which is not as high as it would be if it were Delta, but it's still tragic," Smith said.



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

### As homeless numbers grow, more shelter beds and services are expected to come into play in 2023.

#### Homeless population keeps growing

It's hard to imagine there will be much improvement in San Diego's growing homeless population, which in the downtown area set record numbers month after month at year's end, but many new shelter beds and services are expected to come online 2023.

In January, Chula Vista is expected to open a shelter consisting of 66 pallet homes, also called sleeping cabins, and it could double the program with a recent grant the city received from the county.

Also in South County, the San Diego Rescue Mission plans to open a 162-bed shelter in National City.

San Diego has plans to open a safe, legal camping area for homeless seniors, a first for the county, and Father Joe's Village is hoping to have its own campsite in East Village.

More safe parking lots are planned, with one in San Diego and another in Vista.

Also in North County, the Rescue Mission plans to open a 50-bed shelter in Oceanside.

The city of San Diego is planning a non-congregate shelter for families and a safe haven residential treatment program for people with addictions.

In Escondido, Interfaith Community Services will open a family shelter, while Catholic Charities has plans to expand its La Posada de Guadalupe shelter in Carlsbad, adding beds for women and mothers with children and expanding its operation into a navigation center to connect homeless people with resources.



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

#### Reshaped gun laws?

Text, history and tradition. That's the new legal standard by which judges must analyze gun laws thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court's June ruling in a New York firearms case.

That new legal framework could bring sweeping changes to California's gun laws in 2023 and beyond.

Now, each time a Second Amendment group challenges one of the state's firearm restrictions, a judge must decide if the regulation is "rooted in the Second Amendment's text, as informed by history," and "must demonstrate that the regulation is consistent with the nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation."

Several California gun laws are already getting a fresh look in San Diego federal court, where U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez — known for his firearm-friendly decisions — is handling many of the cases. He recently asked government attorneys defending four weapons laws to compile a spreadsheet containing historical firearm regulations to aid his analysis.

The new standard could lead Benitez and other judges to wipe out laws that ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, homemade "ghost guns" or frequent firearm purchases. If that happens, the coming year could bring answers as to whether the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, using the same new analysis, will uphold those decisions.



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

#### Housing projects face headwinds

It happened south of Escondido. It happened in Santee. A year ago, it happened in Otay Ranch.

Developers have been repeatedly blocked from building new suburbs, as judges have sided with environmental groups worried about wildfires and climate change.

Those rulings come even as state lawmakers try to make it easier to build amid a lack of affordable housing.

While some projects are essentially dead — one 2,000-acre plot north of Escondido was finally sold to a spa — others may still be realized.

In Santee, critics of the proposed 3,000-home Fanita Ranch housing development won a victory when a judge ruled it wasn't clear whether residents would be able to timely evacuate during a fire.

The court told the City Council to pull back its approval, and leaders complied. But after the developer finished a study that found it would take between 20 minutes and 2 hours to get people to safety, the council re-approved the proposal.

A new lawsuit challenging that decision is now working its way through the courts.

#### SDSU gang-rape case continues

The case is far from over. In December, the District Attorney's Office announced it would not file criminal charges against three former San Diego State University football players who were accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in October 2021.

While the decision closed a chapter in one of the county's most-watched cases, a civil lawsuit and a university inquiry into the matter will continue this year.

News of the allegations broke over the summer, and additional details were made public when the young woman filed her lawsuit. She alleged she was raped at a College Area home not far from the university campus early Oct. 17, 2021, and accused three players: Matt Araiza, who was briefly a punter for the Buffalo Bills before the team learned of the lawsuit and dropped him, and former redshirt freshmen Xavier Leonard and Nowlin "Pa'a" Ewaliko.

It's unclear how the district attorney's decision will affect the civil case.

SDSU was sharply criticized for delaying its own investigation into the matter — a decision college officials said they made at the San Diego Police Department's request. The university would eventually open an administrative inquiry to determine whether any of its policies were violated.

That effort will continue into 2023.

U-T reporters Deborah Sullivan Brennan, Phil Diehl, Jeff McDonald, Kate Morrissey, Blake Nelson, Alex Riggins, Gary Robbins, Paul Sisson, Joshua Emerson Smith, Gary Warth and Lyndsay Winkley contributed to this report.