

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# CREATIVITY UP TO BAT IN FIGHT AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

When slugger Juan Soto joined the Padres in August, it signaled a commitment to winning by team owners. And win they did: This weekend, the Padres are playing a post-season series against the New York Mets after clinching one of three National League wild-card spots.

Soto's celebrated signing had an unintended consequence. While boosting attendance at games, it also increased awareness of homelessness in San Diego — a particular problem in East Village, where Petco Park is located. The unsheltered population in the area has nearly doubled in size this year.

There are blocks and blocks of tent encampments. Sidewalks are littered with garbage, feces, drug paraphernalia and more — a shocking sight for occasional East Village visitors.

My wife was among them. She recently attended an event at the Central Library, near Petco Park. The library entrance was clogged with people who appeared to be living right there. She felt sad that they had nowhere else to go. NBA Hall of Famer Bill Walton, a San Diego resident, has a different feeling about homelessness here. Walton is angry. In a heated news conference last month, Walton blamed inaction by San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria for the worsening situation. He spoke about being harassed, chased and attacked while riding his bike in Balboa Park, near a homeless encampment.

Walton called for the mayor's resignation, saying he is heartbroken to think that the "greatest place on earth" (San Diego) is now "paradise lost."

Gloria's director of communications responded, saying that the mayor is frustrated, too — but that he is taking decisive, sustained action to improve conditions. She added, "To say that he has done nothing on homelessness is objectively false."

Following Walton's outburst, the county Board of Supervisors and San Diego City Council approved a resolution to construct 10,000 units of affordable housing on government-owned land by 2030 — a response to our region's critical housing shortage. Last

month, supervisors declared homelessness a public health crisis, calling attention to a different need: the mental and physical health of the unsheltered.

These actions are meaningful, to be sure. But building houses takes time. And right now, we have nearly 9,000 people living on our streets, in cars and in shelters, according to the latest official count.

One idea gaining traction is the "safe village," which repurposes parking lots or vacant land for transitional living. Residents live in tents (or other types of temporary housing); on-site hygiene facilities and basic resources like counseling and health care are provided.

It brings to mind a recent column in which I wrote that "out of sight, out of mind" is not the best policy for dealing with migrants. I have the same feeling when it comes to unsheltered people, although I recognize the benefits of a safe village for those who are living inside and outside its perimeter.

But there is no path forward without addressing the root

causes of homelessness. We need to broaden the discussion to prevent the loss of housing in the first place. And given the differences in individual circumstances, there is no single — or easy — solution.

But for many people, it's a matter of money — especially in an expensive city like ours.

That's precisely what local nonprofit Serving Seniors found out, after conducting a needs assessment of older adults at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. Their study described an urgent situation, with this population projected to triple over the next decade. Already, 1 in 4 homeless adults in San Diego is over the age of 55.

Serving Seniors learned that many older adults become homeless after suffering catastrophic events with dire financial consequences.

Lacking a safety net, they may take actions that compromise their health and safety, just to make ends meet.

More than half (56 percent) of the people interviewed reported that an additional \$300 or less of

monthly income could make a difference, increasing their ability to pay rent.

According to research published in Housing Policy Debate, the average monthly cost of a shelter bed for single adults was \$1,333 in 2015. And, as Serving Seniors found, some older adults avoid shelters because of concerns for their personal safety.

According to Paul Downey, president of Serving Seniors, the idea of a "shallow subsidy" for seniors has taken hold.

The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously in favor of a pilot program that will pay \$500 per month directly to landlords, with the goal of preventing homelessness.

It's a creative approach to a complicated problem. If it works, Padres fans will have another reason to cheer. And San Diego will be better 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)

## MURALS

FROM B1 said.

Gaines also painted a colorful Volkswagen bus on the same building.

Matthew Millington's Quetzalcoatl, also at Pueblo, is a depiction of the feathered serpent deity of ancient Mesoamerican people, she added.

Several murals are by unknown artists. But many of the works have become iconic through the years, and many of the artists are not only known locally, but throughout the world. Most have only positive things to say about their time spent creating pieces in Pacific Beach.

For example, Kathleen King was one of the first artists to create a mural in Pacific Beach. King is also the artist behind the America's Finest City mural in downtown San Diego.

"She grew up in P.B. and the mural she is often associated with locally is her depiction of the town from the 1940s, based on a historic photograph taken in 1943," Dufour said.

Since the vintage-looking mural is at 979 Garnet Ave., it's easy for viewers to compare how the town has — and has not — changed over time.

Not all murals have such serious subjects. The fanciful characters inhabiting the murals on Cheba Hut, 4651 Mission Blvd., were created by Oregon-based artist Bayne Gardner. He reportedly wanted to offer local residents and visitors "something colorful and playful" that would "get people to smile."

One of the more well-known murals in P.B. is at an equally iconic location; the owl representing the Nite Owl Cocktail Lounge, at 2772 Garnet Ave., on the corner of Garnet Avenue and Mission Bay Drive.

The classic dive bar has been open since 1962.

Hanna Daly, the painter behind Hanna's Murals, said she was contacted around 2019 by the new owner at the time of the Nite Owl.

"He wanted something urban and hip to spice up the corner," she said.

Growing up in San Diego, she's been painting for nearly 20 years. She said she's always loved to hang out in P.B. and skate the boardwalk.

She said the owner gave her a lot of artistic freedom, which she appreciated.

"I did the first mural of the owl on the west side wall; I didn't realize how iconic the spot was at the time. People sit at that light forever on their way in and out of P.B.," Daly said.

She later painted the east wall, which is seen when entering Pacific Beach.

But the job came with some unexpected challenges.

"When I was painting the east wall I heard a crash and an older man had run into the wall — while I was painting it," she recalled.

As if that didn't make her nervous enough about finishing the job, she said a truck next hit part of the roof of the building and "took it off."

With the murals finished and her nerves recovered, Daly said, "It's a very fun mural for me; every-



Artist Gloria Muriel stands beside one of her murals of whimsical, colorful women figures.

one knows it. And the Nite Owl is a great place to hang out, with super folks there."

Although not all her creations are part of the Mural Walk, Daly has multiple projects scattered across Pacific Beach, including the La Clochette Du Coin Bakery at 4680 Cass St., Biggies Burgers at 4631 Mission Blvd., Kono's Cafe at 704 Garnet Ave. and Kitchens for Good at 980 Hornblend St. She said each project was the result of people seeing the original Nite Owl mural.

"When I first started doing outdoor murals 19 years ago, many communities were afraid to include them," Daly said. "They were afraid they might be too controversial and it was hard to convince them otherwise."

"Now, a lot more areas have accepted them," she said. "But P.B. was very accepting of them before anyone else and they were bolder with their artistic choices."

More of Daly's creations can be seen at [hannasmurals.com](http://hannasmurals.com).

Artist Gloria Muriel, who also goes by the name Glow, has been a fine arts painter and muralist full time since 2011, when she said she just decided to "go for it."

A native of Mexico City and raised in Mexicali, Muriel said she now spends more time in San Diego than Mexico.

Her work often features a surreal, whimsical quality, based on her psychedelic connection to Mother Earth and the four elements.

In Pacific Beach, her painting on the side of the French Gourmet Restaurant can be seen at 960 Turquoise St. The artwork features a round-eyed French girl, drinking a hot cup of tea with her French bulldog beside her and the Eiffel Tower in the background.

Done in 2012, Muriel said, "It was one of my first walls, and I wasn't used to heights. I was really nervous, and I didn't paint at all the first day. I just sat there and gave myself a pep talk."

Fortunately, the restaurant owner was really cool and supportive, she said.

"It was awesome and we made it work," Muriel said, noting that now, small heights don't bother



Hanna Daly with the oversized burger mural she painted at Biggie's Burgers, 4631 Mission Blvd. It makes for great selfies.

her, but anything over three stories can still "make me anxious."

The scaffolding ended up playing another unexpected role.

"Because it hides a lot of the painting, people can't see the whole thing," she said. "So a lot of people were intrigued and came up to talk and ask me about my work."

Muriel said she is especially fond of partnering with nonprofits, and her work can be found at Rady Children's Hospital, Pangea Seed Murals for Oceans, Autism Tree Project, San Diego Autism Society and Rady Children's Specialists.

Her most recent project has been painting a wall at Botanica in North Park. When it is finished, Muriel said she will be traveling to Mexico to work with the Mexican Institute of Social Services.

"There are communities there that are known for their work making ceramics," Muriel said. "But they are using a toxic sealer for the clay. We will be trying to help members of the communities with their health and to come up with alter-

natives for the future."

No matter where her work takes her, Muriel said she continues to look forward to painting murals.

"Every single mural is an adventure and a challenge. Every one has different colors, different wall textures and even different energy," she explained.

Even while taking a brief break to discuss her work, Muriel was eager to get back to it.

"With a beach scene, really nice weather and a lot of really nice people, P.B. is great," she said.

To follow her adventures, visit [gloriamuriel.com](http://gloriamuriel.com).

Artist Hilary Dufour — Leslie's daughter — also has a special fondness for Pacific Beach.

"I want to support P.B. and I'm biased," she laughed. "I'm from here and live here now and there is a lot of opportunity to bring more art into town."

As a geographic information systems (GIS) analyst, Hilary Dufour said her full-time job is very technical, so "it's nice to have a cre-

ative outlet" in her artistic work.

One of her works is at Coffee Cycle, 1632 Grand Ave. She was a customer before the shop became her client.

"I love the people who work there and their coffee; I think it's the best coffee in P.B.," Hilary Dufour said.

"They had a wall in the back that looked like it could use some color and art. The owner agreed to let me do a mural and gave me the freedom to decide what to do," she said.

The resulting work features a colorful tiger in a yin-and-yang moment with a coffee plant. The border features black and white poppies, with espresso beans in place of the plant fruit.

"I wanted it to fit the aesthetic as to how the coffee shop looked at the time, which was white walls with a burlap sack border that had linocut-style designs," Hilary Dufour explained. "It was fun to learn about coffee plants while I was doing it."

Hilary Dufour said she strives to work with her clients throughout the process by understanding what they want the art to bring to the space. She usually brings in elements of the business so she can "match" the existing environment. But she admits if she "can incorporate native plants and wildlife, I love to do that."

For her first mural, inside San Diego Cyclery (formerly Pacific Beach Bikes) at 1632 Grand Ave., she "wanted to create a vibrant design fitting the vibe of a bike shop in a beach town."

The result was a vibrant jungle of colorful tropical plants and flowers interspersed with large bold bike chain rings.

Tropical plants were also the theme of a large outdoor mural she designed for a private residence in Pacific Beach, although the color theme was primarily pink and aqua.

"Although it's not visible to the public, it adds a lot of color to the space and the owner is happy," Dufour said.

"It's a really fun challenge to go into a space without any preconceived notions, to visit and get a feel for it. I'm very inspired by my clients and the local scenery," she said.

Dufour's murals, painting and photography can be seen at [hilarydufour.com](http://hilarydufour.com). Culture Brewing Co. hosted a show of her art in September. Her next solo show will be in October 2023 at Thumbprint Gallery in La Jolla.

Whether it's John Lennon with a daisy in his eye on the side of Five Guys Burgers and Fries, 1020 Garnet Ave., painted by Steve Garrow, or the menagerie of undersea creatures popping up on buildings all over town, Leslie Dufour said she invites residents and guests to explore the PB Mural Walk.

"We encourage everyone to go out and enjoy the great art available in P.B.," she said.

Visit [beautifulpb.com](http://beautifulpb.com) for more information about the organization. To find online maps — one interactive and another watercolor — for taking self-guided tours of the PB Mural Walk, visit [beautifulpb.com/art-in-place-2021](http://beautifulpb.com/art-in-place-2021). Many of the artists can be found on Instagram.

Elling is a freelance writer.

## GOLF

FROM B1 the staff report.

The city selected Escondido Golf from a field of five companies that submitted bids for the management contract, including JC Management.

The Reidy Creek property includes a 2,582-yard course that offers 18 holes of golf, disc golf, and foot golf; a pro shop with golf and disc golf merchandise; and the newly renovated Clubhouse and Creekside Tavern that also serves as a venue for meetings and special events, said a city staff report.

Bugbee said the first or-

der of business once his company takes the reins is to spruce up areas of the course that have been neglected. For the longer term, he said, Escondido Golf plans to increase community programming to attract the 90 percent of residents who don't regularly play golf — versus the 10 percent who do — to come and check out the facility.

That could mean a host of activities such as small concerts, movie nights and holiday celebrations, including Fourth of July carnivals and Easter egg hunts.

The course is "a very valuable resource for the residents of Escondido," so expanding its usage to include

more of the population is crucial, Bugbee said.

In recent years, the course has added disc golf and foot golf — a hybrid of golf and soccer in which players kick a soccer ball into large cups stationed on the course — and Bugbee said the new management will seek to build on those uses as well.

While golf courses around the country had seen declines in usage and revenue for a number of years, the sport actually got a boost during the COVID-19 pandemic as families sought healthy, outdoor activities, Bugbee said.

Among the goals of the new management company

is to improve Reidy Creek's bottom line, Bugbee said.

"Absolutely we think we can increase revenues," said Bugbee.

That should be music to the ears of the City Council, which voted unanimously at a recent meeting to approve the new management agreement with Escondido Golf LLC.

The former management company had a long contract, but "lost money year after year after year," said Mayor Paul McNamara.

The new operator promises to look for creative ways to increase use of the facility and bring in more paying customers, said McNamara.

"They're not just manag-

ing, they are actually trying to make money. If something doesn't work, we'll try something else," he said.

Vince McCaw, real property manager for the city, said the council preferred a shorter management contract, so this time the duration was set at five years instead of 10. The city will have an option of extending the contract by an additional four years, which will coincide with the payoff of the construction bonds in 2030, when the city might want to revisit the contract.

Under the old contract, McCaw said, the operator received a percentage payment whether the course was profitable or not.

The new contract calls for a management payment of \$75,000, plus 10 percent of net profit after the annual debt service is paid. In addition, the city will receive 10 percent of the food and beverage revenue generated at the course.

Overall, city officials are optimistic the new management team can improve the fortunes of the formerly underperforming golf course.

"It's a new opportunity," said McCaw. "They're bringing in a lot of good ideas we want to explore, so we expect positive things to come from this."

Tash is a freelance writer.