

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# ROBERT SARVER FOULS OUT AS PHOENIX SUNS OWNER

If there was a “Mensch of the Year” award, I know one thing for sure: Robert Sarver, owner of the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury, wouldn’t win it.

A mensch, in Yiddish, is a person of integrity, morality and dignity — someone with a deep sense of what is right and responsible.

As reported by Yahoo Sports columnist Shalisse Manza Young, Sarver has a long list of sins. He frequently screamed and cursed at his subordinates. He treated female and LGBTQ employees unequally and with disdain. He joked about sex acts. And he regularly used the “N-word” and other racially insensitive language.

Sarver’s behavior was first documented in a November 2021 article published by ESPN titled “Allegations of racism and misogyny within the Phoenix Suns: Inside Robert Sarver’s 17-year tenure as owner.”

Following its publication, the National Basketball Association retained the law firm of Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz to conduct

an independent investigation of Sarver’s alleged workplace misconduct and provide their findings.

After interviewing more than 100 people, Wachtell, Lipton corroborated the ESPN article. Their report, which was issued last month, noted that Sarver’s actions “had a substantial impact on employees, with some witnesses describing their experiences ... in emotional and forceful terms.”

The firm’s investigators concluded Sarver wasn’t motivated by racial or gender animus. Instead, Sarver thrived off making others uncomfortable, acting as if workplace norms and policies didn’t apply to him.

Sarver’s appalling behavior — over many years — yielded the equivalent of a wrist-slap from NBA Commissioner Adam Silver: a \$10 million fine and yearlong suspension. While calling Sarver’s conduct “indefensible,” Silver said it didn’t warrant taking the team away. And, he believed, Sarver had evolved.

NBA fans, like me, were sur-

prised that Silver didn’t do more. In 2014 (when Silver was new to his job), he banned L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling from the game of basketball — for life — following the release of Sterling’s racist comments, captured on audio.

Several players spoke up, saying the sanctions fell short. Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James called for Sarver’s ouster. PayPal, a longtime partner of the Suns and Mercury, announced it would not renew its sponsorship deal — valued at \$3 million — if Sarver was leading the organization post-suspension.

It seems that PayPal didn’t want to soil their brand by being affiliated with someone whose workplace behavior conflicted with the company’s own values.

The cascading criticism came to quick resolution with Sarver’s recent announcement that he will sell both franchises. Sarver said, “As a man of faith, I believe in atonement and the path to forgiveness. I expected that the commissioner’s one-year suspension would provide the time for me to

focus, make amends and remove my personal controversy from the teams that I and so many fans love.”

But, he continued, “in our current unforgiving climate, it has become painfully clear that that is no longer possible — that whatever good I have done, or could still do, is outweighed by things I have said in the past.”

While James and others cheered Sarver’s announcement, it left me feeling unfulfilled. There was no acknowledgment of wrongdoing nor hint of lessons learned. Instead, Sarver played the “woe is me, I’ve been canceled” card — even as he stands to make hundreds of millions of dollars on the sale of the teams.

We’ve seen this behavior before — people in power, most often men, who harass or abuse the less powerful but proclaim to be the victim. As Manza Young wrote, “The real shame in all of this (is that Sarver) will walk away from this with a tidy profit to further enrich his already bloated bank account, while the men and women he victimized

for years get nothing.”

Sarver seemed to hope that his unacknowledged misdeeds would be overlooked or offset, given his contributions to social and racial justice causes. He has donated millions of dollars to Arizona nonprofits. He has served on the board of an organization that is focused on addressing racial disparities in policing. And his hiring record at the Suns is laudable: people of color represent 55 percent of staff working in team operations, the highest percentage in the NBA.

While generosity puts points on the scoreboard, it can’t trump the basic human decency at the core of a civil society. Each of us is accountable for our actions and responsible to others — even Robert Sarver.

It’s something that every mensch knows.

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)



MELISSA JACOBS

From left, Trudy Bronner, of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap; Sky Ewing, a Clairemont branch club member; and Joe Kroening of Andy’s Transfer & Storage.

## SCENE

# Boys & Girls Clubs

Organization holds An Evening of Changing Lives

BY U-T STAFF

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego held its signature event, An Evening of Changing Lives, presented by Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap, on Sept. 10 at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina.

More than 500 supporters attended. The event raised \$1.2 million for the

organization’s programs.

Boys & Girls Clubs serve kids ages 5 to 18 with academic, character development and physical fitness programs at 24 sites countywide.

For more information, go to [sdyouth.org](http://sdyouth.org).

If your organization has held a philanthropic event, you’re welcome to email a high-resolution photo along

with information on the event to [society@sduniontribune.com](mailto:society@sduniontribune.com).

Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer’s name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.

## GUARDS

FROM B1 hire the security officers.

Services will be concentrated within the city’s “property and business improvement district,” which the city formed in 2019 and is managed by the MainStreet organization.

Oceanside voters approved Measure X in November 2018, a seven-year, half-cent sales tax hike specifically to pay for improved public safety, aid for the homeless, road repairs and other infrastructure needs.

Funding for the security guards is new in the city’s Measure X Year 4 spending plan for fiscal 2022-23.

Also approved in the Measure X Year 4 spending plan is an allocation of \$828,000 to create a paramedic squad that will handle “lower acuity calls” in the city’s downtown and coastal

core. The new squad is intended to reduce the high number of calls handled by firefighter-paramedics at the city’s downtown Fire Station No. 1.

Measure X Year 4 spending also includes \$2 million to begin design work for the Police Department’s new headquarters building, which will be constructed on land the city owns along Rancho Del Oro Road across from El Corazon Park. The new building would replace the headquarters now in two former strip mall retail stores on Mission Avenue just east of El Camino Real.

Excluded from Year 4 funding is money for the sobering center that the city opened in late 2020.

“We are recommending to wind it down and direct the money to the motel voucher program,” Assistant City Manager Michael Gossman said Wednesday.

The sobering center pro-

vided an overnight stay for people with drug and alcohol problems, with access to services they might need, and it saved police officers the time needed to take them to Vista for booking at the jail. However, because the center only helped an average of 17 people a month, it proved to be ineffective, Gossman said.

The motel voucher program will get \$617,000 including the sobering center’s allocation in the Measure X Year 4 budget. Oceanside started its voucher program in April 2021, and it handles an average of 43.5 clients a month.

In all, Year 4 of Measure X includes more than \$27 million in spending for police services, a community gang diversion program, homelessness prevention efforts, and infrastructure work including road repairs and traffic calming measures.

[philip.diehl@sduniontribune.com](mailto:philip.diehl@sduniontribune.com)

## SMOLENS

FROM B1 tration’s selection of the development team, questions surfaced about the qualifications of the group’s lead member — and the more than \$100,000 he spent to help elect Gloria.

This may be just a rough stretch for the mayor, and it’s too early to say whether his expected 2024 re-election bid is in trouble. There’s no obvious viable challenger looming so far, nor are there outward signs that the broad base of labor, business and progressive activists that supported him in 2020 won’t be there for him.

But politicians always have to be on guard, and not just about opponents. It’s a problem if things get to the point that friends just aren’t feeling it for you like they used to.

To be sure, Gloria has substantial achievements. He promised a more equitable approach to boost services in historically underserved communities. That’s happening on a variety of fronts, from public works projects to development of parks.

He has increased overall infrastructure.

Gloria has helped channel millions of dollars into rent relief and other housing programs, and backed measures to help residents and businesses that suffered during the coronavirus pandemic.

He and the City Council have continued to establish rules aimed at making it easier to build more housing, which he and others say San Diego needs. But many neighborhood groups adamantly oppose more density in their communities.

Gloria pledged to bring more diversity to City Hall and has appointed what he says is the most diverse mayoral administration ever.

But none of this may matter if voters don’t see substantial improvement on homelessness. Virtually everyone — including Gloria — agrees that’s San Diego’s biggest problem.

San Diego is not alone. Rampant homelessness exists in other California cities. It’s understandable that people are frustrated and want immediate action. But simply arresting homeless people or moving them from one place to another is



BILL WECHTER FOR THE U-T

Mayor Todd Gloria speaks in July at the opening of a women’s shelter in downtown San Diego.

no solution.

Some of the root causes of homelessness are difficult for cities to address, if they can at all. Wages often don’t keep up with the cost of living, particularly the price of housing. The city and county of San Diego are moving to build lower-cost housing, but that will run into resistance: Neighborhoods, by and large, don’t want housing targeted for lower-income people, whether it’s on public or private land.

Homelessness has long been a systemic issue and Gloria inherited a bad situation. He has overseen increases in shelter beds and outreach teams, expanded various services and gotten more people into supportive and permanent housing.

Meanwhile, the county government is more involved in homelessness than before, especially in providing mental health care.

Even with that, the needs still far outstrip available services and facilities. Homelessness has been increasing and the pandemic exacerbated things.

But Gloria set high expectations. He not only promised progress, but had tough criticism of how Faulconer approached the problem. In some ways, Gloria finds himself in the same place as his predecessor. Granted, he hasn’t had to face a deadly hepatitis crisis in the homeless population like Faulconer did, but the mayor is similarly under a growing public demand for action.

Faulconer gained extra motivation when civic leaders came down hard on him. Gloria is getting that kind heat from leaders of the philanthropic Lucky Duck Foundation and most certainly Walton, a former Gloria backer who is so upset about the level of

homelessness in a portion of Balboa Park near his home that he called on the mayor to resign.

After his 2016 re-election, Faulconer, a Republican, was talked up as a gubernatorial candidate in 2018. He fed the speculation by appearing up and down California, giving speeches about state issues, and refocusing the California Republican Party on quality-of-life matters and away from losing social issues.

Some early polls had him in second place. Whether he actually would have run or been able to beat Gavin Newsom — highly doubtful — soon became irrelevant. The deadly 2016-18 hepatitis A outbreak hit and forced Faulconer to pay more attention to problems back home. Faulconer did eventually run as a replacement candidate in the 2021 recall election of Gov. Newsom. The governor prevailed and Faulconer finished a distant third.

As with most mayors, there naturally has been talk about Gloria’s future political prospects.

Now, it seems whether he becomes a one-term footnote or a rising political star depends on the trajectory of homelessness in San Diego.

### Tweet of the Week

Goes to Nick Canepa (@sdutCanepa) on Wednesday, the 62nd anniversary of Ted Williams’ last Major League at-bat (a home run).

“When I first met Ted, I told him: ‘I’ve been mad at you my whole life.’ He asked: ‘Why?’ I told him: ‘You had a choice and went to Hoover (High) because you didn’t think you could make (my alma mater) San Diego (High)’s baseball team.’ He said: ‘That’s true.’”

[michael.smolens@sduniontribune.com](mailto:michael.smolens@sduniontribune.com)

## DANCE

FROM B1 said. “I used to have a whole group there, too.”

When she and her husband, Robert, moved to Ramona in 1980, Aida and Diana kept performing as teenagers at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church.

Their mother continued her dancing lessons at the former Ramona Library’s parking lot. When the current Ramona Community Library was built about a decade ago, Aida Perez was able to move her dances to the library’s meeting room.

“I love the dancing and the music,” Perez said. “I’m grateful to the parents who have trusted me all these years. When I see the parents involved with the kids it makes me so happy.”

In October and through Nov. 2, ballet folklorico lessons will temporarily be held at the regular time at a Ramona resident’s house, Perez said. Starting Nov. 9, the classes are expected to resume in the library’s Com-

munity Room. Library officials said they need the Community Room for training for Election Day.

Ramona resident Lydia Dukes likes to see her 10-year-old daughter, Leah Cosio, carry on the cultural tradition. Dukes has always lived in the San Diego area, and in Ramona for the past five years, but her parents are from Baja California, she said.

Dukes said the ballet folklorico classes teach Leah about the historical Latin music that comes from Mexico and give her a chance to interact with friends. The lessons also help Leah understand the style of dancing and learn how to follow the steps, she said.

“I used to do it when I was a lot younger,” Dukes said. “At first it was my idea to have her have something to do as an activity, but as the years passed by, she started looking forward to it and now it’s her who wants to go for it.”

Leah, who began taking folklorico lessons in 2018 but took a two-year break during



JULIE GALLANT U-T COMMUNITY PRESS

Aida Perez teaches free ballet folklorico lessons and sews skirts for some of her students.

the COVID-19 pandemic, said she likes the performances more than the weekly rehearsals in the library’s large meeting room. She said she was looking forward

to performing with the dance class at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church’s Oktoberfest celebration today and at the Ramona Chamber of Com-

merce’s annual Christmas Tree Lighting on Main Street.

Katelyn Heyer, 8, started taking ballet folklorico lessons from Perez about two months ago. She had briefly taken the lessons before, but they were shut down by the pandemic.

“I like the music, the dance moves and the skirts,” Katelyn said. “It’s fun to do because it looks beautiful when everybody moves their skirts.”

Her mom, Iris Heyer, had become familiar with the folklorico tradition while she was living in Tijuana years ago.

“Katelyn has family in Guadalajara and they’re super proud she’s dancing folklorico,” Heyer said. “And they’re proud that she doesn’t forget where she comes from.”

Katelyn has been telling her friends at Ramona Community Montessori School about the free classes, hoping they’ll join, too, her mother said. Eventually, the family plans to bring Katelyn’s sister, 4-year-old Kendra, along when she’s

ready. Kloe Karkosh, 6, is new to ballet folklorico, having only taken her first lesson. She said she’s already had fun dancing hip-hop.

“I’m excited about learning a different kind of dance,” Kloe said.

Her mom, Diana Vasquez, said Kloe is half Mexican. Vasquez is a first-generation Mexican American; her mom is from Guerrero and her dad from Oaxaca. Kloe’s father, Luke Karkosh’s family, is from Germany.

Vasquez is also encouraging Kloe to learn to speak Spanish.

“It’s important for me to have her identify with her culture, the traditional dances and folk music,” said Vasquez, who took ballet folklorico lessons herself when she was a child. “She loves music, she loves to sing and to dance. It’s one of the things that she really, truly enjoys.”

For information, call the library at (760) 788-5270.

Gallant writes for the U-T Community Press.