

**ART WITH SOME BITE**



Paintings and other creative works by students in the Garden Grove Unified School District will be again on display in the annual "First Impressions Art Exhibit" to be open to the public March 8 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in The Courtyard Center in the Village Green in Garden Grove and on March 10-13 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Tribune photo).

**Tony Strickland maintains a lead in 36th District race**

Tony Strickland, a former state senator hoping to return to the upper house of the California Legislature, remains atop the field in a special election to fill a vacant seat in the 36th Senate District.

**Election 2025**

Strickland, a Republican now serving as a member of the Huntington Beach City Council, is leading with 80,504 votes as of

Friday afternoon, according to the California Secretary of State's Office.

Perhaps just as important, his vote total is 51.3 percent. If he can continue to tally 50 percent of the ballots cast – plus one – he can avoid a runoff election between himself and the second-highest vote getter.

For the present, that's Democrat Jimmy Pham, who's received 43,618 votes (27.7 percent) so far. In third is Julie Diep, also a Democrat, who has 22,572 votes (14.3 per-

Continued on page 2

**Quick work saves turtle**

Quick work by the Orange County Fire Authority early Wednesday morning in Garden Grove kept an apartment fire from spreading and saved the life of a pet turtle.

According to the OCFA, the blaze was reported at 1:27 a.m. on Dawson Street. Firefighters were able to knock down the fire in just 20 minutes. There were no injuries and pets were carried to safety,

**HUNTINGTON BEACH CITY COUNCIL**

**Decisions On Library Initiatives?**

**'New' city manager to be hired**

The appointment of a permanent city manager and decisions on how to respond to citizen initiatives on the management of the city library system are on the agenda for Tuesday's meeting of the Huntington Beach City Council.

Veteran city employee Travis Hopkins, who has been serving as acting city manager since October of 2024, is the council's choice to be the top executive of Surf City's municipal operations.

He's the fourth person in five years to have that post. Before Hopkins became assistant city manager, police chief Eric



**TRAVIS HOPKINS**  
From acting to actual?

Parra was interim city manager after Alfred Zelinka resigned after serving 17 months after coming to Huntington Beach

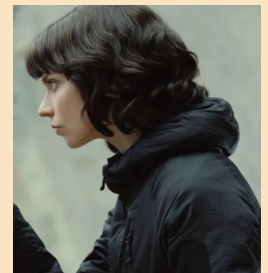
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**Inside The Tribune**



**A weird reunion**

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**'Gorge' is shallow**

ARTS & LIVING Page 5

# Huntington Beach council

Continued from page 1

in 2022, leaving the City of Riverside,

Zelinka replaced Oliver Chi, who served from 2019 to 2021 before leaving to go to Irvine.

Also on the agenda are the consideration of options on how to proceed with citizen initiatives repealing a) the city council's creation of a "community-parent guardian review board for procurement of children's library materials," and b) requiring that the city's library system be operated publicly and not by a private firm.

## Senate election

Continued from page 1

cent) and in last is Republican John Briscoe with 10,539 votes (8.7 percent).

The 36th District seat – which covers much of coastal and western Orange County as well as a small part of Los Angeles County – is vacant because Janet Nguyen resigned her seat after she was elected to the Orange County Board of Supervisors, representing the First District.

Strickland last served in the Senate from 2008 to 2012 and in the Assembly from 1998 to 2004.

Election results will be certified by March 6

The choices are to put the matters on the general election ballot on Nov. 3, 2026 or call for a special election this year.

The council will meet at 4 p.m. in closed session and at 6 p.m. in regular session in its chambers at 2000 Main St.

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## The★Tribune

**Jim Tortolano**  
Editor and Publisher  
**Marilyn Lewis Tortolano**  
General Manager

The Orange County Tribune is published on Wednesdays and Saturdays with some exceptions. Address is 9402 Luders Ave., Garden Grove, 92844.

E-mail : [orangecountytribune@gmail.com](mailto:orangecountytribune@gmail.com).

[www.orangecountytribune.com](http://www.orangecountytribune.com).

Phone: (714) 458-1860.

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# News & Views

## Drink, eat and, maybe, want to 'Go Dutch' Bros.

**What's In Store Dept.:** One more preview of what is planned for Garden Grove, development-wise. A Dutch Bros. coffee (and more) shop will be opening at Brookhurst Street and Westminster Avenue by the end of March, we are told.

Now, if you say, "Big deal. Don't we already have two armfuls of Starbucks in town already?"

True, but these guys aren't Starbucks, which I have to say is revered by my household.



### Retorts Jim Tortolano

Dutch Bros. started in Grants Pass, Oregon and has grown across the western United States.

How Dutch Bros. differs from, say, Starbucks and others is the selection of coffees and other drinks. They tend to be less ... uh ... pretentious ... in naming their offerings and more ... down-to-earth.

There's "Kicker," "Annihilator" and (my fave) "Golden Eagle." There are "rebel" energy drinks, lemonades, shakes, smoothies and a very small selection of food items.

Not trying to shill for these guys, but when we visited their nearest location (on Magnolia Street in Fountain Valley) they had two lanes full in the drive-thru with four minions taking orders.

It's kind of a cult thing. You might like it. We did.

**Growing Fast Dept.:** I have it on pretty good authority that Sprouts (an affordable version of Whole Foods) is looking for a location in Westminster.

The store in Garden Grove (Chapman Avenue, west of Brookhurst) appears to be doing

Continued on page 8

## A COMFORTING HAND ... ER ... PAW



To show support for firefighters, the families who lost their homes, and students whose elementary schools were affected by the Los Angeles fires, Great Wolf Lodge in Garden Grove hosted a special event recently. Firefighters, families, and students from the schools were invited to enjoy a complimentary day of play at the lodge with their families, complete with an indoor waterpark featuring multiple slides, a wave pool, and other attractions, to create some joy during these difficult times. People – a total of 348 of them – came from Altadena, Malibu, Pacific Palisades and Pasadena. Firefighters came from Orange County, Pasadena and Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Kids came from Marquez Charter School and Palisades Charter Elementary in Pacific Palisades, Averson Charter School in Altadena and Longfellow Elementary School in Pasadena (Great Wolf photo by Nicolle Goddard).

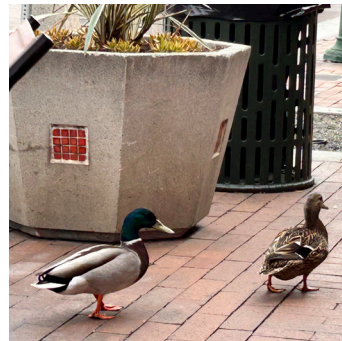
## Don't quack up ... ducks are back

### ■ AREA NEWS BRIEFS

City leaders in Garden Grove promised that when the ponds in the Civic Center Park (demolished to make room for the new police facility and parking structure) were gone "there will always be a place for ducks in Garden Grove."

Well, it's true. Ducks and other water fowl have been spotted in the West Street basin (once known as "Kid's Haven") and in the Village Green Park.

On Thursday, this handsome couple (at right) were spotted strolling along Main Street in the downtown area.



**MAIN STREET MALLARD** and friend. (Tribune photo).

### Stanton planners cancel

The Stanton Planning Commission meeting planned for Wednesday, March 5, has been cancelled.

The next meeting is scheduled on March 19 at 6:30 p.m.

### GG planners consider apartments on Lampson

A public hearing on a site plan for a seven-unit, three-story residential apartment complex at the southwest corner of Lampson

Avenue and Westlake Street will be held by the Garden Grove Planning Commission when it meets on Thursday, March 6.

The proposed project – to be built on a 0.29-acre lot – would include one affordable housing unit for a "very low-income" resident.

The location is west of Euclid Street near Ralston Intermediate School.

Another public hearing will be held on a request for a one-year time extension for a site plan to build a new 88,164-square foot shell industrial building at 11300 Western Ave. at Lincoln Way.

The commission will meet at 7 p.m. in the Community Meeting Center, 11300 Stanford Ave. (west of Euclid Street), across from Garden Grove High School.

# NewsUpdate

## Trump-Zelensky Meet Ends in Chaos

### President demands Ukrainian must OK a cease-fire deal

A meeting between President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance and Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office on Friday descended into angry disagreement and an early end.

According to the Associated Press, the meeting was billed as the completion of an agreement for peace between Ukraine and Russia that was rejected by the Ukrainian president for lacking in "security guarantees" for his nation.

Vance called it "disrespectful" for Zelensky to try to "litigate" the agreement in the Oval Office in front of television cameras. Zelensky has repeatedly said that any agreement to end the war would need to have



**PRESIDENT TRUMP** is angry with the Ukrainian president (Shutterstock).

some provisions to keep Russia from reopening its attacks.

The press conference planned for after the meeting was cancelled.

Trump later said that Ukraine had to agree to an immediate cease-fire or risk losing American support. The leaders of most Western Euro-

pean nations voice their support for Ukraine, some of them vowing to organize Europe to pay for the kind of aid the U.S. has been supplying.

## Musk will try again in insisting on self-reports from federal workers

Billionaire Elon Musk is taking another shot at demanding that federal government employees submit reports on what they accomplished in the week.

The New York Times is reporting that the e-mails this time will not come from the Office of Personnel Management but directly from the agencies themselves.

The original e-mail threatened termination for those which did

not comply, but the consequences of not complying are unclear, although Musk wrote in the note that a failure to respond would be "taken as a resignation."

A federal judge, in the meantime, ruled that the OPM had no authority to fire anyone, except its own employees. The new e-mail could be going out as early as Saturday.

### Great Thoughts

"I detest what you write, but I would give my life to make it possible for you to continue to write."

– Voltaire

"Happily, the Government of the United States, which gives bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving to on all occasions their effectual support."

– George Washington, president of the United States

## Pope Francis' condition is now complicated with lung, kidney problems

Pope Francis, 88, has been placed on a "breathing machine" in response to what The Vatican called a "sudden worsening of his respiratory condition."

United Press International reports that doctors will need "about 24 to 48 hours" to accurately assess the Pontiff's con-

dition. The prognosis is now considered "guarded."

He is not "out of danger" but is described as "alert and aware at all times."

While hospitalized with double pneumonia he suffered "some kidney failure" and is listed in critical condition.

### Weather: Temperatures falling

The cooling trend that began on Friday in our West Orange County cities continues and picks up speed this weekend. The forecast calls for a daytime high of 67 on Saturday with an overnight low of 53 under partly cloudy skies. Sunday will cool to 63 (54) with cloudy skies. Monday will be even chillier at 61 (49) with a 40 percent chance of rain. A slight reversal is predicted for Tuesday with a high of 64 with a low of 40 and with a 37 percent chance of rain.

# Arts & Living

## 'The Gorge' Is Deeply Ridiculous

Some geology,  
some romance,  
much foolishness

By Jake Coyle  
AP Film Writer

In the movies, we've had green valleys, haunted hills and grand canyons. But only now has the time arrived for a long-over-shadowed land formation. "The Gorge," a preposterous new videogame-like thriller, at least succeeds in, um, gorging on this often-overlooked geological feature.

The gorge in question, to be fair, is a beauty. In some northern forested wilderness sit two concrete towers, one for each side of a wide, foggy ravine encircled by sheer rock steep. Two expert snipers — Levi (Miles Teller) from the U.S., and Drasa (Anya Taylor-Joy), placed by Russia — have been dropped off to man their respective stations.

Both are conscripts of a sort. Levi has been a private contractor for the military since being psychologically deemed unfit for service by the Marines. (Sigourney Weaver plays the cryptic woman who hires him.) Drasa is Lithuanian. Each operates in the murky quasi-official world of covert military operations. All they know is that they're to be at this ultra-classified post for a year, part of an annual rotation. Their main job is to shoot anything that comes out of the chasm below.

What's inside? The guy Levi is replacing thinks it could be a portal to hell. "The Gorge," directed by Scott Derrickson ("Doctor Strange," "The Black Phone") from a script by Zach Dean ("The Tomorrow War," "Fast X"), unpeels these mysteries in a film that, if it wanted to, could be a very atmospheric post-Cold War parable, a kind of kaiju-in-the-ground thriller, about deep-



MILES TELLER and Anya Taylor-Joy in a scene from "The Gorge" (Apple Studios).

### Movie Review

buried military secrets.

That may be the backdrop, but "The Gorge" wants to be something else, too. It wants to be a love story. Taking after the hybrid DNA horrors that emerge from below, "The Gorge" mixes rom-com with sci-fi, with mostly ridiculous results. This is the rare movie to boast both horse-riding tree-zombies (that's what I said) and so, so many T.S. Eliot references.

There is good preposterous and bad preposterous. "The Gorge" — which I'm happy to report features the line "The gorge is exposed!" — may find some believers on both sides of that gulf.

The production quality is well above the grade of its script, with cinematography by Dan Laustsen (Guillermo del Toro's regular DP) and a score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross (coming off their incredible 2024 of "Challengers" and "Queer").

But the tonal swings, not to mention the gloss that covers the whole enterprise, make "The Gorge" an intriguing but empty genre mash-up and streaming-

only exercise.

Like would-be lovers who spy each other across balconies, Drasa and Levi find their gazes trained more on each other than the evil that lurks below. It begins with a sign that could be called a tad cutesy for an elite sniper ("What's your name?").

As the months go by, their interactions advance to dancing and even, with the help of some rappelling rope, a dinner date.

You could at this point be asking yourself a few questions. If some version of hell was pried open, would we, perhaps, want more than two guards? But if we're going with two, how likely is it, with ghoulish things sporadically climbing up from the abyss, that they would soon begin a "Love, Actually"-style courtship of holding up signs for each other?

These aren't quibbles that "The Gorge" has any time for, though. Though the movie's flow is choppy and occasionally distracted by overly showy camera moves, it zips along and soon enough the two of them are shooting at what you could only call skull spiders. Questionable as the romantic turn is, Taylor-

### Poor ★

Joy and Teller have convincing chemistry. Plus "The Queen's Gambit" fans can rejoice at the chance to again see Taylor-Joy play chess, albeit in a slightly different context.

Once we get a decent view of the creatures they're charged with keeping under control, they appear half tree root, half human, like demon Groots. "The Gorge" is better before our main characters are no longer poised at the mouth of hell but running through the gorge floor. One minute, they're swaying to the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, the next they're being swallowed by an adhesive root system. "The Gorge" is pretty superficial stuff, but perhaps we can await its even shallower sequel, "The Gully."

"The Gorge," an Apple Studios release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for intense sequences of violence and action, brief strong language, some suggestive material and thematic elements. Running time: 127 minutes.

# TheSportsPages

## Backtracking on competitive equity model

I'm not always the most eager guy to admit I may have been wrong, so this is close to being historic.

I have been carping about my many objections to the "competitive equity" changes made to California high school sports. In the interests of having prep athletic teams play other teams

of roughly equal talent and performance, the old traditional "local" leagues of schools geographically close has been ditched and playoff divisions arranged not



### Sports Retorts

Jim Tortolano

by attendance but by computer models of performance.

But the upside that's emerging is that a team (or teams) that was good but in a tough league still stands a chance of competing successfully in the CIF-SS playoffs.

The semifinal boys' basketball Division 4-AA game between Pacifica and Santiago – both from the Garden Grove Unified School District and once rivals in the old Garden Grove League – played a close, competitive game eventually won by the Cavaliers who are playing Saturday (today) for the title.

Santiago finished third in the Coast League with a 5-3 mark and Pacifica fourth in the North Hills League at 4-4 and under the old arrangements might not have advanced so far. There was once a time when only league champs made the playoffs, believe it or not.

So the competitive equity program has some merit. But that can certainly co-exist with some return to "neighborhood" leagues. The Coast League (for basketball, anyway) has three teams from the old GGL,

Continued on page 8

## It Was A 'Weird' Reunion



**DALLAS FORWARD** Olivier-Maxence Prosper, left, blocks a shot by Los Angeles Lakers guard Luka Dončić during the second half of an NBA basketball game on Tuesday in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Kyusung Gong).

## Doncic: 'Sometimes I don't know what I am doing' in Lakers' win

By Greg Beacham  
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Although Luka Dončić speaks four languages, he struggled for the words to express just how strange it was to play against the Dallas Mavericks on Tuesday night.

Just 23 days after his world was upended by Dallas' shocking decision to trade him, Dončić was on the Los Angeles Lakers' home court to face those same Mavs. His feelings of betrayal and uncertainty are still fresh, and they affected a performance that was inconsistent, occasionally brilliant and altogether fraught with anxiety.

"It was just a lot of emotions I was feeling," Dončić said. "I can't even explain. It was a dif-

ferent game. Sometimes, I don't know what I was doing. I'm just glad it's over, honestly."

Dončić's game was all over the place — just like his head.

He posted his first triple-double in a Lakers uniform, but he also missed 11 of his 17 shots and was wild from 3-point range. He made a dozen sublime passes and at least that many big defensive plays, yet he could only score two points in the fourth quarter of a tight game.

"It was so weird," Dončić said. "There were moments I felt like I don't know what I was doing. I'm glad we got a win."

Fortunately for Dončić, he now has LeBron James for a teammate — and the top scorer in NBA history simply wouldn't let Luka lose.

Continued on page 8

## Lakers win this 'Battle of LA'.

The Lakers won the latest "Battle of Los Angeles" on Friday night, beating the Clippers 106-102 at home. Luka Dončić scored 31 points for the winners and added five assists. LeBron James scored 28 points, had 13 rebounds and had three assists.

Ivica Zubac starred for the Clips with 27 points and 16 rebounds. James Harden scored 18 points, had seven rebounds and nine assists.

It was the Lakers' fifth consecutive win, improving their record to 37-21. They lead the NBA Pacific Division and are fourth in the Western Conference.

The Clippers are 32-27 and sixth in the conference, second in the Pacific Division.

# Trout hits it out, explores right field

## Spring training gets underway for the Halos

By David Brandt  
AP Sports Writer

TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) — Three-time AL MVP Mike Trout hit his first homer of spring training on Wednesday, a solo shot over the left-field wall as the Los Angeles Angels star tries to bounce back from several injury-filled seasons.

The 33-year-old went deep in the third inning off Cincinnati reliever Bryan Shaw. Trout was the designated hitter and plans to play a majority of his games in right field, moving from center in an attempt to preserve his health.

“It felt good,” Trout said. “Just having some good at-bats, seeing pitches and got a good result.”



MIKE TROUT is back for another year with the Angels in spring training (Angels photo).

Trout played just 29 games last season and had surgery on May 3 to repair a torn meniscus in his left knee.

He missed all but 36 games of the 2021 season with a strained right calf, and was out between July 12 and Aug. 19 in 2022 because of an injury to his upper back and ribcage. Trout broke the hamate bone in his left hand when he fouled off a pitch on

July 3, 2023, missing all but one game after July 3.

Trout’s last MVP season came in 2019 when he hit .291 with 45 homers and 104 RBIs. He has a .299 career average with 378 homers over 14 seasons with the Angels.

Trout said his transition to right field has gone well. He’s played one game at the position so far

this spring training and said he’s scheduled to be in right again later this week.

“Looking forward to it, getting some reads off the bat,” Trout said. “It’s different visuals you’ve got to work on and then you’ve got different angles on the line at different stadiums. It’ll be an adjustment but I’m enjoying it.”



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# The 'weird reunion' of Luka Doncic

Continued from page 6

In that fourth quarter, the Lakers' eager fans saw another glimpse of what Doncic and James can become. James took over the game, scoring 16 of his 27 points in the final period — including three key buckets on passes from Doncic to cap his superb playmaking performance.

Doncic finished with 19 points, 15 rebounds and 12 assists in the 81st triple-double of his career. His teammates would have

known it was an important night even if they hadn't seen Doncic take a few meaningful looks at the Mavs' bench, and they helped to sand off the rough edges on Doncic's cathartic evening.

"We understood as his teammates that we wanted to try to get this win for him," James said. "Obviously, we know what transpired not too long ago. As his teammates, we wanted just to back him in any way, shape or form. Happy that I was — along with my teammates — able to make a couple of plays down the stretch to get him this win. I know he probably won't say it, but I think it means something to him for sure."

Doncic was at the center of the

Lakers' attack from the start against Dallas. He missed a 3-pointer after the opening tip, but blocked a shot on Dallas' first possession before adding a layup and an assist on a 3-pointer by James moments later.

Doncic was hyped, as evidenced when he got whistled for an early technical foul by referee Pat Fraher for overzealously protesting a non-call. Two teammates rushed over to Doncic to make sure it went no further.

Dallas general manager Nico Harrison, who has probably bet his career on trading Doncic, was at the game from pregame warmups onward. Doncic said he didn't see him.

While Doncic shot some early free throws, Lakers fans started a chant that returned through-

out the night: "Thank you Nico! Thank you Nico!"

Mark Cuban, who sold controlling interest in the Mavericks 14 months ago, also watched the game from courtside. The billionaire jokingly booed Doncic a few times before Doncic grinningly replied: "Shut up, Mark!"

"It was awkward, but at the same time, it was fun," said Dallas guard Kyrie Irving, Doncic's good friend. "We got a chance to feel like we were in practice all over again, going at each other. That was a good reflection point, and then just seeing the crowd cheer for him and just get him going and see him make some of the tough shots that I've seen him make thousands of times, that probably made it even more awkward. But it was fun. It's fun competing."



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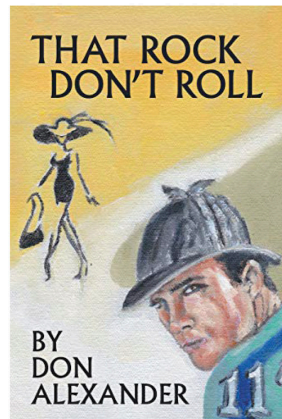
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**Don Alexander** has been a sports columnist, a sports broadcaster, talk show host and a college instructor. This is his first novel.

# Our 'too-early' top fives

As the basketball playoffs wind up, attention is turning to baseball and softball. No one's in league play yet and even tournaments aren't in full swing.

But here's a too-early "ranking" of the top teams so far based strictly on won-loss records (not including Friday's results).

**In softball**, nationally-ranked Pacifica (3-0) has to be considered the top team, but two other schools have unbeaten teams. Los Amigos (4-0) has not only won the most games, but also outscored opponents 42-9 over that span.

Huntington Beach is 3-0, Marina is 3-1 and Westminster 3-2.

**In baseball**, this is a toughie because the team that probably belongs at the top is the Huntington Beach Oilers. The or-

## Prep Sports SPOTLIGHT

ange-and-black haven't started their season and yet are ranked number three in the nation.

They'll start next Wednesday against Harvard-Westlake, ranked 12th in the U.S.

So, we'll give them the benefit of the doubt. The only other unbeaten team is Rancho Alamitos at 3-0. Marina is 3-1, Orange 3-1-1. Estancia, Edison and Bolsa Grande are all 2-1.

*Coaches, fans, players, parents, etc. are encouraged to report scores and stats, and send photos and feature ideas about local high school sports to [orangecountytribune@gmail.com](mailto:orangecountytribune@gmail.com).*

## Jim's ReTorts: Go 'Dutch'?

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very well and that might be inspiring the chain to expand further in the OC. There are already stores in Irvine, Seal Beach, Brea, Orange, Huntington Beach (two), Irvine, Laguna Niguel, Costa Mesa (two), Fountain Valley and La Habra.

## Sports ReTorts: Jim's backspace

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but what's Estancia, located in Costa Mesa doing there? And in the North Hills League, why is Pacifica journeying to Brea Olinda?

The CIF-SS is doing some smart things. But we can still do better.