

FIRST OF A MULTI-PART SERIES

Awaken Church: Unholy Reception

Critics, led by ex-NBC News correspondent Brad Willis, have signed a petition to keep the evangelical and politically active church out of Coronado



Mike and Katy Yeager plan to lead the Coronado campus of Awaken Church. Photo courtesy of the Yeagers.

"Above all else, our mission is to build a church that is fresh, real, and powerful, a place where people can come and hear the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ."

– The Rev. Mike Yeager, an Awaken pastor who plans to co-lead the Coronado campus

"I fear people will be indoctrinated into a radical ideology that relies on disinformation and conspiracy theories, be fleeced out of their money, and manipulated into participating in activities that ultimately put our democracy in peril."

– Coronado resident Brad Willis, a journalist leading the charge against Awaken Church

By DENNIS WAGNER
The Coronado News

In the best-case scenario, the Revs. Jurgen and Leanne Matthesius are prophets who converse with God and spread his word while building religious communities, leading the faithful to goodness and wealth through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the worst cases scenario, as described by critics, Awaken Church leaders are huckster evangelists who prey on weak-minded believers, taking their money in return for a theology that blends Trumpist politics, Christian nationalism and demonizing hate speech.

Either way, the Matthesiuses and their desire to plant an Awaken Church campus in Coronado has churned up a First Amendment dispute, with freedom of speech, assembly and religion all involved.

The controversy is the latest in a culture war playing out here and across the country as conservatives and liberals have staked ground in high-stakes skirmishes.

Nationally, there's the recent boycott of Bud Light by conservatives after Dylan Mulvaney, a transgender influencer, promoted the beer on Instagram. And Disney pulled the plug on \$1 billion in development and 2,000 new jobs in Florida over legislation that Republican Gov. and GOP presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis signed that restricted the teaching of sexual orientation and gender identity for kindergarten through third grade.

Closer to home, community members made LGBTQIA+ training an issue at the Coronado School Board meeting on April 20, while concerned parents and residents crammed the Coronado City Council chambers on July 18 to debate the Coronado Public Library holding a storytime hour for children ages 3-6, where a book was read in honor of Pride Month.

So, when some vocal Coronado residents banded together this year in an attempt to block the Matthesiuses from opening a new church in the community, Jurgen Matthesius expressed outrage.

He went so far as to claim the critics were backed by Satan, adding: "The demoniacs on Coronado... don't get to dictate. We're gonna drive them out, and the church is coming to Coronado."

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Brad Willis



The Rev. Jurgen Matthesius

Imperial Beach activist wants US-based solution for sewage crisis

By JULIETA SOTO
The Coronado News

Leon Benham has proudly called Imperial Beach his home since the Civil Rights era, and today he continues a fight to clean the nearby Tijuana River and stop the flow of raw sewage from Mexico into the Pacific Ocean.

Part of that effort includes being executive director of Citizens for Coastal Conservancy ("C4CC"), a non-profit organization based in Imperial Beach that advocates for objective science to help address the cleanup of the Tijuana River Valley and the coastal ocean environment.

"Our mission statement and our core purpose is to educate local citizens about border ocean water pollution and provide practical solutions," Benham said. He considers that C4CC has raised public awareness and scrutinized government policies, but more work is needed to find sustainable solutions.

"We're a small grassroots local situation," Benham told The Coronado News in a July interview. "We're not funded by state agencies or federal agencies and we advocate for the cleanup of our beaches."

» Continued on Page 6



Leon Benham, the executive director of Citizens for Coastal Conservancy. Staff photo by Madeline Yang.

Softball all-stars soaring after a successful season

By MAYA SCIARRETTA
The Coronado News

The Coronado Youth Girls Softball All-Star team, composed of 13 talented and dedicated players selected from the league's multiple 12U teams, made an impressive run all the way from Coronado to the state championships in Lancaster.

Before that, however, they competed in the championship games for four of their five total tournaments.

Ultimately, the All-Stars ended the season with a winning record: 20 wins and nine losses.

"I find that to be an incredibly successful season," said Jim Thompson, manager of the 12U All-Stars.

The team's performance at the district championship exemplifies their success and determination. Despite the 106 degree heat, the girls were able to salvage their tournament

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CORONADO

CORONADO LOVE LETTER

this week

12 • saturday

Don't miss the Summer Reading Finale at the Coronado Library Park. It's a 1990s-style Foam Party at 2 p.m. Kids - don't miss this awesome party, presented by FoamDiego. Wear your bathing suit, shorts or other comfortable clothing you don't mind getting wet. A "cannon" will shoot foam into the air for kids to play in. The foam is made from soap that is biodegradable, hypo-allergenic, and fragrance-free — however, swim goggles or similar eye protection are recommended especially for kids under 5. And don't forget to bring a towel! For more information about the foam ingredients and other Q&A, please visit <https://foamdiego.com>.

16 • wednesday

The Coronado Public Library, in partnership with the Coronado Island Film Festival, presents Film Forum Coronado, taking place the first and third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. p.m. in the library's Winn Room. Film expert Ralph DeLauro will provide a brief introduction to each film and leads a discussion afterwards, often including pointers about how lighting contribute to a scene's mood or propel the story. This film is "Mandala" (Korean with English subtitles, 1981, 117 min).

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DJ entrepreneur celebrates 50 years

Dean Atkinson and his Boogie Machine concept celebrate 50 years in 2023. The entrepreneurial musician has provided soundtrack magic for thousands of events over the past half century, and was a pioneer in providing canned music for events in this country.

His history in Coronado dates back to 1962 where he played drums, keyboards and bass guitar in various high school bands (until 1972) before starting his mobile music business.

Atkinson was popular for the music he provided that set the mood for many events in Coronado – proms, graduations, weddings and reunions. Although retired now, he continues to provide musical entertainment on request, and recently

entertained the Class of 1968's 55th high school reunion at the Coronado VFW. Atkinson was a member of that class.

He discovered his love of music in 1972, on a trip to Europe. Upon his return he began to build on the idea that a traveling musical DJ might be an interesting profession. In October of that year he provided music at a Halloween party in San Diego.

When "American Graffiti" came out in 1973, he was hired to set up dance machines in front of theatres for the first two weeks of screen-



ings. Atkinson, of course, handed out business cards, and before long he had a new career.

Atkinson continues to maintain his enviable music collection, something he has been contributing to since 1955. The endless stacks of vinyl records, however, have been mostly replaced with thousands of music CDs.

As the years have gone by, Atkinson is proud of his work, and the pleasure he has brought people with his custom-made soundtracks.

"I guess you could say I'm retired," he said. "But music continues to play a huge role in my life. I can't imagine a day without a music soundtrack."

Submitted by Joe Ditler.

Meet Sherry, the Pet of the Week

Sherry is the sweetest girl with the most calm and loving disposition, and PAWS of Coronado says she's looking for a home.

PAWS says Sherry is a wonderful companion who is used to city living and does well in the home when she is left alone.

Sherry loves going for walks with her foster home and with her hired dog walker. She has a few doggy companions that she walks with each week and looks forward to pack walk days.

She would love a forever home that enjoys taking their dog on adventures with them. She loves car

rides and being with her people where ever they go. She is often described as intuitive, loyal, and an "old soul" and is loved by everyone who has the pleasure of meeting her.

If you are looking for a sweet soul to join your household, Sherry is your match.

All of our animals at PAWS are spayed/neutered, microchipped, vaccinated, and up to date on flea preventative. Adoptions are by appointment ONLY. If you are interested in adopting any Sherry or any other animal, please visit www.pawsofcoronado.org.



Student of the Week is on Summer Break — it will return when school resumes!

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ISLAND INSIDER



Expert Analysis on the Coronado Housing Market

HELLO CORONADO!

Corey Simone here. Every Friday moving forward, I will be bringing you news, stats and information in the ever changing real estate market. Should you have a topic you want covered please email me at info@simonerealestategroup.com



Understanding Proposition 13 and real property assessments

Proposition 13 is the driving force behind all property tax assessments, whether homeowners realize it or not.

Prior to the proposition, passed on June 6, 1978, properties were systematically reviewed and updated, keeping assessed values at or near market value constantly.

Enter Proposition 13, swooping in to respin the narrative and limit the amount of times that a property can be reassessed.

As your expert real estate agent, I am here to help you understand the rhyme and reason behind your property taxes, which can sometimes seem like a jumbled mess.

This week, I will break down the basic formula for understanding Proposition 13 by providing history, outlining the rules and answering common questions.

Let's start with a simple equation for determining your property's value with Proposition 13:

Real property value = base year value + a yearly inflation index rate not exceeding 2%.

(In addition, there is also a limit on property taxes to 1% of the assessed value plus voter-approved taxes.)

History of Proposition 13

The proposition, which is a property tax limitation initiative, was first overwhelmingly approved on June 6,

1978 by California voters, according to California Property Tax by the California State Board of Equalization.

It is said that the initiative was a collective response from taxpayers who were sick of the dramatic increase in property taxes.

The Proposition brought back most real property assessments to a 1975 market value. This established the first base year in California. Now, a new base year is only reestablished when there is a change in ownership or new construction on a property.

Before 1978, real property was appraised cyclically with a 5-year gap (at most) between reassessments. Because of the frequency of reassessments, property's assessed values were typically kept at or near the current market value.

Since Proposition 13 only reassesses with a change in ownership or a new construction, properties that have not undergone either of those two things since 1975 will stay at a 1975 base year value.

Considering these changes, new homeowners should not be shocked if their assessment is higher than their neighbors who have owned property for years. As such, the assessed values of recent home purchases tend to mirror approximate market values.

Since assessed values cannot be increased by more than 2% per year, it is common for longtime homeowners

to have a lower tax liability than people who have acquired property recently.

It is also important to note that there is some controversy surrounding Proposition 13, specifically in regards to this gap.

A few rules with Proposition 13:

- The maximum amount of property tax cannot exceed 1% of the property's assessed value, plus any bonds or fees approved by voters.
- The new value determined with reassessment (upon change of ownership or new construction) will be increased each year by an inflation index that will not exceed 2% per year.
- Properties purchased before March 1, 1975 will still have a base year value of the 1975 assessment.

As a trusted real estate agent, I am here to keep you informed about the most up-to-date information of all things real estate. It is my goal to make sure you understand the essential California propositions that will help support your home-owning journey.

If you have any questions about Proposition 13, or are interested in learning more about the implications of your property's taxes, don't hesitate to reach out at 619-568-0568 or info@simonerealestategroup.com.

I am always here to help answer any questions and keep you informed on the ever-evolving landscape of real estate properties!

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OPINION

OP-ED

The rugged beauty of the Alaskan bush

Bristol Bay is home to the largest sockeye salmon run, and I have spent every summer living and working among its brilliance.

By **SOFIE FRANSEN**

The warm tones of the sun linger over a vast bay at dusk, the water a mirror to the sky's brilliance. A few short hours later, when the sun rises, those same colors come to life again.

I find myself admiring this staple of an Alaskan summer—the eternal glow of the sun—from a skiff where I stand in waders, ankle deep in salmon, working to pick fresh catches out of a 50 fathom long commercial fishing net.

This is Bristol Bay, Alaska, home to the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world, and I have spent every summer of my life living and working among its rugged beauty with my family. I consider this place my second home.



Fransen picking fish out of a 50 fathom long commercial fishing net in Bristol Bay, Alaska.
Photo courtesy of Ben Matthews.

When a significant portion of your childhood was spent in the Alaskan bush, where a grizzly bear sighting is often more common than a shower and your cabin leans aggressively more each year to the shifting bluff behind it, you learn to adapt quickly.

My mom, who never gets enough credit for all of the work she does keeping everyone fed and alive each year, was brave enough to bring my brother Cody and I up when we were little. In fact, both of us haven't missed a summer since the first year after we were born.

While my dad was out fishing, she watched us turn the tundra, creek, beach, four wheelers and cabin into our personal playground.

I even learned to walk in that endearing cabin, despite constantly falling from the floor's slight tilt.

As I grew older though, my time

spent on the beach shifted significantly to working in my dad's boat.

I became a crew member on his set net site when I turned 10 and then gained even more responsibility at 13 when Cody, four years older than me, started running his own boat and crew.

The two of them taught me everything I know about the industry.

Here's the other thing about spending summers in the Alaskan bush—you're expected to pull your weight at a young age.

The years leading up to officially becoming a crew member, my dad would plop me in the boat with my brother, the other hired crewmen and hundreds of fish. It was my job

- **To hear more about the Fransen's story visit <https://wildfinseafoods.com/>**
 - **To check out more of Ben Matthew's professional photography, visit his website <https://www.bentmatthews.com/>**
- to sit amid the slime and blood and help pitch the impossibly fresh fish into brailer bags.
- Although being so little, I was probably more interested in admiring the lively dance of the salmon as they came onto the boat and skipping flounders across the water, than I was in actually helping.
- Besides, at that point, the weight of

a fish was still clumsy in my hands, so I always opted for the two-hand grasp or tail clasp, which any fisherman knows is frowned upon.

I remember Cody would teach me the art of holding a salmon, arranging my small hand on top of the head with a thumb in the gills.

I can also visualize admiring the lighting speed at which my dad picked fish out of the net. And even with the intensity of the job, he always took the time to slow it down for me, patiently teaching the right picking techniques.

Now at 22, with 12 years of experience under my belt (plus years of

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OP-ED

In response to 'A Practical Solution to Ocean Pollution'

By **MORGAN ROGERS**

The South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) does not discharge or divert untreated sewage into the ocean.

While flows into the SBIWTP have averaged 8% above the plant's design capacity over the past seven months, all flows into the plant are still treated and discharged through a pipeline to 3.5 miles offshore.

Furthermore, environmental assessments in support of the SBIWTP expansion project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and based on 20 years of data, concluded that beach pollution sources are most

likely originating from Tijuana River transboundary flows and the San Antonio de los Buenos Wastewater Treatment Plant (SAB) ocean discharge, not the SBIWTP.

The EIS report can be found here: bit.ly/43T92CO

Transboundary flows down the Tijuana River that discharge into the ocean typically consist of treated water, potable water, groundwater, and wastewater, in addition to trash and solid wastes, all of which contribute to our beach pollution.

In addition, an estimated 35-plus million gallons per day of raw sewage are discharged year-round directly into the ocean south of the

border at the site of Mexico's defunct SAB plant.

Depending upon ocean currents, this raw sewage sometimes drifts north and contaminates our beaches. These are the most significant sources of ocean pollution within our coastal communities and beaches.

A new plant at SAB is scheduled to be online in 2026, eliminating this source of pollution.

One year ago, the International Boundary and Water Commission signed a U.S.-Mexico agreement known as Minute 328 to implement a list of sanitation projects in San Diego and Tijuana, includ-

ing construction of the new SAB plant, doubling the capacity of the SBIWTP, and capturing raw sewage that currently flows into the Tijuana River.

Implementation of these projects is already underway and as they are completed over the next several years, untreated flows discharged to the ocean at SAB will be eliminated and the number of days of transboundary flows in the Tijuana River will be greatly reduced.

Submitted by Morgan Rogers, Area Operations Manager, San Diego Field Office; US International Boundary & Water Commission

The Coronado News accepts Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor. Please send them to Editor Craig Harris at craig@thecoronadonews.com.

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2024

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LISA BENSON

CORONADO

Q&A:

County Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer talks about the Tijuana sewage crisis

By JULIETA SOTO
The Coronado News

San Diego County Board of Supervisor Vice Chair Terra Lawson-Remer has long voiced protecting area beaches and coastlines as an essential priority for community members.

Lawson-Remer represents District 3, which includes Coronado, and she has a background in working toward social, environmental and economic justice. Earlier this year, the board elected Lawson-Remer as vice chair.

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors declared the Tijuana River Valley Pollution a public health crisis in 2021. This year, Chairwoman Nora Vargas and Lawson-Remer proposed a resolution requesting additional funding at the state and federal levels to ensure clean water for all San Diego families, businesses and visitors.

On June 27, the Board of Supervisors declared the first-ever state of emergency regarding the ongoing Tijuana sewage crisis polluting the Pacific Ocean and closing beaches in Coronado and Imperial Beach.

Vargas and Lawson-Remer also gathered and sent 2,500 petition signatures from local citizens asking President Biden to take federal action in July.

The Coronado News inquired about Lawson-Remer's motivation and goals for ongoing efforts to mitigate the cross-border sewage crisis via email correspondence. Here's the interview:



Lawson-Remer

Why do you consider the Tijuana sewage crisis a priority?

Lawson-Remer: When you have 35 million gallons of toxic sewage being spilled in the ocean every day — poisoning our environment, hurting our tourism industry and threatening the health of our residents — to me, that certainly fits the definition of a crisis.

The fact that previous regional leadership allowed this crisis to persist for so long is unconscionable. Our coastal communities should not have to suffer this environmental injustice, and they deserve action from all levels of our government to put a stop to it. So to me, the question isn't why it's a priority, but why isn't it a top priority for all of us?

And that's a big part of what I've been fighting for, is building that awareness and sense of urgency that's been missing, so we can bring all the key players together to finally get serious about fixing this crisis.

What do you hope to accomplish with the county-wide state of emergency regarding the sewage contamination entering the U.S.-Mexico border that contaminates local ocean waters?

Lawson-Remer: Declaring a county state of emergency raised the red flag and immediately elevated this issue in the eyes of our state and federal leaders. When we issued our declaration and called for a federal emergency, our entire local congressional delegation joined the call and urged President Biden to take action.

Our state leaders joined the fight by urging Gov. Newsom to declare a state of emergency in California. This is the same process that local agencies recently used to tackle the

water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

In Flint, it was their county's emergency declaration that finally brought swift action from the state and federal levels. We need a federal emergency to cut through red tape and get shovels in the dirt fixing the broken sewage infrastructure that's causing this crisis.

It will also put pressure on the Mexican government to do their part. A federal emergency lets Mexico know that this crisis is not just a regional issue, it's a major national priority of the United States.

What solutions can the community of Coronado expect you to bring forth by 2024 to lessen beach closures?

Lawson-Remer: At the county level, we will keep doing everything in our power to keep our water clean — this goes back to the critical investment in stormwater infrastructure I fought for, as well as rehabilitation efforts our county will be working on in the Tijuana River Valley.

In just the past two years we've made more progress than our old leadership was able to accomplish in decades. With the momentum we've been building, I'm optimistic that we'll finally get the attention this issue deserves from our federal government. But that only happens if we keep the pressure on, which is why I'll be calling for action until all of our beautiful beaches are safe to swim in.



Read the full interview online. Scan the QR code with your smartphone camera, and tap on the link.

Firehouse Spaghetti Dinner in late July benefits Burn Institute

The Coronado Firehouse Annual Spaghetti Dinner benefiting the Burn Institute took place on July 23, and those attending feasted on spaghetti served by the firefighters.

The Hotel del Coronado and the Coronado Island Marriott donated the food, according to organizers.

With the concert in the park around the corner, diners wandered in to pick up to go portions or sat at one of the community tables.

The mission of the Coronado Fire Department is to maintain a highly trained, professional organization providing excellent service to our community, region, state, and each other through duty, honor, respect and family.

Last year the event raised \$11,000 for the Burn Institute, and the annual spaghetti dinner has occurred for about 40 years.

Making this event possible is the collaboration of Local 1475 of the Firefighters Union, while students from the Miramar Fire Academy and the Fire Science Program at Southwestern College assisted.

The department consists of 32 full-time firefighters, seven life-guards and administrative staff.

Submitted by Cynthia K Kosciuczyk

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He said efforts for change began in 2014 around the same time when he worked as the chief estimator and project manager to build public county trails in the park. Benham went on to found C4CC in 2019.

Rather, he claims, it will result in the San Antonio de los Buenos (SAB) wastewater treatment plant in Tijuana capturing less sewage and causing additional sewage outflow in Imperial Beach.

During dry events, the water entering from Mexico through the Tijuana River would be diverted into these basins allowing 300 million gallons to

However, Benham admits that not many elected officials are pushing for this type of change.

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AWAKEN CHURCH: UNHOLY RECEPTION | FIRST OF A MULTI-PART SERIES

Critics have signed petition to keep the evangelical and politically active church out of Coronado

» Continued from Page 1

The leading nemesis, Brad Willis, is an ex-foreign correspondent for NBC News.

He drafted the “No Cults” petition and authored a scathing five-part series about Awaken at his online Substack site that’s also used to expose what he claims is a threat to his adopted home. And, he’s recently used two of the city’s longtime publications to express his views.

He wrote a letter to the editor on May 12 in The Coronado Times — where he’s listed as part of its news team — alleging the church was a “cult” that tried to take over the Coronado School Board in the last election and is in “cahoots” with Mayor Richard Bailey.

The mayor declined to comment for this story.

Willis also wrote a letter to the editor on July 20 in The Coronado Eagle & Journal, where he wrote Awaken’s move to Coronado is “cause for great concern,” and he added: “You are not going to surround us and make us surrender with our hands in the air, as you have threatened.”

His “No Cults” petition with nearly 900 signatures contends Awaken’s aggressive political tactics will disrupt schools, assail town officials and lead to “active recruitment in our community for Awaken’s militia-style camps, and result in more unsuspecting Awaken followers being fleeced of their money and Coronado youth being subjected to indoctrination.”

In an interview via email, Willis said Jurgen Matthesius frequently claims he has spoken with God, and his proclamations suggest the church wants to impose its theocratic vision on Coronado, rather than become a part of the community.

He also noted that Awaken videos and literature are rife with war imagery, and militia-style training is offered by a subgroup known as The RMNNT (an apparent allusion to biblical passages that say only the remnants will be saved).

A RMNNT post on Facebook, for example, asserts that all commands from civil authorities running “counter to the revealed will of God are null and void, and disobedience to them is NOT A CRIME BUT A DUTY.”

Noting that there are conflicting interpretations of many Bible passages, Willis asked: “The ‘revealed will of God’ according to whom? Certainly not to mainstream Christians or a majority of Americans... I fear people will be indoctrinated into a radical ideology that relies on disinformation and conspiracy theories, be fleeced out of their money, and manipulated into participating in activities that ultimately put our democracy in peril.”

Unapologetic about political involvement

In a 2020 sermon posted on YouTube, Jurgen Matthesius pounds the lectern and accidentally drops the Bible while railing against wickedness in America.

He reads an Old Testament passage (Samuel Chapter 7, verses 13-14) wherein God crushes Israel’s enemies as a reward for Samuel’s devotion: “So the Philistines were subdued... And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines.”

Matthesius tells followers they must mirror that kind of devotion in San Diego or Satan will control the government, educational system and culture.

“If we don’t prophecy over San Diego, who will?” he asks. “If we don’t prophecy in our high schools, then the Devil will run rampant. It is a war. There is no neutral territory.

“God is raising up a church called Awaken... I want the testimony to be that the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Awaken Church.”

Matthesius and his wife also are unapologetic about Awaken being involved in politics.

On the Awaken website, the couple in a short video explain that America was founded on biblical principles, and “We believe Christ has called the church to be thermostats of culture, not mere thermometers.”



ABOVE: A screenshot from a recent recorded sermon by The Rev. Jurgen Matthesius, who expressed outrage at the critics and said “we’re gonna drive them out, and the church is coming to Coronado.”



LEFT: Mike Yeager will co-lead the Awaken Church with his wife, Katy. Photo courtesy of the Yeagers.

called “MyAwaken,” where members can donate through their checking accounts, debit or credit cards. And, the church accepts cryptocurrency as well as stocks and assets, according to its website.

Yeager said he could not provide Awaken’s budget, audits or a list of church board members.

Pastor: Church-goers spiritually uplifted

Yeager said he wishes critics such as Willis would attend Awaken services and see how church-goers are spiritually uplifted, marriages are saved and addictions are overcome.

He said Willis has never reached out to church leaders, and he denied accusations that the church and its leaders spew hate, traffic in conspiracy theories or promote violent insurrection.

“Jesus Christ was arguably the most controversial figure in all of history,” Yeager added in a subsequent email to The Coronado News. “... Any church that never offends anybody and perfectly integrates into all cultures and communities with zero friction is not teaching the Bible. But, above all else, our mission is to build a church that is fresh, real, and powerful, a place where people can come and hear the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ.”

Willis contends the church and Matthesius do not offer religion but Christian nationalism or “an extremist movement that uses the faith of Christianity as a cover for totalitarian ideology.”

“Our founding fathers fought to liberate us from tyranny and religious persecution,” Willis wrote in an email. “...As Thomas Jefferson noted, the First Amendment to our Constitution was designed to build ‘a wall of separation between church and state.’ The Christian nationalism movement would knock down that wall. As a result, we would no longer have majority rule, the freedoms we cherish, or liberty and justice for all. We would have an authoritarian theocracy. Think about the Taliban...”

Schmalz, the religious studies professor at the College of Holy Cross, says the question in Coronado comes down to “how far does religious liberty go?”

“If a group is law abiding can you prevent them from practicing their faith...? When do a religion’s beliefs and practices become real dangers? In this case, I see the potential for social disruption but I am not sure the label ‘cult’ is helpful in working through the complexities of religious liberty and community standards,” Schmalz said.

Coming Next: Part 2 — A Church Service: Music and Miracles

Members can receive “PoliticalAction” text updates, and the website provides links to conservative political sites like Turning Point USA, which has promoted culture war activism at universities and high schools.

Matthesius turned down interview requests through Mike Yeager, an Awaken pastor who with his wife, Katy, plans to lead the Coronado campus when it opens.

Yeager, who recently moved into the community, told The Coronado News that the “No Cults” petition was shocking because Awaken had never before faced a backlash.

He said critics have spread fear and hatred by cherry-picking church teachings and sermons out of context, just as someone could make a romantic comedy seem like a horror flick if they produced a trailer using fragmented scenes or images.

The label, “cult,” is particularly offensive, Yeager said, because it derives from an ancient term for hidden or dark.

“Nothing we do is hidden or in darkness,” he added. “That word just doesn’t apply, period.”

Willis counters: “With a religious cult, the leader often makes false and fantastical claims to glorify themselves, such as claiming they perform miracles and are in a two-way, direct conversation with God. Matthesius makes numerous such claims, including that he helped stop the tanks in Tiananmen Square by speaking in mock Asian tongues from his bedroom 1,000 miles away.”

Religious scholars: Avoid cult label

Religious scholars, social scientists and other experts typically hold that, while cults do exist, the term is so subjective that it should be avoided. They more commonly speak of “new religious movements.”

“The term ‘cult’ can too easily become a label that marginalizes groups we don’t understand or simply don’t like,” warned Mathew Schmalz, a religious studies professor at the College of Holy Cross and Founding Editor

at the Journal of Global Catholicism. “Calling a group a ‘cult’ can become a bogus pretext for denying people religious liberty.

Phillips Stevens, Jr., an associate professor of anthropology emeritus at State University of New York at Buffalo, also said branding with the word “cult” is “not helpful.”

In an email, he noted that the term has been applied to all sorts of groups ranging from Catholics who revere specific saints to devotees of Princess Diana or former President Donald Trump.

“That label has various legitimate meanings; but popularly it’s mostly negative and is applied loosely to various tightly knit groups whom the user of the term doesn’t like,” Stevens said.

“Most commonly, I think, it’s applied to groups whose methods of recruitment and retention of members are extremely coercive, so that members are ‘trapped’ in some way, psychologically, emotionally, economically, etc. I don’t see any of this in any of the various Awaken congregations around the US.”

Rick Ross, founder and executive director of the Cult Education Institute, makes a distinction between benign and destructive cults.

The latter, he said, share three characteristics: 1) a charismatic leader who becomes an object of worship or claims to convey God’s directives as a means of controlling followers; 2) the social isolation of new recruits and group members; 3) teachings or practices that hurt members physically, emotionally, financially or in other ways.

Organizational structure is often a red flag, Ross added, especially if a sect’s pastor cannot be fired, there is no elected church board, and there is no accountability or transparency with finances.

And while some mainline evangelical churches post their annual audited financial statements or budgets on their websites, Awaken does not appear to do so.

Awaken, however, makes it easy to give through an online program

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NAVY

North Island hosts 5th Annual Youth STEM Day

By **MADELINE YANG**
The Coronado News

Students step into a large airplane hangar on Naval Air Station North Island, but instead of planes filling the space, booths snake around the room. Tiny circuit boards, LEGO robots, cameras that see up to 8 miles away, tanks and planes parked outside and men and women from the United States Navy, Coast Guard and Marines mingle behind their stations. It's the 5th Annual Youth Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) Day that happened July 31, as part of the National Naval Officers Association goal of introducing these subjects to 6th to 12th grade students from greater San Diego.

Arthur Johnson, retired Navy Rear Admiral and aviator who came on board as the STEM coordinator in February, believes strongly in the importance of this event. "I know what this event might mean for some of the kids. It gives them a little bit of focus, it gives them a reason to do what they need to do," Johnson says.

Johnson reminisced on his own childhood of having the opportunity to fly in a helicopter at the age of 12 that inspired him to pursue a life of aviation within the Navy.

With the subject of STEM comes a similar passion of diversity for Johnson that includes men and women as well as people of different races and ethnicities.

Johnson says it's important for these kids who walk through life to see people who look like them doing these things, either within STEM or within the military. And, he noted, this event makes that possible.

"When I was growing up, it was difficult because there weren't very many Black boys. I made it all the way through flight training and I was



Military personnel putting on a helmet on a student at the 5th Annual Youth Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) Day.
Staff photo by Madeline Yang.

a flight instructor teaching other people to fly before I flew with another Black pilot. It was such a big deal," Johnson says. "The whole 33 years I was in the Navy, we never had more than six Black female pilots."

The STEM event aimed to provide visuals of success within different fields for the students walking through the hangar.

In the corner, yells and screams were coming from a booth surrounded by kids.

It's LEGO robotics, and the students were building their own robots.

Davon Copeland, a former gunner's mate, completed 20 years in the Navy before moving on to Western Governors University working in Strategic Partnerships.

He was running the booth as part of Code Wiz, a company dedicated to teaching kids how to code.

"In their mind, they think that they're playing games and getting this robot that they build on their own, but they're not. They're learning the basics and they're getting brilliant on the basics of coding with scratch, drag and drop," Copeland says.

Copeland explains that STEM and the military are not as far apart as one may think.

"A person is going to come in, they're going to look at your stuff and they're going to be like, 'it's not within specs.'...And so in the military, coming down to that punctilious degree of accuracy is extremely important, just as it is when you do engineering," Copeland says.

Meanwhile, five or six LEGO robots sit on the booth, all built and ready to move.

Kyelin King, a 17-year-old Lincoln High School student walks around with a group of his friends.

King wants to study biomedicine and sports medicine. He said having an interest in science and coming to the event sparked some curiosity in him in the robotics field.

A booth for the Marine Corps System Command sat in the middle of the room.

A group of teenagers stood on one side, heads down, hands focused on a dog tag. They learned about the conductivity of salt water acting as erosion on the dog tag.

With electric tape, they make a design on the steel dog tag, and with this science experiment, they erode the parts of the dog tag that aren't covered with tape. What emerges is the eroded steel outlining their design.

Outside the hangar, a handful of Navy planes and helicopters are parked, with a Marine tank and a Coast Guard boat next to them all lined in a row.

Kids explored the aircrafts and vehicles, climbing in the cockpits, touching the buttons and pretending they're out to sea.

This event and its goals have been a work in progress, finding diversity in STEM and in the military.

"It's slow work, but it's necessary," Johnson says.

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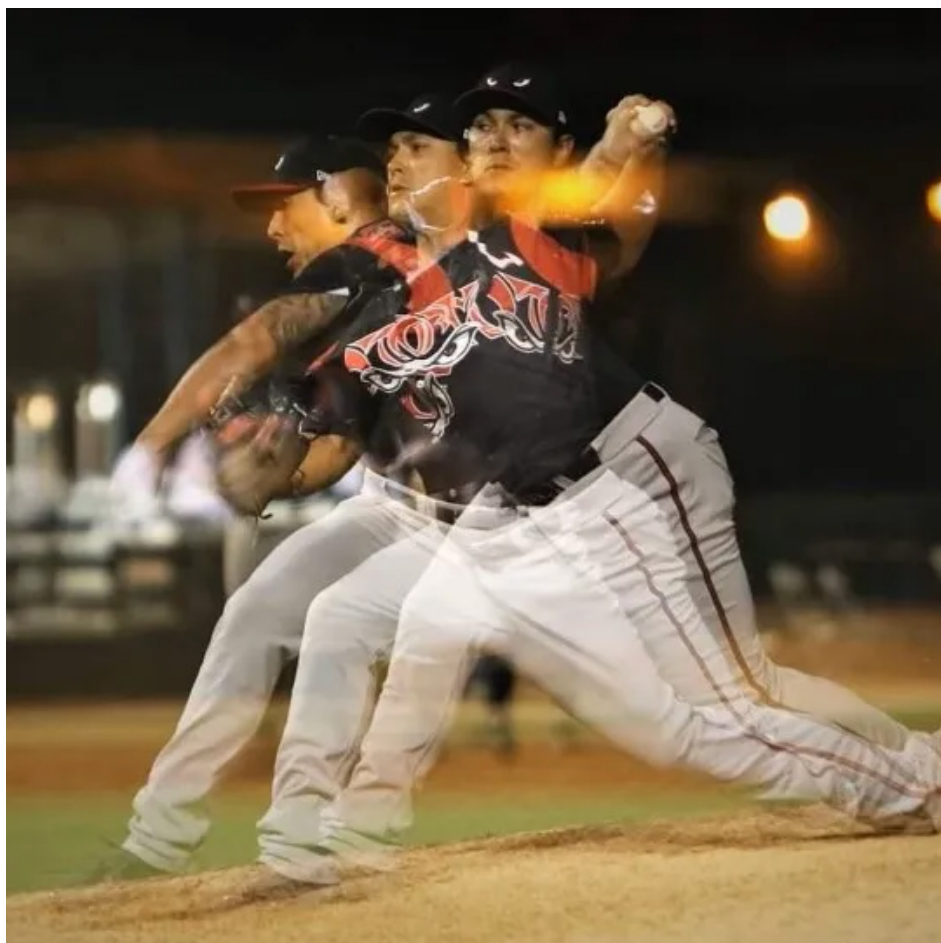
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Fred Schlichtholz looking for another comeback

By ANDREW NADLER
The Coronado News

After excelling during summer ball before his junior year at Coronado



“Tommy John process coming back

After playing some summer ball to

But at the Major League level, if you have a bad outing, it is more like a couple of days, then you are back out there, so you can not dwell on the success or failure too much, he said.

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The Coronado Youth girls 12U All-Star softball team placed eighth in the state tournament out of 48 teams. *Photos courtesy of Jim Thompson.*



The 12U All-Star team is composed of 13 players selected from all of the 12U teams.

Girls Softball 12U All-Star team soaring after successful season

» Continued from Page 1

run after a disappointing 8-7 day-one loss.

Coronado’s All-Stars won the next two games by a landslide, thereby qualifying for the championship round and the state tournament.

“They responded by not just winning the games but crushing the opposition,” said Thompson.

Sheerah Haywood, president of Coronado Youth Softball, was impressed by the team’s explosive hitting throughout their season.

“They scored more runs than I think I’ve ever seen,” said Haywood. “There were multiple games where they merced the other teams, which

means they were ahead by at least 10 runs.”

That power carried the girls to eighth place in a state tournament with 48 of the best teams in California.

Yet hitting was not the only key to the team’s success.

Unity and cohesion helped the girls work through tough games and recover from losses.

“They are so much stronger when they all buy in and play together and work in the same direction,” Thompson said.

As registration for the fall season begins, Coronado Youth Softball looks forward to introducing other young athletes to the joy, excitement and community of the sport.

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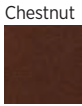
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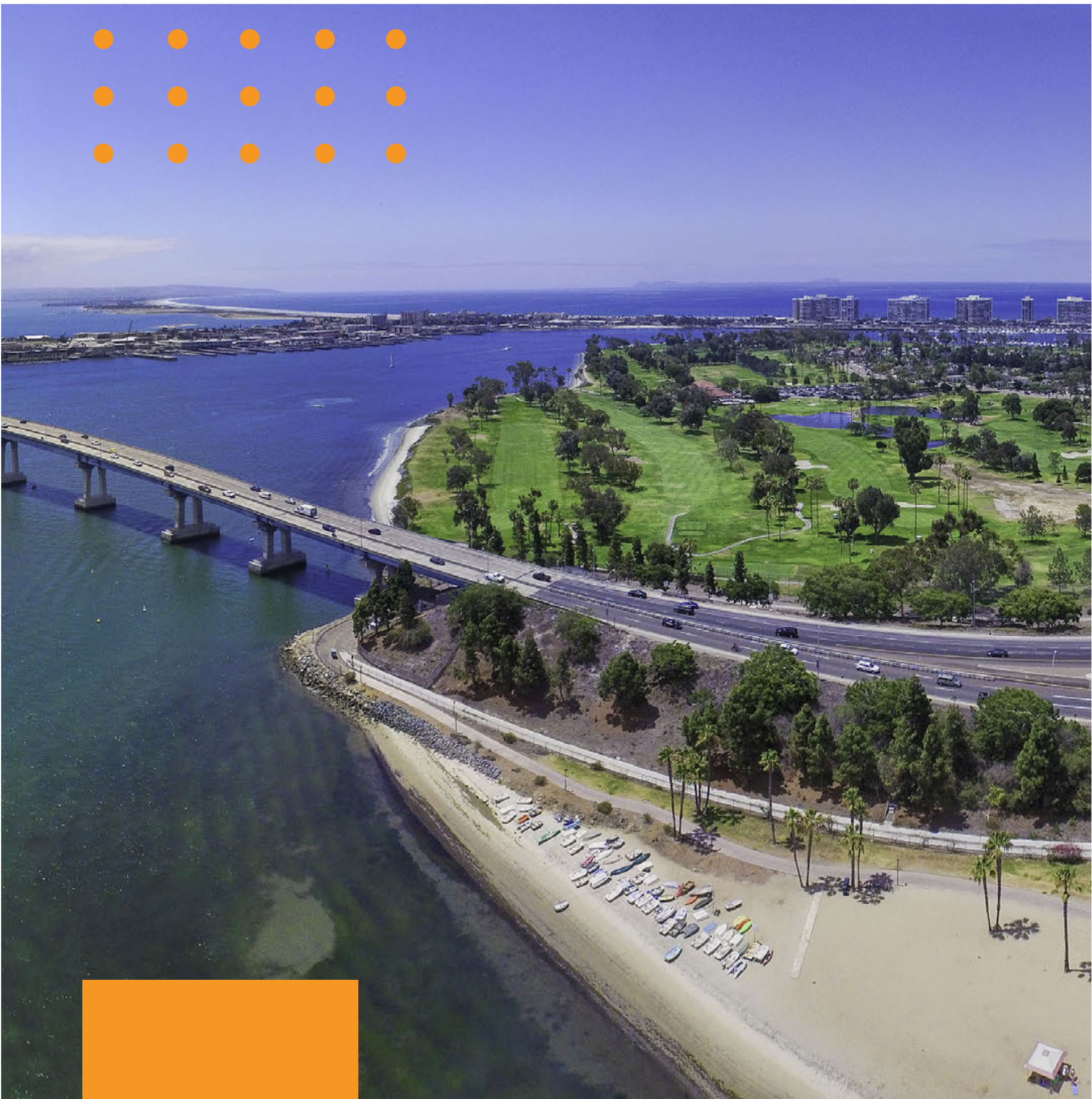
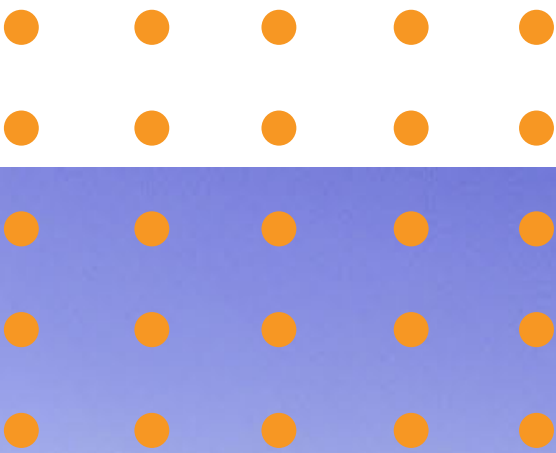


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PAWS of Coronado hosts its first summer camp and it is just a few PAWS away!



Join PAWS of Coronado for an unforgettable summer experience with the perfect blend of cuddles and education.

Summer is here and PAWS of Coronado is excited to launch its first summer camp, happening August 7-11th at the Coronado Animal Care Facility (1395 First Street). There are 5 fun-filled days planned, with two 3-hour sessions offered (AM & PM), designed to engage children ages 8-13 in hands-on activities that foster compassion and responsible pet ownership. With a focus on animal welfare and education, camp participants will have the opportunity to interact with our animals under the guidance of experienced & trained staff. Throughout the camp, they will learn about the needs of different animals (specifically dogs, cats, and small animals), how to provide basic care and the importance of love for our furry friends, and what PAWS of Coronado provides to our community. Activities will include feeding, cleaning, grooming, enrichment, training, medical care, and more!



We are excited to launch ‘PAWS Days of Summer’ camp offering children a chance to connect with animals and gain valuable knowledge about their care and well-being,” said Teresa Leighty, PAWS of Coronado Board President. “By instilling compassion and understanding at a young age, we hope to inspire the next generation of animal advocates and responsible pet owners.”

PAWS Days of Summer is guaranteed to be a camp your child loves! Registration is now open at www.pawsofcoronado.org/pawsdaysofsummer. SPACE IS LIMITED! For more information about “PAWS Days of Summer” or if you are interested in becoming a sponsor for our summer camp, please contact Jennifer Stein @ jennifer.stein@pawsofcoronado.org.