THE CORONADO NEWS

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Tanaka concedes, Duncan to be new mayor for Coronado

Current City Council member John Duncan is to be the new mayor of Coronado after leading the polls by 4% and running mate Casey Tanaka concedes.

BY MADELINE YANG
The Coronado News

After several long months of campaigning, filing donations and speaking at forums, former Mayor Casey Tanaka has conceded to current City Council member John Duncan to be the new mayor of Coronado.

A vote tally update on Nov. 11 showed Duncan with a commanding lead, carrying just under 46% of the ballots. Tanaka trailed with just under 42% of the votes, and current council member Mike Donovan was a distant third with just over 12%.

The votes in all races are still being counted; election results won't be finalized until the race is certified.

"I'm happy for him, and wish him the best," Tanaka said to The Coronado News. He added that the difference between their numbers was getting increasingly higher and, mathematically, he probably wasn't going to overcome that deficit.

"It feels great," Duncan said. "There's no way I could have won without the help of so many people."

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Current City Council member John Duncan is to be the new mayor of Coronado. *Staff photo by Madeline Yang.*

Additional race results in Coronado

Inside this edition: Many key races affecting Coronado were on the ballot for this municipal election. Read pages 5-7 to see how state ballot measures and races for Congress are fairing, and learn which ticket Coronado voters favored in the presidential election.

Editor's Note: Election results in this edition reflect numbers updated on Nov. 11. Head to thecoronadonews.com for more updates.

Early results in the City Council race were particularly tight, with three candidates divided by three percentage points of one another.

Mark Fleming was in the lead as of Nov. 11, with 22.59% of votes, while Amy Steward followed at 19.69% and Laura Wilkinson Sinton in a close third at 19.26%.

Meanwhile, Renee Cavanaugh, led the school board candidates at 31.25% with Fitzhugh Lee, trailing closely behind at 29.36%. Bill Sandke was in third with 22.13% and said that he strongly believes the margin from third to second will not be made up. Shawnee Barton Merriman conceded.

THE CORONADO ISLAND FILM FESTIVAL

Winners celebrate their awards at the Coronado Island Film Festival. From left to right, festival founder and chair Doug St. Denis, CEO and Artistic Director Merridee Book, Scott Alexander, Leonard Maltin, Claudia Puig, Bettina Sherick, Larry Karaszewski, Jane Seymour and Clarence Maclin. *Staff photo by Katie Morris.*

An evening of inspiration and artistry

The Coronado Island Film Festival celebrates legends and new voices

BY KATIE MORRIS
The Coronado News

Coronado Island Film Festival's 2024 Industry Tribute Gala was held in the Hotel del Coronado's Crown Room. *Staff photo by Katie Morris.*

Below the arched sugar pine ceiling and crown-shaped chandeliers of the Hotel del Coronado's Crown Room, a sea of guests — dressed in sequins, velvets and silk — pooled in for the Coronado Island Film Festival's Industry Tribute Gala.

The celebration, a signature event for the ninth annual film festival, was hosted by film critic and historian Leonard Maltin, and it served to honor both legendary figures and rising talent in the film industry.

Past honorees include cinematic icons like Richard Dreyfuss, Diane Ladd and Geena Davis, whose contributions to the industry have shaped its very language.

For nearly a century, this beach town and specifically the Hotel Del have drawn movie legends, from Marilyn Monroe to Tom Cruise, leaving an indelible imprint on Hollywood's lore and shaping the festival's character as a homage to cinematic heritage.

But for Merridee Book, the festival's CEO and artistic director, the festival is not simply about cinematic reverence — it's an ever-evolving blend of the carefully curated and the serendipitous.

"You know, each year just gets better and better," she said. "The diversity of the films has really made this year very special."

In contrast to the frenetic glitz of Cannes or Vince, the festival is built on connections between creatives, industry leaders and passionate cinephiles.

Book described the selection process for the gala's honorees as "rather organic," a mix of timing, availability and an instinct for which stories demand recognition.

This year, awardees included Jane Seymour, Clarence Maclin, Claudia Puig, Bettina Sherick, Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski.

Jane Seymour

Seymour, 73, celebrated for her versatility across film and television, received the Legacy Award.

With multiple Emmy and Golden Globe wins, a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II and a legacy defined by roles in "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman," "Live and Let Die" and "Wedding Crashers," Seymour said being recognized for her career across a spectrum of media was humbling and exciting.

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this week

19 • tuesday

Every third Tuesday evening of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the Coronado Public Library, the San Diego Shakespeare Society holds free open readings of plays. On Nov. 19 they will perform a staged reading of Troilus and Cressida Part 1.

20 • 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. in the library's Winn Room. Film expert Ralph DeLauro provides a brief introduction to each film and leads a discussion afterwards, often including pointers about how lighting or camera angles contribute to a scene's mood or propel the story. November's film will be "Out of the Past."

22 • friday

The November meeting of the Republican Women's Club of Coronado, Crown City, will be held at the VFW, 550 Orange Avenue, on Nov. 22 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. This will be a celebratory meeting. Those who wish, may purchase lunch. The new Coronado mayor-elect and two Coronado Council members-elect will be invited to speak.

CONTACT US

For news tips, story submissions and letters to the editor, contact Editor Sofie Fransen at sofie@thecoronadonews.com or 619-990-8465.

To advertise contact Ad Executive Braeden Stegman at braeden@numbersix.com

Registration open for annual Thanksgiving Day Turkey Trot

Coronado News staff

The 11th annual Coronado Turkey Trot, presented by the Coronado Unit of Rady Children's Hospital Auxiliary, is set to take place on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, Nov. 28, at Tidelands Park.

This community-favorite 5K run/walk, which sells out every year, will raise funds for the Pediatric Ophthalmology Department at Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego.

Participants of all ages are encouraged to sign up early online, as spots are limited. The course begins at Tidelands Park at 8 a.m.

This year's event features Xavier Marsh, a Coronado High School student, as an ambassador. Marsh was diagnosed with Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy, a mitochondrial disease that caused him to lose his central vision at the age of 13.

Despite his vision loss, Marsh continues to live a full life, participating in boy scouts, competing on his varsity cross country and track and field teams and engaging in adventurous activities like mountain biking and skiing.

In addition to supporting a worthy cause, all race participants will receive a participant shirt and an exclusive finisher medal to commemorate their achievement.

"We are incredibly grateful for Rady Children's Hospital and the care they've provided Xavier," says Marsh's mother, Malinda Marsh. "Through this race, we hope to raise awareness and funds for other families facing similar challenges, knowing that anything is possible with the right support."

Coronado High School cross country runner Xavier Marsh will be the ambassador for the 11th annual Turkey Trot this year. Here, he is competing at the first league cluster meet in early October. *Photo by George Green.*

Mister.

PETS OF THE WEEK

Meet Mister

PAWS of Coronado

Meet Mister – The Sweetest Snuggle Buddy and best cowboy out there!

Mister's a grey & white Lionhead rabbit who's always ready to mosey on down to the grass and sniff out some new territory. When he's not on the trail, you'll find him wrangling up the coziest spots for a good old snuggle.

This little cowboy's looking for a partner in snuggles and adventure. So, if you're lookin' to give this wrangler a forever home, saddle up and come meet Mister!

All animals at PAWS are spayed/neutered, microchipped, vaccinated and up to date on flea prevention. Adoptions are by appointment only. If you are interested in adopting, please visit pawsofcoronado.org.

Get Vaccinated for Fall and Winter

Protect yourself against COVID-19 and the flu. Staying up to date on vaccines is the most important step you and your loved ones can take to be safe.

The Sharp Coronado Community Pharmacy offers COVID-19 and flu vaccines. Visit **sharp.com/coronado** or call **619-522-3996** for more information.

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OUR STORY

"Once Upon A Time" my son and I were discussing solar systems over lunch. Being licensed electricians, we were familiar with Solar Applications and its advantages.

After conducting a fair amount of research, we determined that Solar Technology had advanced to the point that adding a Solar Panel to the roof of a golf cart could significantly add to the travel range, as well as several other advantages including Green Movement Tax Credits.

I had recently moved to a golf cart community and purchased a cart of my own, after installing the best and most powerful system available, the concept of installing Solar Panels on golf carts was conceived.

We began spreading the word to our friends who owned electric carts and began installing Solar Panels on their carts in our spare time out of our garage in Oceanside, CA. Due to the publicized acceptance and popularity in Beach Communities of San Diego County, we decided to expand the business even further. Many beach cities have permitted the use of golf carts in 35 mph zones and are expanding Bike Lanes to 7 feet wide to accommodate their use.

So, there you have it. There is more to the story and we would love to discuss it with you while we install your Solar Panels on your cart.

We took the concept of Green Solar Energy and put it to practical use to lessen the carbon footprint.

We look forward to meeting you soon.

Richard Stachowicz
Ride All Day Solar Carts
Owner and Coronado Resident

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Make the Earth Happy. Solar energy is clean. No carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere as it is when batteries are plugged into the wall to charge. Similarly, no fossil fuels are consumed as they are in gas-powered golf carts. The sun's energy is both clean and renewable. With their renewable, clean energy and lack of generated pollution, solar charged golf carts are an Earth-friendly option. You can help ensure that golf courses will be around for a very long time.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS

While it can be costly up front to buy a solar-powered golf cart or convert your existing cart to solar, in the long run, you might save money. You might be eligible for cost incentives offered to people who go solar. Some programs include:

- Federal tax credits
- Federal grants
- State and local utility tax credits
- Rebates

Together, these can help make solar power an affordable option for your golf cart. Additionally, you will likely save quite a bit of money on your electricity bill without having an electric vehicle drawing from your home's electricity supply. Individuals aren't the only ones who benefit monetarily from solar power. When entire golf courses convert their fleets to solar-powered vehicles, they can slash their annual charging costs by about 20 percent. Whether you want to enhance the performance of your golf cart, help the environment, or save money in the long run, you're sure to benefit from changing your power to the sun.

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OPINION

I don't recognize my country anymore

BY KEN FITZGERALD
Letter to the Editor

Ken Fitzgerald is a trial lawyer, trumpet player, and writer living in Coronado. *Photo provided by Ken Fitzgerald.*

Donald Trump won the presidential election. He won the popular vote. Despite his obvious senility, incoherence, malignant narcissism, racism, cruelty and pathological dishonesty, the American people made their voices heard at the ballot box and said, "THAT'S OUR GUY!"

I don't know where to start with this.

I don't recognize this country. I can't fathom how the majority of American voters could side with someone so obviously incompetent, corrupt, vindictive and dangerous. I thought character mattered. I thought facts would carry the day. But after this election, it seems that good character is a political liability, lies work, and hate sells. Bigly.

The anger over Trump's win has me feeling heavy and depressed. Dark thoughts about Trump are interrupted only by shocked disgust when I think about what he'll bring with him: a clown car of oligarchs, misanthropes, and frauds like JD Vance, Elon Musk, RFK Jr., Stephen Miller, et al. Everywhere I turn in my mind, it's more terrible.

I am profoundly sad. And disgusted. And bewildered. And disillusioned. I know my friends are too. We are grieving over the collective loss of what we were raised to believe was the American promise: a meritocratic society that respects individual liberties, demands honesty of its leaders, and is built on the rule of law.

I am especially sad for the environment. Global warming is going to get a lot worse, real fast. Our natural world will pay a high price for American selfishness and anti-immigrant xenophobia.

I can't possibly console my daughters with any degree of intellectual honesty, since they have now been told – twice – that they don't matter. Their freedoms and safety extend only as far as some toxic white men and religious zealots deem them worth the trouble. I wanted better for them. I feel guilt over bringing them into this sorry excuse for a country.

The big losers on election night were the environment, women, the rule of law, the Ukrainian people, Palestinian women and children, and truth.

The winners: Putin, oil companies, and bigotry. It was also a great night for mass shooters and rapists.

Silver linings?

I did wake up on Wednesday feeling closer to my loved ones. We're clinging together on a life raft, it seems. They matter in ways that elections don't, and I find my feelings centering on them, and on love. So there's that.

And I feel energized to make music, exercise, and work hard in my law practice. I feel motivated to disconnect from the media and social media that's centered on politics. Since I am freshly disassociated from a body politic that feels so foreign, I can just focus on the activities that matter most to me as a human being.

Ken Fitzgerald is a trial lawyer, trumpet player and writer living in Coronado.

LISA BENSON

JACK OHMAN

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CORONADO

Coronado voters favor Democratic ticket in presidential election, preliminary numbers show

BY SOFIE FRANSEN & KYLIE CAPUANO
The Coronado News

As the nation voted to put Donald Trump back into office last week, preliminary numbers from the San Diego County Registrar of Voter's office show that Coronado did not join the trend.

In fact, with 4,580 votes for Kamala Harris and 3,897 votes for Trump counted as of Nov. 11, so far the community appears to favor the Democratic ticket.

Votes are still being counted so these numbers won't be finalized until the race is certified.

Yet, the number of registered voters for each party in Coronado reflects the opposite tendency: There are 3,602 registered Democrats in Coronado and 4,244 registered Republicans. These numbers were reported by San Diego County on Nov. 1.

At the voting center in Coronado on election day, voters seemed divided on who they were choosing.

For instance, Stephanie Price, 38, said she cast her ballot for Kamala Harris out of fear about how Trump might treat women and the LGBTQ+ community.

"I'm voting for her to protect women's reproductive rights," said Price on Nov. 5. "I'm also queer, and the opposing side has a lot of LGBTQ stuff on the docket for Project 2025, which is terrifying. Kamala is just incredible as opposed to Trump."

Paul Savage, 76, left the polls wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat.
Staff photo by Kylie Capuano.

Many of Harris' supporters at the voting center on election day, predominantly women, shared similar sentiments to Price.

Meanwhile, supporters of the now president-elect Trump talked about their unwavering confidence in his leadership.

Robert Weichelt, 58, and his wife, Carla Weichelt, both voted for Trump – with Robert calling their decision the "common sense" choice.

"The border — big deal. Fentanyl – unacceptable. The economy needs to roar again," said Robert Weichelt on Nov. 5.

Lori Doyle, president of the Coronado Democratic Club, offering personal opinions, said that the best description for the election outcome isn't shock, but rather a deep sadness that the very party that has worked to provide assistance for struggling families and individuals will not be able to achieve results to ease the burdens on hard-working Americans.

"I'm not an expert on the analysis of the results," Doyle said, "but privately, Republican friends had shared that while they have no intention of changing their political affiliation, they could not bring themselves to vote for a convicted felon who has continued to share false information that causes harm to others, and has been vocal in his desire to dismantle systems of checks and balances that he feels limit his power."

Rhonda Fleming, Membership Chair of the Republican Women of Coronado, said the fact that Trump won the electoral vote by a landslide – and received the most popular votes – should send a clear message that American voters are fed up with the policies of the Biden/Harris administration and want new leadership.

She added that the other dynamic at play in Coronado's election is the fact that the city has a substantial number of no-party affiliation and independent voters.

"The Comedian Bill Maher recently said it best …. The Democratic Party needs to take a long, hard look at itself following the defeat and realize that Americans want common sense policies," Fleming said.

"We hope that the country can heal and that we can all move past the division and divisiveness that has permeated our society for the past many years," she added. "We all have more in common with each other than what separates us. It is time to lower the political temperature and return to being family, neighbors and friends. We live in the greatest country in the world and it is time to come together as one nation under God!"

"We all have more in common with each other than what separates us. It is time to lower the political temperature and return to being family, neighbors and friends. We live in the greatest country in the world and it is time to come together as One Nation Under God!"

- Rhonda Fleming, Chair of the Republican Women of Coronado

CORONADO

Results of state ballot measures affecting Coronado

BY SOFIE FRANSEN
The Coronado News

Editor's note: These numbers in print reflect information from Nov. 11. Head to thecoronadonews.com for the most up-to-date information.

In addition to the key Coronado races, there were 10 propositions on the ballot for California voters. Here are the results to date for those measures, with outcomes called by the Associated Press.

Prop. 2 (Bonds for building schools): Passed

With passage of this proposition, the state can borrow $10 billion to build or renovate K-12 public schools and community college facilities. According to California's Legislative Analyst's office, $8.5 billion would be reserved for K-12 schools and $1.5 billion is directed toward upper education.

To repay the bond, the state needs to pay an estimated $500 million per year over a 35-year period. The Legislative Analyst Office said the potential effect on local costs statewide is unclear.

AP called this race on Nov. 6 and as of Nov. 11, there were 57.8% of votes in favor and 42.2% against.

Prop. 3 (Constitutional right to marriage): Passed

While federal courts have said that same-sex marriage is legal, outdated language in the California Constitution from Proposition 8, passed by voters in 2008, says that marriage can only be between a man and a woman.

With voter approval, this proposition will update the Constitution to match what federal courts have said.

AP called this race shortly after the first election results were released on Nov. 5. There were 61.2% votes in favor and 37.9% of votes against as of Nov. 11.

Prop. 4 (Bonds for climate programs): Passed

Proposition 4, also known as the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Prevention and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, authorizes a $10 million bond toward climate programs:

- $3.8 billion would go toward drought, flood and water supply, meaning money would be used to store water for future droughts, clean polluted water so it's safe to drink and reduce the risk of floods by capturing and reusing stormwater.
- $1.5 billion would be used to improve the health of forests and reduce the risk of wildfires.

Check out the list of California propositions and where their votes stand.
Staff photo by Julieta Soto.

- $1.2 billion would restore coastal areas and protect from rising sea levels.
- $1.2 billion is for land conservation and habitat restoration.
- $850 million would go toward the development of wind turbines off the coast of California.
- $700 million would be used for expanding parks.
- $450 million would go toward protecting communities from extreme heat.
- $300 million would go toward agriculture, specifically for activities that encourage farmers to improve soil health, reduce air pollution and use less water.

It will cost the state $400 million annually for 40 years to repay this bond.

The effect on local governments, according to California's Legislative Analyst's office, would vary.

State funding could replace the funding that local governments would have to pay out of its own for certain projects. Or, it could encourage the governing body to spend more money on larger projects than they would.

This proposition had 58.9% of votes in favor as of Nov. 11 and 41.1% of votes against. AP called the race the day after the election.

Prop. 5 (Local bonds for affordable housing): Not passed

Voters rejected this measure, which would have made it easier for local governments to fund affordable housing and infrastructure projects. Currently, to borrow money, cities and counties require the support of at least two-thirds of voters. With Proposition 5, that number would have been lowered to 55%.

As of Nov. 8, when AP called the race, this proposition had 56.2% of votes against it and 43.8% of votes for it.

Prop. 6 (Ending forced labor in state prisons): Not passed

AP called this race on Nov. 10. As of Nov. 11, there were 53.8% of votes against this proposition and 46.2% in favor.

Currently, prison inmates can be required to work as a punishment for crime. This is known as involuntary servitude. The Legislative Analyst's office says that many of these workers are paid less than $1 an hour, but they can also earn "time credits" to reduce their total time in jail.

If passed, this proposition would have banned involuntary servitude as a punishment for crime. State prisons would not be allowed to punish inmates for refusing to work. However, the measure would not stop prisons from granting people time credits if they choose to work.

Prop. 32 (Raising minimum wage to $18 an hour): Pending

With 48.7% of votes in favor of this proposition and 51.3% against it, this race has not been called yet.

The current minimum wage in California is $16 an hour. If Proposition 32 passes, it would hike up to $18 an hour by 2026. In 2025, the minimum wage would vary depending on the size of the employer – $17 where there are 25 employees or less and $18 for any employer with 26 or more employees.

Prop. 33 (Extending rent control): Not passed

A vote in favor of this proposition would have meant the state couldn't limit the kinds of rent control that local governments enforce, such as putting a cap on how much a landlord increases rent.

AP called this race shortly after the first election results were released. As of Nov. 11, only 39.1% of votes were in favor, while 60.9% were against.

Prop. 34 (Revenue from prescription drug program spent on patient care): Pending

As of Nov. 11, there were 50.9% votes in favor of this proposition and 49.1% of votes against it. This race has not been called yet.

There is a 30-year-old law that gives a discount on pharmaceutical drugs to health care providers that are public or private nonprofits serving low-income patients. They are exempt from paying tax on their revenue.

Prop 34, if it passes, would establish rules to make sure that providers are spending 98% of their revenue on patient care and, if not, enforce penalties.

Prop. 35 (Permanent tax on health care insurance plans): Passed

There is an existing tax on certain healthcare plans, such as Kaiser Permanente, based on the number of people they provide coverage to.

According to the Legislative Analyst's office, this tax is expected to bring in $7 billion to $8 billion to the state each year. These excess funds are then used to pay for existing costs in Medi-Cal – the federal-state program that provides health coverage to people of low-income – and to increase its funding.

Since that tax is not permanently approved by the California Legislature, it will expire at the end of 2026. Adoption of this proposition makes the tax permanent beginning in 2027.

AP called this race shortly after election results were released on Nov. 5, and as of Nov. 11, there were 67.3% of votes in favor and 32.7% of votes against.

Prop. 36 (Increased sentences for drug and theft crimes): Passed

Passage of this proposition means the state will reclassify some misdemeanor theft and drug crimes as felonies. This proposal was written to undo aspects of Proposition 47, a 2014 measure that made select theft and drug crimes misdemeanors to reduce prison overcrowding.

Prop. 36 requires the state to create a new process for drug possession crimes, increasing penalties for certain drug and theft crimes.

This race was called by AP on Nov. 5. As of Nov. 11, 69.4% of votes were in favor and 30.6% of votes were against.

Tanaka concedes, Duncan to be new mayor for Coronado

» Continued from Page 1

And his plans for mayor?

"Being present in the community – a face-to-face mayor – is what is really, really important to me," Duncan emphasized.

But, he also has other plans, like continuing his work with the Tijuana sewage crisis, maintaining Coronado's presence with SANDAG and refining the Cays Park Master Plan – a city project that has been a point of contention for months now.

Duncan, who has been part of the city's Tijuana subcommittee for over 18 months said he wants to build on recent progress by pushing Congress for more funding to resolve the sewage crisis. He's also on outside committees like the Tijuana River Valley Working Group and the Citizens Advisory Group with the International Boundary and Water Commission.

"Another part of it is relationships with Mexico, and you know, ensuring their plant is finished as well," he added.

Duncan, a board member representing Coronado at the San Diego Association of Governments, said the relationship between the city and the metropolitan planning organization is improving.

There has been some leadership change at the agency, he added, so the dynamic has changed.

"It's very, very different than it was two years ago," Duncan said.

Within Coronado, Duncan said he wants to trim down the Cays Park Master Plan.

"We've gotten to the point now where everybody who was on council and our city manager and everybody agreed that it was just a conceptual plan," Duncan said. "It's about scaling it down on each of the items. So, that'll be a job for the new council and myself as mayor, as part of the new council, to figure out exactly what we're going to approve or not.

"It's not going to be the $30 million plan that was in the master plan. We're going to approve something smaller," he added.

Newly elected Mayor John Duncan at his campaign party on Nov. 5.
Staff photo by Madeline Yang.

With Duncan's win for mayor, there will now be a vacant City Council seat that is up for grabs – to be filled either through a special election or by appointment from the new City Council and mayor.

Duncan said that discussion will probably happen during the first City Council meeting of the year in January.

For Tanaka, he is now 48 and says it's likely that he would run for a local position again, but he has no plans for it at the moment.

Tanaka served on the City Council from the age of 26 until he was elected mayor at 32 in 2008. He continued to win a second mayoral election four years later, serving two full terms until December of 2016 when Mayor Richard Bailey was elected. He came back to serve on the City Council in 2020.

CORONADO

Results of US Congress and state races affecting Coronado

Associated Press
& Coronado News staff

While the nation swept Republican candidate Donald Trump back into office, voting trends in California remain significantly Democratic.

Here is a wrap up of races on the national and state level that will affect Coronado:

U.S. Senate: Adam Schiff

Democrat Adam Schiff beat out Republican and former baseball star Steve Garvey in the race for the California U.S. Senate seat.

The seat was long held by Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who was elected in 1992 and died in September 2023. Laphonza Butler, a Democratic insider and former labor leader, was appointed to the seat following Feinstein's death. Butler decided not to seek a full term.

According to the Associated Press, a Republican candidate hasn't won a Senate race since 1988 in California and Schiff held an edge in campaign financing and polling.

California will not have a woman representing it in the U.S. Senate for the first time in three decades.

The Associated Press reported that Schiff promised to work in the Senate for safe neighborhoods and better schools, and to reduce the menace of climate change. California is facing struggles, he said, but "together, there is no challenge we cannot overcome."

U.S. House of Representatives, 50th District: Scott Peters

Democrat Scott Peters won reelection to the U.S. House seat representing California's 50th District in San Diego County, which includes Coronado.

The Associated Press called the race in the early minutes of Nov. 6, shortly after the first results were released. Peters beat out Republican challenger Peter Bono with the San Diego County Registrar of Voters reporting 63.01% of votes in favor of Peters and 36.99% in favor of Bono.

U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., a candidate for the U.S. Senate, talks to the media on Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024, in Glendale, Calif. *AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes,File.*

Peters serves on the House Energy and Commerce and Budget committees.

He cosponsored a bill, enacted by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden in October, intended to boost domestic microchip manufacturing.

U.S. House of Representatives, 52nd District: Juan Vargas

Democrat Juan Vargas won reelection to a U.S. House seat representing California's 52nd District, which includes Imperial Beach. The Associated Press called the race in the early minutes of Nov. 6.

U.S. Rep. Scott Peters spoke at the Dec. 21 Optimist Club meeting in Coronado. *File photo by Sofie Fransen.*

State Senate, 39th District: Akilah Weber

Democrat Akilah Weber beat out Republican Bob Divine for the State Senate seat representing the 39th District, which includes Coronado. Weber captured 61.19% of votes, according to the San Diego County Registrar of Voters on Nov. 8, and Divine got 38.81%.

Weber will replace Toni Atkins, who termed-out.

State Assembly, 77th District: Tasha Boerner

Democrat Tasha Boerner is leading against her Republican challenger James Browne in the early results. The State Assembly member position for California's 77th District represents Coronado. Boerner had 59.46% of the vote compared to Browne's 40.54% as of Nov. 8.

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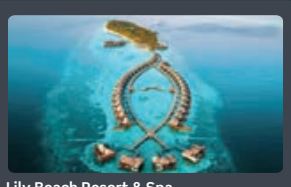

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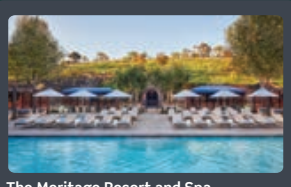

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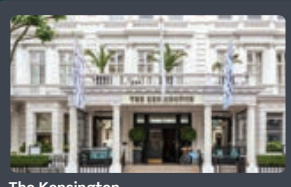

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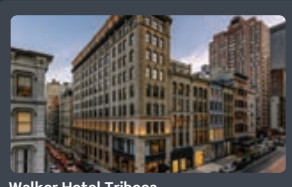

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CORONADO

A four month update on the Island Express

The city partnered with Circuit to provide a free electric mini shuttle service to the residents and visitors of Coronado four months ago. This is the update.

BY MADELINE YANG
The Coronado News

The Coronado City Council heard a four month update on the Island Express, a free electric shuttle service provided by the city in partnership with Circuit. *Staff photo by Madeline Yang.*

Coronado's experiment with a free shuttle service has attracted about 322 passengers a day since it was launched as a pilot program in June, but city leaders have yet to determine whether the program will be sustainable.

The city paid Circuit a total of around $347,000 to operate the Electric Mini Shuttle Service, also named the Island Express, during its first four months of service, or approximately $87,000 per month on average. The contract between the city and Circuit puts a cap of $630,000 of spending on the program for the total six months.

A staff report to the City Council on Nov. 5 said 38,366 passengers were recorded during the shuttle service's first four months. The initial vision for the program was to allow free door-to-door transportation for residents and visitors and test the service's impact on residents, traffic and car use reduction.

It does not run on routes like a bus system and instead works as a dial-a-ride service.

Coronado Village vs. Coronado Cays

The staff report showed that ridership in the Coronado Cays was significantly lower than rides in the Village, and therefore cost significantly more per passenger to operate. Approximately 5% of the total rides occurred within Coronado Cays, according to the staff report.

There were 998 total rides from the Cays, averaging around 16 passengers per day. When factoring the amount the city paid for this program, that comes out to around $49 per passenger in the Cays, while costs in the Village averaged out to around $7 per passenger due to receiving more passengers and rides.

The Village, which saw 95% of rides, consists of anywhere north of the Naval Amphibious Base; from First Street to Coronado Avenue to Ocean Boulevard and to Glorietta Boulevard, said Councilmembers Casey Tanaka and Mike Donovan to The Coronado News.

According to the staff report, 86% of users who responded said they were very satisfied with the service, while less than 5% reported an unsatisfactory experience.

Three-quarters of respondents said they would pay a small fee to use the service.

The goal

The Island Express was launched, in part, in hopes of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

According to Circuit, the mini shuttle program has resulted in 17.36 metric tons of greenhouse gas savings through the first four months of service. However, Circuit's formula assumed that 100% of all rides displaced a trip by a gas-powered vehicle.

"Their assumptions, I'm not sure are correct," said Richard Grunow, director of community development, redevelopment services and housing. "I think that [number] is probably inflated."

Councilmember Mike Donovan said his goals for the electric shuttle are to reduce traffic on the island, improve parking availability and benefit the environment.

"We've gotten mixed signals on some of those, but it's clear … that the costs, I think at this point, are not sustainable," Donovan said. "It's not something that we would want to pay for."

Donovan also noted that the shuttle program is now in competition with Coronado Livery, a taxi service.

"It's hard to compete with something that's free," said Carelyn Reynolds, the livery company president. "And it's hard to compete when someone is given $600,000 of city funds."

Donovan suggested spending more time working with the cab company to figure out costs, greenhouse gas emissions and whether electric or hybrid vehicles can be used as taxis.

Staff will return to the City Council at the end of the year to assess the program's data after the six-month pilot period is completed, and to ask for direction on how to move forward.

AP photos show the terror of Southern California wildfires and the crushing aftermath

Associated Press

Before the wildfire comes a decision: what to save. It often comes down to "the smallest things," Dawn Deleon told ABC7. The Mountain Fire destroyed her house in Ventura County, California this week.

Cats, dogs and horses. Family photos and SD cards and mementos. A single bag of clothes.

It's a choice becoming ever more common as human-caused climate change adds fuel to the destructive wrath of wildfires around the world, especially in already fire-prone landscapes like Southern California, with its strong Santa Ana winds that rustle flame-adapted vegetation.

The power of fire is evident. Palm trees turn to silhouettes against a raging orange wall. Firefighters push a vintage car through a haze of smoke. A woman clutches a scarf to her masked face as she leads her horse away from a burning hillside. Towering blazes strip homes to their foundations.

"It's never a question of 'if' but rather 'when' and 'how big' when it comes to wildfires in Southern California," said Alex Hall, director of UCLA's Center for Climate Science. He called the impact on lives, livelihoods and ecosystems "truly devastating."

The flames forgive little. Lucky residents escape with their lives and the few things that matter most. The unlucky lose the irreplaceable.

Often residents must return to sift through ash and rubble. Every now and then comes a surprising remnant — like a teapot with the word "blessed" in soot-covered cursive.

Firefighters and sheriff's deputies push a vintage car away from a burning home as the Mountain Fire burns in Camarillo, Calif., Nov. 6, 2024. *AP Photo/Noah Berger.*

Tiffany Hobelman leads Koshan from an enclosure at Swanhill Farms as the Mountain Fire burns in Moorpark, Calif., Nov. 7, 2024. *AP Photo/Noah Berger.*

A firefighter walks through smoke while battling the Mountain Fire, Nov. 7, 2024, in Santa Paula, Calif. *AP Photo/Noah Berger.*

A firefighter watches as flames from the Mountain Fire consume a home in Camarillo, Calif., Nov. 6, 2024. *AP Photo/Noah Berger.*

The Coronado Island Film Festival celebrates legends and new voices

» Continued from Page 1

"To actually stop for a moment and realize I've been doing this professionally for 60 years is a little daunting," she laughed.

From her early days as a dancer and painter to her ventures as a producer and philanthropist, Seymour said she's sought out roles and projects that challenge and enrich her creative spirit.

"It is the most incredible privilege in the world to be an actress," she said after receiving the award. "I've had this extraordinary life experience of being in other worlds, other people's skins."

For Seymour, one of the most impactful roles of her career came with "War and Remembrance," a project that resonates with her personal history.

Both of her parents were survivors of WWII, and the narrative of the 1988 miniseries, which chronicles the global scope of the war and its human toll, mirrored the trauma endured by her own family.

Her father's Polish relatives, she told the audience, were likely annihilated in concentration camps and her mother spent three and a half years in a Japanese internment camp. These experiences lent an unspoken gravity to her portrayal in the series.

"Take what you know and use it," she said, explaining that being a part of the first generation of the war's survivors developed an innate empathy. "I'm very comfortable being in other people's skin."

Jane Seymour is holding her award at the gala. *Staff photos by Katie Morris.*

Clarence Maclin

Maclin, who served prison time for robbery before becoming an actor, now works in youth counseling and performance. He accepted the Industry Impact Award.

Maclin's feature film debut in the A24 film "Sing Sing," where he plays a younger version of himself, has earned critical praise, capturing an "inspiration and change" that Book felt was unmissable.

At 29, Maclin was sentenced to 17 years at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. There, he encountered the Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) program, an initiative that sparked his personal metamorphosis and a newfound vocation in theater and film.

"RTA is not in the business of making actors; they're in the business of making better human beings," Maclin said, crediting the program with helping him find his voice.

Since his release, Maclin has channeled his experience into social impact as a youth counselor, creative arts specialist and gang intervention specialist at Lincoln Hall Boys Haven in Somers, New York.

"We can't go back and change history, we can't change some of the things we've done to each other," he said. "But what we can do is tell stories to try to heal that."

Clarence Maclin (left) won the Industry Impact Award at the gala.

Claudia Puig

Puig, a distinguished voice in film criticism and programming, was presented with the Leonard Maltin Award for changing the movie industry — a recognition she described as both humbling and meaningful, particularly because it was bestowed by Maltin himself.

"He is someone we all look up to," Puig said, recalling how she used to reference Maltin's film guide as a resource in her early career, which has a photo of him on the cover. She shared an anecdote about her daughter recognizing Maltin at a screening years ago, exclaiming "He's on your book!"

"I would turn to it as a source, it was always sitting on my desk," she said. "I've admired his screen for a really long time, and I feel fortunate to work with him as friends."

Spending much of her life immersed in cinema, Puig said she watches up to 900 films annually across multiple platforms and festivals. Yet, for her, discovering hidden gems and championing films that defy conventions is the true reward.

"We [movie critics] have this sense of missionary zeal," Puig said. "I want people to see amazing movies. My favorite role is loving something, encouraging people to see it and sharing that experience."

Claudia Puig was the Leonard Maltin Award recipient.

"We [movie critics] have this sense of missionary zeal... I want people to see amazing movies. My favorite role is loving something, encouraging people to see it and sharing that experience."

- Claudia Puig, the Leonard Maltin Award recipient.

Bettina Sherick, Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander

Sherick, a veteran of entertainment digital marketing and the president and founder of Hollywood in Pixels — a nonprofit dedicated to preserving pioneering digital film campaigns that have shaped Hollywood's marketing landscape — received the Trailblazer Award.

With a career that began at 20th Century Fox International, she led award-winning campaigns for films like "Avatar" and "Life of Pi," and later held leadership roles at Warner Bros. and Fox. Most recently, she served as the head of digital intelligence at Prime Video, overseeing "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power."

"When I first suggested that we actually interact with fans through this community called 'the internet,' I was told by legal that I could not do that ... because if the studio had to sue them for putting content on the internet, there would be a pre-existing relationship," she said. "Oh my god, how times have changed!"

Writing duo Alexander and Karaszewski — their works include "Ed Wood," "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story" and "Goosebumps" — were honored with the festival's inaugural Screenwriting Award.

Karaszewski said he met Alexander when they became roommates during their freshman year at the University of California's School of Cinema – a friendship that now spans over four decades.

Alexander, who was in love with the Marx Brothers as a kid, said he discovered Maltin's 1974 book "Movie Comedy Teams" when he was 9 years old.

"I read this book so many times. All the words are smudged because I stared at it so much," Alexander joked.

Winning an award from Maltin, Alexander said, felt like an achievement.

"Leonard was writing about the Marx Brothers and The Stooges... Tommy Noonan and Peter Marshall," he said. "Leonard's work was so extraordinary and meant so much to me."

NAVY

‘Fat Leonard,’ sentenced to 15 years in prison

Leonard Francis, a former Navy contractor behind one of the military’s biggest scandals was sentenced to 15 years in prison on Nov. 5.

Associated Press

Former military defense contractor Leonard “Fat Leonard” Francis was sentenced on Nov. 5 to 15 years in prison for masterminding a decade-long bribery scheme that swept up dozens of U.S. Navy officers, federal prosecutors said.

Local Coronado officers were among those prosecuted in what would become the Fat Leonard case — the biggest and most damaging corruption scandal in U.S. Navy history.

U.S. District Judge Janis L. Sammartino also ordered Francis to pay $20 million in restitution to the Navy and a $150,000 fine, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney’s Office. He was also ordered to forfeit $35 million in “ill-gotten proceeds from his crimes,” the statement said.

Prosecutors said the sentence resulted from Francis’ first guilty plea in 2015 concerning bribery and fraud, his extensive cooperation with the government since then and another guilty plea on Nov. 5 for failing to appear for his original sentencing hearing in 2022.

Shortly before he was due to be sentenced in September 2022, Francis cut off a GPS monitor he was wearing while under house arrest and fled the country. He was later arrested in Venezuela and brought back to the U.S. in December 2023.

This undated photo provided by the U.S. Marshals Service shows Leonard Francis. *U.S. Marshals Service via AP, File*

Consecutive sentences

Sammartino sentenced him to more than 13 1/2 years for the bribery and fraud charges, plus 16 months for failing to appear. The sentences are to be served consecutively.

“Leonard Francis lined his pockets with taxpayer dollars while undermining the integrity of U.S. Naval forces,” U.S. Attorney Tara McGrath said in a statement. “The impact of his deceit and manipulation will be long felt, but justice has been served today.”

Email and phone messages seeking comment were left on Nov. 5 for William Douglas Sprague, an attorney for Francis.

Sprague, who sought a sentence of just under nine years, argued that his client’s cooperation should warrant a lesser sentence, 10 News San Diego reported.

Sprague also said Francis’ company provided the Navy with exemplary services for many years.

“Unfortunately, as Leonard acknowledged in his early guilty plea and immediate cooperation, his greed drove him to commit bribery and to commit fraud,” Sprague said.

Prosecutors said Francis’ actions led to one of the biggest bribery investigations in U.S. military history, which resulted in the conviction and sentencing of nearly two dozen Navy officials, defense contractors and others on various fraud and corruption charges.

An enigmatic figure

An enigmatic figure who was 6-foot-3 and weighed 350 pounds at one time, Francis owned and operated his family’s ship servicing business, Singapore-based Glenn Defense Marine Asia Ltd. or GDMA, which supplied food, water and fuel to vessels. The Malaysian defense contractor was a key contact for U.S. Navy ships at ports across Asia for more than two decades. During that time, Francis wooed naval officers with Kobe beef, expensive cigars, concert tickets and wild sex parties at luxury hotels from Thailand to the Philippines.

In exchange, officers, including the first active-duty admiral to be convicted of a federal crime, concealed the scheme in which Francis would overcharge for supplying ships or charge for fake services at ports he controlled in Southeast Asia. The officers passed him classified information and even went so far as redirecting military vessels to ports that were lucrative for his Singapore-based ship servicing company.

In a federal sting, Francis was lured to San Diego on false pretenses and arrested at a hotel in September 2013. He pleaded guilty in 2015, admitting that he had offered more than $500,000 in cash bribes to Navy officials, defense contractors and others. Prosecutors say he bilked the Navy out of at least $35 million. As part of his plea deal, he cooperated with the investigation leading to the Navy convictions. He faced up to 25 years in prison.

While awaiting sentencing, Francis was hospitalized and treated for renal cancer and other medical issues. After leaving the hospital, he was allowed to stay out of jail at a rental home, on house arrest with a GPS ankle monitor and security guards.

But three weeks before his scheduled sentencing in September 2022, he snipped off his monitor and made a brazen escape, setting off an international search. Officials said he fled to Mexico, made his way to Cuba and eventually got to Venezuela.

He was arrested more than two weeks after his disappearance — caught before he boarded a flight at the Simon Bolivar International Airport outside Caracas. Venezuelan officials said he intended to reach Russia.

The cases were handled by the U.S. Attorney’s Office in an effort to be independent of the military justice system. But they have came under scrutiny.

The felony convictions of four former Navy officers were vacated following allegations of prosecutorial misconduct. Sammartino agreed to allow them to plead guilty to a misdemeanor and pay a $100 fine each.

Last year, Sammartino ruled that the lead federal prosecutor in the officers’ case committed “flagrant misconduct” by withholding information from defense lawyers, but that it was not enough to dismiss the case.

ABOVE: Coronado Middle School students greet Josh Preston (left) who attends the “Take a Veteran to School Day” event with his son Maddox Preston, a sixth grade student.

RIGHT: Military families walk down a “Line of Gratitude” at Coronado Middle School.

Staff photos by Julieta Soto.

A salute to veterans in the Coronado community

Coronado Middle School celebrated current and past members in the service and their families.

BY JULIETA SOTO
The Coronado News

Smiles decorated the faces of Coronado Middle School students as U.S. veterans and current service members paraded through a “Line of Gratitude” procession the Thursday before Veteran’s Day, surrounded by small American Flags waved in the air.

The procession – mostly parents of the schoolchildren – was part of a larger celebration that featured speeches and ringing applause inside the school’s Granzer Hall as part of the 14th annual “Take a Veteran to School Day.”

Take a Veteran to School Day is an initiative started by The HISTORY Channel to honor veterans and let students hear their stories of service.

At the middle school, there are over 200 military-affiliated students, according to demographics reported by district leaders in October. District-wide, 33% of students are military connected.

“It’s a meaningful thing to honor them,” said Coronado councilmember and mayor-elect John Duncan. “It’s kind of bittersweet … This is the first one I’ve ever been to where there were no WWII veterans, and last year there were two.”

“There’s one common theme, a tie that bonds all these groups together, and that’s a sense of service,” said Naval Base Coronado Capt. Loren Jacobi. “That spirit of service is how we build bridges rather than walls.”

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Pauline Johnson-Brown

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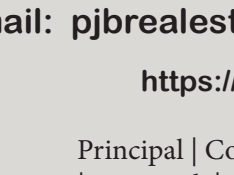

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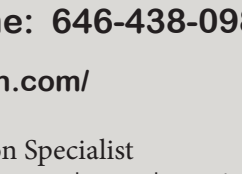

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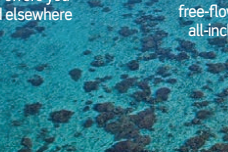

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SPORTS

After earning a league championship title for the first time since 2014, the CHS girls varsity volleyball program was knocked out of the CIF Division 2 playoffs during a Nov. 6 semifinal match. *Photo courtesy of Kelly Moore.*

Coronado girls varsity volleyball loses in CIF Division 2 semifinals

The 4-1 semifinal loss against University City High School on Nov. 6 came after a strong start in the playoff series.

BY KYLIE CAPUANO
The Coronado News

After a semifinal loss in the CIF Division 2 playoffs, Coronado girls varsity volleyball head coach Adeile Ahmu referred to this past season as her best yet since taking over the program in 2019.

The 4-1 semifinal loss against University City High School on Nov. 6 came after a strong start in the playoff series with two landslide wins.

After dominating their regular season with a 35-3 record and placing first in the Eastern CIF league, the Islanders hit the ground running in their first playoff game against Classical Academy High School on Oct. 30.

"We came into it pretty confident in ourselves, but we were humble enough to recognize that this was a team that if they got the momentum, they could beat us," said senior co-captain Sadie Proctor.

Islanders sweep first two playoff matches

The CHS girls kept Classical from achieving that momentum, winning each set with a score of 25-15, 25-12 and 25-10.

The match against Classical was followed by another 3-0 win for the Islanders as they faced up against Patrick Henry High School on Nov. 2 for the quarterfinals.

"We knew we wanted to advance and we were not going to let Patrick Henry have any hope by keeping our lead with each ball," said Ahmu. "If they did get a point up against us, we were quick to get the ball back with a sideout."

By capitalizing on their opponent's defensive weaknesses and preventing them from running a smooth offense through aggressive plays at the net, they won each set with a score of 25-15, 25-19 and 25-11.

3-1 loss against University City High School

The Islanders' 25-game-winning-streak came to an end on Nov. 6 when they faced up against University City High School for the semifinals.

"We just kind of had a bad day, and it's unfortunate that it happened on the day of the playoffs," said Proctor.

The Islanders lost 4-1, falling short in the first two sets with a score of 23-25, 21-25, winning the third set 25-12 and sealing the loss in the fourth set with a score of 21-25.

Ahmu chalks the loss up to game day nerves.

"The energy from the crowd was great, but our energy wasn't matching theirs," said Ahmu. "It wasn't the poised and fluid team that we've seen all season, but a bit more of a frantic shift as the stakes were higher. I think the girls definitely played under some pressure and it showed in areas where we are normally strong in."

An end to a successful season

Despite this, Ahmu said she is proud of the effort the girls put in and the dedication they demonstrated throughout the entire season.

"I'm extremely proud of these 12 athletes and wouldn't wish anything different," said Ahmu. "The overall season was magical to say the least. These girls showed up every day for 3 months with two goals in sight: Win league and win the D2 championship."

Proctor stepped away from the semifinal loss with a "bittersweet" feeling; a mixture of pride in a successful season and disappointment in falling short of their championship goal.

"I just think this season shows the importance of determination," said Proctor. "Our team wasn't expecting to be anything at the beginning of the year and we just came out as this big powerhouse and nobody expected it. I think that was largely because of how hard the girls on the team worked and how closely bonded as a team we were."

San Diego Padres pitcher Wandy Peralta (58) throws against the Arizona Diamondbacks in the first inning during a baseball game, Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024, in Phoenix.

AP Photo/Rick Scuteri, File.

Wandy Peralta exercises option with Padres. Ha-Seong Kim declines

Associated Press

Left-hander Wandy Peralta exercised his $4.25 million option to remain with the San Diego Padres.

Gold Glove infielder Ha-Seong Kim declined his $8 million mutual option to become a free agent and will receive a $2 million buyout.

Peralta was guaranteed $16.5 million under what could be a four-year deal. He had a $3.35 million salary this year, and the deal includes player options for $4.45 million in both 2026 and 2027.

The 33-year-old had a 3.99 ERA in 46 relief appearances this year. He was sidelined between July 9 and Sept. 4 by a left adductor strain.

Kim tore the labrum in his right shoulder on Aug. 18 and needed season-ending surgery. He hit .233 with 11 homers and 22 stolen bases in the final season of a $28 million, four-year contract.

San Diego Padres manager Mike Shildt looks on during practice Monday, Oct. 7, 2024, a day before Game 3 of a baseball NL Division Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers in San Diego.

AP Photo/Gregory Bull.

Padres manager Mike Shildt agrees to 2-year contract extension

Associated Press

San Diego manager Mike Shildt and the Padres agreed to a two-year contract extension through the 2027 season, the team announced on Nov. 6.

Shildt was hired in November 2023 and given a two-year deal.

San Diego went 93-69 this season, finishing second in the NL West, five games behind the Los Angeles Dodgers. The Padres swept Atlanta 2-0 in the Wild Card Series, then lost a five-game Division Series to the Dodgers after taking a 2-1 lead.

"As Mike demonstrated this year, he has an unwavering commitment to winning and a unique set of skills that got our group to perform at a high level," general manager A.J. Preller said in a statement.

Shildt managed St. Louis from 2019-21 and led the Cardinals into the playoffs in all three seasons.

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SPORTS

Nathan Ayan (right) edges out Miles Pike for the win. *Photo by Phil Grooms.*

Nathan Ayan a top finisher at HOKA Postal Nationals

Coronado News staff

Nathan Ayan, a runner on the Coronado boys' cross country team, claimed the lead in the third fastest heat of the San Diego Flagship HOKA Postal Nationals on Nov. 2 with just 300 meters left to the finish line.

He edged out Miles Peck from Canyon Crest High School, who came nearly even with Ayan in the last 20 meters.

Vincent Russo came in 14th place in the same heat.

Morgan Maske had a stand out performance for the girls team, placing 14th in the second-fastest girls' race.

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CALIFORNIA

California farmers enjoy pistachio boom

Associated Press

In a sprawling plant in the heart of California's farmland, millions of shells rush down a metallic chute and onto a conveyor belt where they are inspected, roasted, packaged and shipped off to groceries around the world.

Pistachios are growing fast in California, where farmers have been devoting more land to a crop seen as hardier and more drought-tolerant in a state prone to dramatic swings in precipitation. The crop generated nearly $3 billion last year in California and in the past decade the United States has surpassed Iran to become the world's top exporter of the nut.

"There has been an explosion over the last 10 or 15 years of plantings, and those trees are coming online," said Zachary Fraser, president and chief executive of American Pistachio Growers, which represents more than 800 farmers in the southwestern U.S. "You are starting to see the fruit of people's vision from 40 years ago."

California grows more than a third of the country's vegetables and three quarters of its fruit and nuts, according to state agricultural statistics. Pistachios have surged over the past decade to become the state's sixth-biggest agricultural commodity in value ahead of longtime crops such as strawberries and tomatoes, the data shows.

Much of the crop is headed to China, where it is a popular treat during Lunar New Year. But industry experts said Americans also are eating more pistachios, which were rarely in grocery stores a generation ago and today are a snack food found almost everywhere. They are sold with shells or without and flavors range from salt and pepper to honey roasted.

The Wonderful Co., a $6 billion agricultural company known for brands such as Halo mandarins and FIJI Water, is the biggest name in pistachios. The company has grown pistachios since the 1980s, but it ramped up in 2015 after developing a rootstock that yields as much as 40% more nuts with the same soil and water, said Rob Yraceburu, president of Wonderful Orchards.

Now, Wonderful grows between 15% and 20% of the U.S. pistachio crop, he said. Its pistachio orchards stretch across vast tracts of dust-filled farmland northwest of Los Angeles also lined with pomegranates and dairies. The trees are shaken each fall and the nuts hauled to a massive processing facility to be prepped for sale.

Rows of young pistachio trees are planted at the Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds in Lost Hills, Calif., on Friday, Oct. 25, 2024. *AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes.*

"There is an increasingly growing demand in pistachios," Yraceburu said. "The world wants more."

Pistachio farmers learn from almond farming struggles

Pistachios are poised to weather California's dry spells better than its even bigger nut crop, almonds, which generated nearly $4 billion in the state last year, industry experts said.

Pistachio orchards can be sustained with minimal water during drought, unlike almonds and other more sensitive crops. The trees also rely on wind instead of bees for pollination and can produce nuts for decades longer, Yraceburu said.

Many California farmers who grow both nuts are applying lessons learned from almonds to the pistachio boom. Almond production, which is much bigger than pistachio, also soared in California, but prices fell amid a glut of post-pandemic supply while farmers grappled with drought and rising input costs, leading some to not replant aging orchards when it came time to take them out.

Pistachio growers say they hope to avoid a similar fate and are striving to keep demand for the nut ahead of supply. For example, American Pistachio Growers recently inked an endorsement deal with a top cricket player in India hoping to help promote pistachios there, Fraser said.

The rise of pistachios is part of California farmers' shift into perennial crops commanding higher returns than products such as cotton, according to a 2023 report by the Public Policy Institute of California.

Perennial crops, which are not replanted annually, can't just be swapped out during dry years, which can be challenging during extensive drought, said Brad Franklin, a research fellow at the institute's Water Policy Center.

But pistachios have benefits other perennial crops don't. They can go longer without water and grow in saline soils. That may make them appealing to California farmers who are facing limits on how much groundwater they can pump under a state law aimed at conserving the critical resource, he said.

When farmers decide what to plant, "I think the biggest thing is the market and where is the market," Franklin said. "And water is right below that."

Farmers face water challenges, but pistachio acreage has grown

Farmers across California are bracing for the impact of the 2014 state law aimed at ensuring a more sustainable use of groundwater after years of over pumping depleted basins and eroded water quality in some rural areas. About a fifth of California's pistachio crop is grown in areas that rely exclusively on groundwater for irrigation, Yraceburu said, adding he expects some of these orchards will eventually come out of production.

But over the next few years, pistachio acreage is expected to continue to grow in the state as trees planted in recent years come into production. That is in contrast to almond and walnut acreage, which are stabilizing or declining as orchards are being pulled out, said David Magaña, a senior analyst at Rabobank in Fresno, California.

Pistachios require about 3 acre-feet (3,700 cubic meters) of water per acre (0.4 hectares) compared with nearly 4 acre-feet (4,934 cubic meters) for almonds and produce more per acre than almonds while fetching a higher price, he said.

"You see all the value the pistachio industry is providing to California agriculture is approaching that of almonds with a lot less acreage," Magaña said. "I haven't seen pistachio orchards being pulled out."

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