



Former TOPGUN instructor Vincent Aiello pilots a fighter jet. Photo provided by Vincent Aiello.

Former TOPGUN instructor and Coronado resident opens up in new book

Vincent Aiello served 25 years as a Navy pilot before founding and hosting his own podcast and releasing his first autobiography

BY MADELINE YANG
The Coronado News

In 2009, Navy pilot and TOPGUN instructor Vincent Aiello was diagnosed with a prolapsed mitral valve. It was causing his heart to swell up bigger than normal in order to pump the blood his body needed. Aiello was told that if he waited any longer to fix it, he would’ve needed a heart transplant or worse, could’ve died. He had been flying for 12 years at this point. He was 39 years old. Three years after an open heart surgery, in 2013, he was finally able to fly again. During the ordeal, Aiello said he was “shaking his fist at the heavens” because he didn’t understand why this happened to him. But, over time, he realized this was just one more opportunity to prove that his whole life story was about persistence. The Coronado resident flew Navy fighter jets -- F/A-18 Hornets and F-16 Fighting Falcons -- for a quarter of a century, deploying several times overseas on aircraft carriers. He retired after 25 years in 2017. In 2000, Aiello was asked to be a “TOPGUN” instructor at the U.S. Navy Fighter Weapons School, where he taught for three years. He now hosts an online show, “Fighter Pilot



Vincent Aiello stands with his fighter jet with his call sign “Jell-O” on the aircraft. Photo provided by Vincent Aiello.

Podcast,” where he interviews expert guests on topics such as air combat, weapons systems and aircraft. This year, he also released a book, “Through the Yellow Visor,” based on his experiences in naval aviation. Although Aiello completed a long and successful career as a pilot and TOPGUN instructor, he never felt like he was destined to have this reputation. He said he actually endured imposter syndrome as he advanced, but decided that even if he didn’t attain it, he was always going to try. Where there were dead ends, he said, he just found a “way around or through or under

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The U.S., Mexico sign a memorandum addressing the Tijuana sewage crisis

The two countries reinforced a commitment to fund and expedite projects, expanding their 2022 agreement

BY JULIETA SOTO
The Coronado News

The United States and Mexico announced new deadlines for projects to address the decades-old Tijuana River sewage crisis identified in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that reiterates a pact adopted by both sides years ago. “This isn’t just an agreement for 2025,” said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin. “It was a product of a conversation of, ‘Where do we need to be in 2030, in 2035 and beyond, as we look towards infrastructure challenges faced on the Mexico side?’ And there are a lot of new Mexican-side projects that Mexico is agreeing to as part of this memorandum of understanding.” Zeldin and Alicia Bárcena, Mexico’s environmental secretary, signed the MOU outlining renewed commitments to address the longstanding binational environmental emergency that has polluted the Imperial Beach and Coronado shorelines. Lee called years past negotiations of projects identified in Minute 328 an 80% solution that failed to factor in Tijuana’s increasing population. The Minute 328 plans came from a 2022 agreement between Mexico and the U.S. that aimed to complete infrastructure projects to treat sewage. Expanding on that agreement, Mexico and the U.S. entered into a new pact on July 24. Minutes are official agreements made by the U.S. and Mexican sides of the International Boundary

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Alicia Bárcena, Mexico’s Secretary of the environment and natural resources, and U.S. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin display copies from a memorandum of understanding regarding the Tijuana sewage crisis signed on July 24, 2025 in Mexico City. Photo courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency.



Caltrans invites stakeholders in District 11 to take part in a community survey. Photo by California State Parks.

Caltrans: The future of the Silver Strand Highway is at risk

A Caltrans survey is gathering input so the agency can devise solutions to keep SR 75 safe and accessible

BY JULIETA SOTO
The Coronado News

Faced with a rising sea level triggered by climate change, state transportation officials are exploring ways to strengthen vulnerable areas along California State Route 75, the scenic Silver Strand stretch connecting the cities of Coronado and Imperial Beach.

According to Caltrans, that seven-mile strip of land already sees flooding during storms and is likely to get worse if no action is taken. Thus the agency is conducting what it calls a “Climate Resilience Study” to identify future coastal hazards and develop plans for long-term safety and accessibility. One of the goals is to gather feedback from local residents, businesses and agencies via a survey to make the highway resilient and protect it for future generations.

The study began in February and is scheduled for completion in early 2027. During that timeframe, officials will gather information about current coastal conditions; identify key challenges; analyze how sea-level rise and storms could affect the highway; develop practical solutions to protect the corridor; and collaborate with a committee of experts to provide guidance. Following the study, the department will produce a final report with findings and recommendations.

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this week

3 • Sunday

Art in the Park is scheduled on Aug. 3 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Spreckels Park. More than 50 top artists in San Diego County, in every genre, will display their artwork, providing the community the chance to converse directly with the artists.

3 • Sunday

SixWire, along with a special guest, will perform at Spreckels Park at 6 p.m. as part of the Coronado Promenade Concerts' summer series.

Prior to the concert, the Coronado Chamber of Commerce will recognize local military members with an awards program at 5 p.m. The celebration will start with a performance of the National Anthem by the 1st Marine Division Band accompanied by the Coronado High School NJROTC Color Guard. Three awards will be presented to local military members.

5 • Tuesday

An SAT prep workshop is planned at the Coronado Public Library at 6 p.m. by Steve Reiss, owner of Reiss SAT Seminars and the Math Magician. Registration is required at coronado.librarycalendar.com.

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

THINGS TO DO

Coronado Playhouse presents ‘Head Over Heels’ in August

Coronado News staff

Coronado Playhouse’s production of “Head Over Heels” — a lively jukebox musical — will hit the stage in August.

The musical, a tale that fuses Elizabethan-era forbidden love, royal prophecy and self-discovery, first premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2015. It brings together the narrative of Sir Philip Sidney’s “The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia,” along with a pop-rock soundtrack of The Go-Go’s.

Set in the utopian kingdom of Arcadia, “Head Over Heels” follows King Basilius, his queen Gynecia, and their two daughters: Philoclea, whose heart belongs to the humble shepherd Musidorus, and Pamela, the kingdom’s famously beautiful yet insecure princess.

The show is scheduled to run from Aug. 8-31 at Coronado Play-



“Head Over Heels” will run at the Coronado Playhouse from Aug. 8-31. Image provided by Coronado Playhouse.

house. Performances are scheduled for 8 p.m. on Thursdays through Saturdays, along with 2 p.m. matinee performances on Saturdays and Sundays.

Single tickets are \$27 and can be

purchased at coronadoplayhouse.org/head-over-heels/. Discounts are available for active military, students and seniors. For more ticketing information, call the box office at (619) 435-4856.



Meet Colby Jack, the pet of the week. See all adoptable animals: Scan the QR code with your smartphone camera, and tap on the link. Graphic/photo provided by PAWS of Coronado.

PAWS of Coronado

Meet Colby Jack, a lovable 8-year-old retriever/labrador mix weighing in at 67 pounds of pure sweetness. This gentle boy has a heart as big as his paws and a calm, affectionate nature that wins everyone over.

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near his people, offering quiet companionship and unconditional love.

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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 Colby Jack or other pets, please visit pawsofcoronado.org.



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Never Worry About Charging Your Golf Cart Again

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

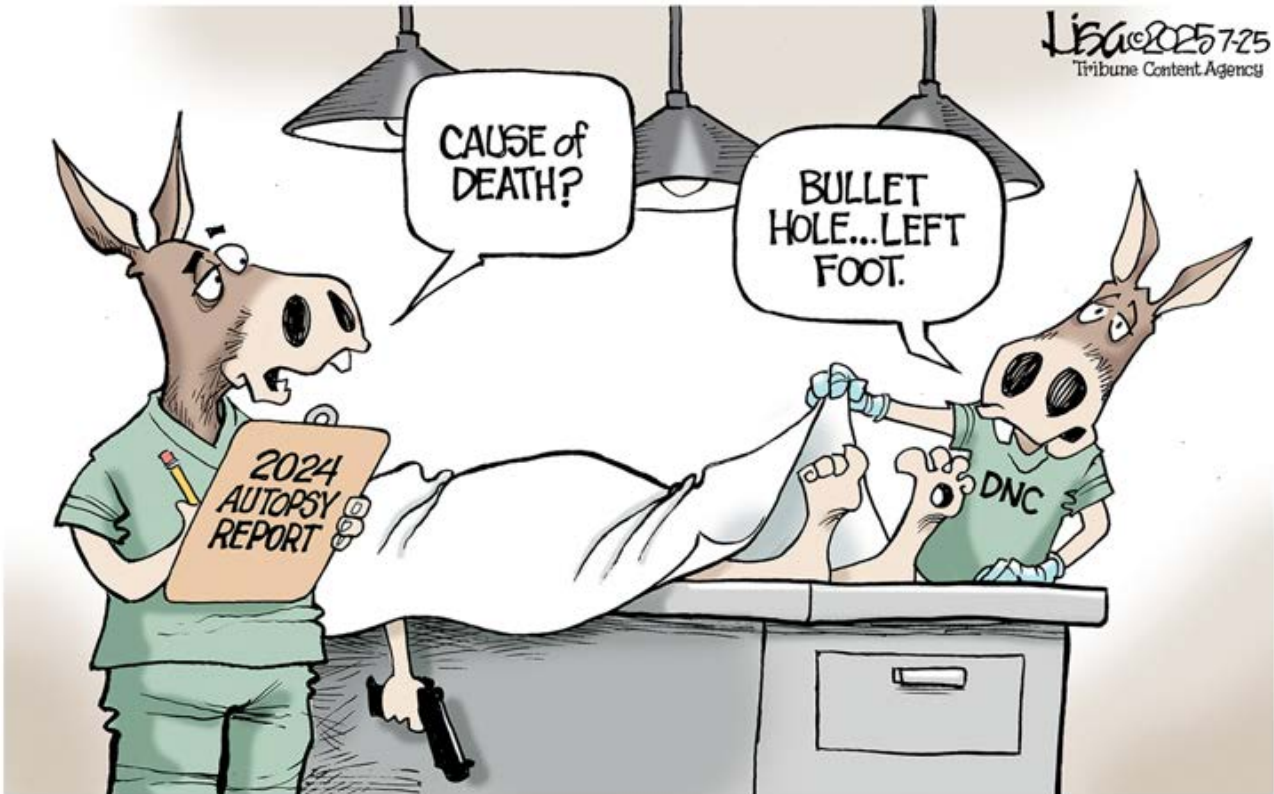
Together, these can help make solar power an affordable option for your golf cart. Additionally, you will likely save quite a bit of money on your electricity bill without having an electric vehicle drawing from your home’s electricity supply. Individuals aren’t the only ones who benefit monetarily from 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

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CORONADO



Coronado's mayor and City Council members from left: Council Member Mark Fleming, Council Member Amy Steward, Mayor John Duncan, Council Member Kelly Purvis and Council Member Carrie Downey. Photo taken from city of Coronado website.

Get to know your government leaders in Coronado and beyond

BY LILLY CORCORAN
The Coronado News

Have you ever wondered who makes the decisions that shape life in Coronado? This guide breaks down Coronado's elected officials at the local, state and federal level. Whether you want to voice a concern or stay informed, it helps to know who represents you.

Local government

Coronado: Mayor and city council

Coronado elected John Duncan as mayor in 2024. Duncan will serve a four-year term. The mayor's job is to keep the city running smoothly by leading City Council meetings, representing Coronado, listening to residents' concerns and working with city services to best serve his constituents.

Duncan is also a part of the Trans-border Sewage Sub-Committee which aims to find solutions to the wastewater crisis impacting Coronado residents.

Mayor Duncan did not respond to requests for an interview.

The city of Coronado also has four elected City Council members: Carrie Downey, Mark Fleming, Kelly Purvis and Amy Steward. Each serves a four-year term.

"My primary responsibility is to listen to, advocate for and make decisions in the best interest of Coronado residents," Purvis said.

Steward said one of her top priorities is addressing the cross-border sewage crisis. "While the repair and expansion of the binational wastewater treatment plant is essential, it's only part of the solution... I've been researching and advocating for nanobubble technology as a complementary, nature-based solution... This technology has shown great promise around the world restoring water quality and resetting watersheds."

Downey and Purvis focused their comments on housing as the city begins work on its General Plan that is

to include a housing element.

"If we are not able to show progress on building permanent affordable housing, we will be assigned affordable housing obligations," Downey said.

"We're a small city with unique constraints," said Purvis, "and we must advocate effectively at the regional and state levels to ensure our community's needs and values are not overlooked or subject to a 'one size fits all' formula."

Council Member Mark Fleming did not respond to requests for an interview.

County of San Diego: County supervisor and district attorney

District 3 County Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer represents Coronado in county decisions. In addition to Coronado, District 3 also encompasses the incorporated cities of Carlsbad, Del Mar, Encinitas and Solana Beach. Lawson-Remer was elected chair of the Board of Supervisors this year and has represented District 3 since 2021.

"My job is to deliver real results that make life better for Coronado – from protecting public health to fighting for clean water, safe neighborhoods, and a more affordable San Diego," Lawson-Remer said.

Lawson-Remer said one of her main priorities as a county supervisor is finding solutions that address the Tijuana River sewage crisis in Coronado.

"This disaster has plagued our coastline for decades, and I'm doing everything in my power to end it," she added.

Summer Stephan was elected district attorney in 2018, serving as chief prosecutor in criminal cases and protecting crime victims.

"We work with all nine police departments in the county and the Sheriff's Office to make sure those who harm others and terrorize neighborhoods are held accountable under the law," Stephan said, "Part-

nering with our community across the county and building trust is a key ingredient in keeping our neighborhoods safe."

State government: State assembly member, senator and governor

California State Legislature is two pronged, including California State Assembly and California State Senate. Tasha Boerner is the assembly member who represents District 77, which encompasses Carlsbad, Encinitas, Solana Beach, Del Mar and La Jolla south to Coronado.

"As your state assembly member, I am responsible for providing you with access to state services and represent you through my votes in the state legislature," Boerner said.

Dr. Akilah Weber Pierson is the state senator for District 39 which includes Coronado, El Cajon, La Mesa, Lemon Grove and parts of the City of San Diego. Due to timing, Weber Pierson could not provide a comment.

Gavin Newsom has been the governor of California since 2019. He was reelected in 2022. As the governor, Newsom serves as the state's chief. His responsibilities include signing or vetoing state laws, responding to emergencies, leading state agencies and the budgeting process.

Federal government: Senate, House of Representatives and president

The legislative branch of our federal government has two components: the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Alex Padilla and Adam Schiff are the state's two senators, representing all Californians in the U.S. Senate.

Congressman Scott Peters serves as the representative for the 50th Congressional District. Representatives serve a two year term and represent the district in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Representative is both my job ti-

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U.S. Senator Adam Schiff
Contact page: <https://www.schiff.senate.gov/contact/>

President Donald Trump
Contact page: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/contact/>

tle and job description. That means working to elevate what's important to Coronado, San Diego, San Marcos and Escondido in Washington," Peters said. "To address Coronado's needs specifically, I am focused on bringing home funding and securing long-term solutions to end the Tijuana River Valley sewage crisis that is devastating our public health, national security and local economy." As the nation's chief executive, President Donald Trump is responsible for leading the federal government, executing laws adopted by Congress, upholding the U.S. Constitution and serving as the commander in chief of U.S. armed forces.

Contact lillycorcoran7@gmail.com

Caltrans: The future of the Silver Strand Highway is at risk

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"Caltrans strives to make informed decisions based on local stakeholder input," said Aaron Hunter, Caltrans external affairs manager for the area, in an email. "This first phase of engagement will assess how the community wants to address impacts such as sea-level rise and coastal erosion, desired improvements for biking, walking and non-vehicular mobility,

and community priorities for design, access, safety and environmental stewardship."

That input will be collected in an online survey created by Caltrans and its consulting partners at Communications Lab.

To access the survey and provide input, visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SR-75study>.

Following the completion of this survey, Hunter said his team will de-

velop design alternatives, then gather more public reaction.

Caltrans, which manages more than 50,000 miles of California's highway and freeway lanes, identified climate action as one of five main issues in its 2024-28 Strategic Plan.

Hunter said a focus has been placed on studies in areas like the Silver Strand "to help Caltrans adapt to the changing climate in an equitable, safe and sustainable manner."

He said Caltrans previously identified the highway as the No. 1 location across District 11 requiring adaptation due to impacts from sea level rise.

The district encompasses San Diego and Imperial counties.

This vulnerability is further corroborated in studies carried out by the city of Coronado, SANDAG, the U.S. Navy and others, he added.

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CORONADO

REVIEW



Pop Pops Paleta boasts a wide variety of flavors.
Staff photo by Lilly Corcoran.

New Pop Pops Paleta location made me a dessert person

BY LILLY CORCORAN
The Coronado News

I have a confession to make: I am not a dessert person. I much prefer a salty chip or a savory garlic knot to anything sweet. So when I went to review Pop Pops Paleta, the new paleta store in Coronado, I was hesitant. Skeptical even...

The Coronado location of Pop Pops Paleta opened on Orange Avenue on the 4th of July this year. There are also locations in Little Italy and Hillcrest that have been around since 2020 and 2025, respectively. The company is known for its sweet treats that offer respite from the heat in a wide range of unconventional flavors. A paleta is a frozen Mexican treat on a stick, coming in both fruity and creamy bases.

The first thing I noticed when I walked into the quaint storefront was the wide array of frosted treats coming in every imaginable hue and flavor. The colors were vivid and the flavors that went with them distinctive, ensuring a flavor for everyone... including myself. The sour and salty flavor profiles drew me in, an immediate hit to my not-a-dessert-person facade.

Founders Shira and Nissim Levy wanted to start Pop Pops Peleta out of love of the game. “What’s more happy than bringing people joy,” says Shira. All of the paletas are made in-house at the Hillcrest location and distributed to the other stores.

I got three flavors: Barbie (cotton candy), mangonada, and chocolate peanut butter. After I selected my paletas, I had the option to add a drizzle, dip or toppings, including gummy worms, chocolate chips, and shredded coconut. A committed food writer, I got the works recommended for each flavor. All for the reader, of course.

The cotton candy bar was smeared with marshmallow fluff and topped with rainbow sprinkles. The mangonada was paired with spicy Tajín and sour chamoy. And the chocolate peanut butter was showered in decadent chocolate sauce, which is where my anti-sweets facade really gave way.

I was having the time of my life and the paletas took me by surprise. I was expecting them to have more of a popsicle consistency, icy and watered down. When I took my first bite, initial assumptions melted away. The paletas were rich and creamy.

It was incredible. Each paleta got a resounding 10 out of 10 from me. I was shocked by how velvety the paletas were, the texture resembling frozen ice cream. Each flavor was distinct but equally impressive.

But the biggest surprise was the price point. My sweet trifecta of paletas cost less than \$25 for all three – accoutrements included.

For these reasons, I am happy to report that, against all odds, I am a changed woman – salty to sweet. That fateful day of paleta indulgence continues to replay in my mind.

I will be coming back to Pop Pops Peleta to try every flavor, and to lean into my new identity as a dessert person.

Pop Pops Paleta is located at 943 Orange Ave, Coronado, Calif. The store is open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, visit <https://www.pop-poppaleta.com>

Contact lillycorcoran7@gmail.com

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CORONADO

The U.S., Mexico sign a memorandum addressing the Tijuana sewage crisis

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and Water Commission (IBWC), a bi-lateral agency that oversees border issues.

“What the residents of Southern California need and deserve, what they’ve been waiting for for too long, isn’t just a solution that is a Band Aid for that moment, but a permanent 100% solution,” Zeldin told reporters via a webinar from Mexico City.

Zeldin was joined by officials like IBWC Commissioner Chad McIntosh and U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ronald Johnson, hours before signing.

This follows Lee’s visit to San Diego in April to witness the crisis first-hand. He met with Navy SEALs who shared their accounts of dealing with the sewage.

“The trip was very informative,” said Lee. “I smelled for myself that foul smell that so many residents of southern California have been complaining about for so long.”

Lee said the visit ignited a “burning desire” within the Trump administration to dedicate energy and time to bring these residents relief “as quickly as possible.”

“President Trump told us that he wanted this done, especially when he saw the story of the impacts to the Navy SEAL training,” he added.

According to Lee, the administration prioritized three pillars during negotiations with Mexico.

“I’m proud to report that we achieved success with regards to all three of our highest priorities,” he said, outlining each pillar.

Pillar No. 1 was for the Mexican government to allocate a remaining \$93 million to fund Minute 328 projects, which would mitigate untreated wastewater from polluting coastal communities, harming public health and threatening the environment on both sides of the border.

Pillar No. 2 was to “stress test” timelines for projects, speeding up completion of Minute 328 projects, including some to be completed in 2025.

Pillar No. 3 focused on developing a new minute by Dec. 31 to “achieve a permanent 100% solution” with more than one dozen actions addressing the sewage crisis. Among these is developing a real-time binational monitoring system that tracks flow inputs and outputs in the Tijuana River.

The MOU says Mexico will seek funding through either Mexico’s National Water Commission, CONAGUA, or the Baja California state government, to initiate the construction process of two projects in 2025.

One project, at a cost of \$13.3 million, is the diversion of 10 million gallons per day (mgd) of treated sewage entering the Tijuana River from

the Arturo Herrera and La Morita wastewater plants to a site upstream of the Rodríguez Dam. The second project is rehabilitation of the Parallel Gravity Line, totalling \$8.42 million.

The U.S. will release EPA funding to complete the rehabilitation of a key pump station and Tijuana River collection pipes upon initiation of that construction, says the MOU.

The U.S. also plans to provide backup power for some of Mexico’s projects.

By December of 2027, the U.S. aims to complete expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant from 25 mgd to 50 mgd.

Earlier this year, the agency announced the plant’s daily treatment capacity would increase from 25 mgd to 35 mgd, a 100-day plan slated for completion by August 28, 2025.

Meanwhile, Mexico commits to allocate the remaining Minute 328 funds, \$93 million, in its 2026 and 2027 budgets to ensure slotted projects are completed by Dec. 31 of the latter year, or sooner. The MOU outlines these funds will go toward projects that would rehabilitate and upgrade existing pump systems and interceptors.

“The Trump administration heard you loudly and clearly,” Lee said, addressing residents in southern California affected by the crisis in the hours before he signed a commitment from the U.S. “This is a launch of implementation of a 100% permanent solution that we will ensure. ... As we move forward, whatever needs to be done to ensure implementation will be done.”

Veolia North America, which operates the U.S. plant on behalf of the IBWC, congratulated the federal agencies and called the agreement “a major milestone” for the affected cross-border region.

“We are hopeful that the agreements and actions set out in the memorandum will holistically address the cross-border sewage issue that has plagued San Diego County communities for years with beach closures, persistent odors and damage to sensitive environmental habitat,” said Adam Lisberg, spokesman for Veolia, in a statement.

“Veolia, like all community members, is pleased that Mexico has agreed to a series of engineering and construction projects south of the border that will reduce flows of raw sewage – the source of the persistent odors and beach closures – into the Tijuana River and Pacific Ocean by increasing the amount of sewage treated in Mexico,” Lisberg added.

Contact: julieta@thecoronadonews.com



Glenn Kramer will be performing at the Coronado Public Library on Aug. 8. Photo provided by the Coronado Public Library.

Glenn Kramer performs this week at Coronado Public Library

Coronado News staff

Pianist Glenn Kramer will take the stage at the Coronado Public Library on Aug. 8 as part of summer festival concert series.

The performance will showcase pieces ranging from jazz standards to Broadway favorites, along with audience participation activities like music bingo and name that tune.

Kramer has lived in San Diego for the past 21 years, and has been a fixture in the city’s music scene since 2000. He is known for his transitions between jazz, pop, Broadway hits and standards from the Great American Songbook.

Kramer is the founder of AmateurPianists, a piano-themed group located in San Diego. Its mission is to create performance and learning opportunities through recitals, presentations and masterclasses.

Admission is free, and seating is first-come, first-served. Doors open at 12:45 p.m.



The County of San Diego issued closures for the Tijuana Slough, Imperial Beach and Silver Strand shorelines due to findings of bacteria levels exceeding health standards on July 27. The next day, on July 28, the closure for Silver Strand was lifted. Staff photo by Madeline Yang.



Lynda Wood was recognized as the Soroptimist of the Year. From left, Carolyn DeLagrange, Lynda Wood and Jan Iwashita. Photo by Carolyn Muehlenbeck.

Lynda Wood named Soroptimist of the year

Coronado News staff

Lynda Wood, the exiting president of the Soroptimist International of Coronado, was recognized as the Soroptimist of the year — an award presented to a member who has gone well beyond in commitment and dedication to the club’s mission.

The Soroptimist club is a group of women working together to help women and girls advance their education and gain economic independence.

Wood joined the group in 2011, serving for five years as treasurer before leading the club as president over the 2024-2025 year. She has been instrumental in broadening outreach to include projects in Mexico.

Since 2018, she has led clean drinking water projects for schools in Mexico and now directs the Jaws for Life project in her hometown of Nueva Rosita.

For over 30 years, Lynda has operated a bilingual English/Spanish tax preparation business, serving the Coronado community, as well as clients from across the U.S., Mexico and England.

CORONADO

LA fires charred homes into piles of metal and concrete. By recycling them, they're given new life

Associated Press

Candace Frazee recently walked through the burnt remains of The Bunny Museum, searching for anything that could be salvaged before workers cleared the land.

The Eaton Fire in Southern California in January scorched more than 60,000 bunny objects and memorabilia, leaving behind mounds of ash, steel and concrete littered across the landscape. Giant bunny statues that once greeted guests were left just

wiry, hollow skeletons. Her home in the back was also gone.

Yet amid the debris, there are valuable materials being redeemed: Metal, concrete and some trees are being recycled and given new life.

"It's fantastic. It's absolutely fantastic," said Frazee of recycling the materials, who co-founded the museum with her husband. "That's the right thing to do."

After the Palisades and Eaton fires scorched entire neighborhoods, the Army Corps of Engineers set up oper-

ations to recycle concrete and metal from mostly fire-damaged homes. Metal is compacted and concrete is crushed, then trucked to recycling facilities before re-entering the supply chain for future uses. And some trees and shrubs are processed and sold.

"A lot of this material can be reused in future construction, and that's just good for the environment," said Col. Sonny Avichal, an Army Corps commander for the Eaton Fire. "And so there is definitely this notion of, you know, a lot of the stuff that we're able

to recover will actually come back and help rebuild Altadena."

The agency said these operations have sped up recovery efforts, reduced waste going to landfills and helped lower the number of trucks on the road, but they've also sparked some worries. Residents have raised concerns that the work produces or kick up particles into the air. The Army Corps maintains they're ensuring operations are safe by monitoring air quality and continually watering the sites to minimize dust.

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MILITARY



Capt. Ladislao Montero (R) salutes his successor, Capt. Loren Jacobi (L), the new commanding officer of Naval Base Coronado, at a change-of-command ceremony on Naval Air Station North Island. Photo taken from Naval Base Coronado's Facebook.

Naval Base Coronado has a new commanding officer

BY MADELINE YANG
The Coronado News

Capt. Loren Jacobi is the new commanding officer of Naval Base Coronado, taking over for Capt. Ladislao Montero after 18 months of leadership at the base.

Montero will move on to become chief of staff for Navy Region Southwest under Rear Adm. Rich Jarrett.

Jacobi praised Montero during a change-of-command ceremony at Naval Air Station North Island on June 26, thanking him for shaping him as a leader, friend and human being.

Jacobi initially reported to Naval Base Coronado as executive officer in January of 2024.

As he assumed his new role on June 26, Jacobi acknowledged current events within the country and internationally.

“We are living through historic divisions in our country ... and multiple active conflicts around the globe,” Jacobi said. “There is only one way to navigate through these

uncertain times: through partnership. We need to rely on each other.

“That spirit of service is how we build bridges rather than walls. Never in our history has that spirit been so important.”

Under Montero’s leadership, Naval Base Coronado provided fleet support to 150 tenant commands while performing over 196,000 air operations, 325 ship movements and almost a hundred carrier air wing movements, according to Jarrett.

Montero also implemented the Navy’s first facial recognition system at an entry control point and is shepherding that system throughout the entire Navy Shore Enterprise, a network of Navy installations and facilities, according to Jarrett.

Montero said he was filled with immense pride and gratitude for serving in this position.

“It’s been an honor of a lifetime to serve as commanding officer for Naval Base Coronado,” he added.

Contact: madeline@thecoronadonews.com

D-Day veteran and TikTok star ‘Papa Jake’ Larson dies at 102

Associated Press

D-Day veteran “Papa Jake” Larson, who survived German gunfire on Normandy’s bluffs in 1944 and then garnered 1.2 million followers on TikTok late in life by sharing stories to commemorate World War II and his fallen comrades, has died at 102.

An animated speaker who charmed strangers young and old with his quick smile and generous hugs, the self-described country boy from Minnesota was “cracking jokes til the end,” his granddaughter wrote in announcing his death.

Tributes to him quickly filled his “Story Time with Papa Jake” TikTok account from across the United States, where he had been living in Lafayette, California. Towns around Normandy, still grateful to Allied forces who helped defeat the occupying Nazis in World War II, paid him homage too.

“Our beloved Papa Jake has passed away on July 17th at 102 years young,” granddaughter McKaela Larson posted on his social media accounts. “He went peacefully.”

“As Papa would say, love you all the mostest,” she wrote.

Born Dec. 20, 1922, in Owatonna, Minnesota, Larson enlisted in the National Guard in 1938, lying about his age since he was only 15 at the time. In 1942, he was sent overseas and was stationed in Northern Ireland. He became operations sergeant and assembled the planning books for the invasion of Normandy.

He was among the nearly 160,000 Allied troops who stormed the Normandy shore on D-Day, June 6, 1944,

surviving machine-gun fire when he landed on Omaha Beach. He made it unhurt to the bluffs that overlook the beach, then studded with German gun emplacements that mowed down American soldiers.

“We are the lucky ones,” Larson told The Associated Press at the 81st anniversary of D-Day in June, speaking amid the immaculate rows of graves at the American cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach.

“We are their family. We have the responsibility to honor these guys who gave us a chance to be alive.”

He went on to fight through the Battle of the Bulge, a grueling month-long fight in Belgium and Luxembourg that was one of the defining moments of the war and of Hitler’s defeat. His service earned him a Bronze Star and a French Legion of Honor award.

In recent years, Larson made repeated trips to Normandy for D-Day commemorations — and at every stop, “Papa Jake” was greeted by people asking for a selfie. In return, he offered up a big hug, to their greatest joy.

One memorable encounter came in 2023, when he came across Bill Gladden, a then-99-year-old British veteran who survived a glider landing on D-Day and a bullet that tore through his ankle.

“I want to give you a hug, thank you. I got tears in my eyes. We were meant to meet,” Larson told Gladden, as their hands, lined and spotted with age, clasped tightly. Gladden died the following year.

» Continued on Page 11

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Former TOPGUN instructor and Coronado resident opens up in new book

» Continued from Page 1

or over” – whatever it took to achieve that goal.

“I think I was just a persistent person,” Aiello said. “I feel like it’s my vector in life, and so somehow I always just kind of made it, even though I wasn’t necessarily sure that I could.”

He attributed his passion for aviation to his stepdad who asked him the right questions and helped him find the fire he needed.

“I just decided, ‘I’m just going to keep trying until the answer is absolutely 100% no,’ he explained.

“I don’t know where to find (persistence) within you, but if you want something badly enough, you’ve got to reach in there and look around for it because it should be there.”

In his 25 years of flying, Aiello said, he only dropped weapons once during combat.

On his second mission ever, Iraqi air defense guns fired on his flight.

And when Aiello noticed they were shooting at him, it became an oppor-



Vincent Aiello, former TOPGUN instructor and fighter pilot, snaps a photo mid flight. *Photo provided by Vincent Aiello.*

“The book was my way of not only sharing my experiences and telling my podcast listeners more about my life, but bringing hope to people that you can overcome your obstacles... You can persist, if you want something badly enough.”

- Vincent Aiello

tunity to test out what he had been practicing for – and whether they were good enough to fight back.

He dropped bombs on the air defense guns and later found out they were successful, but never knew whether or not there were casualties.

“In that moment, you come to grips with, ‘Okay, this is what I’m here to do.’ And now there’s some trepidation, but you fall back on your training and you fall back on your wingman and the team,” Aiello explained.

On that second mission, Aiello happened to look at the clock while flying back to his carrier and saw that it was 4:30 p.m., and he remembered it was Thanksgiving Day. In that moment, he recalled his prior Thanks-

givings and how, at around this time, he would have a full belly surrounded by family and friends enjoying his comfort and freedom.

On that day, he realized the depth of military service.

“I thought, ‘I’m the one right now that’s providing that – not just the only one – but I’m taking my turn to provide that,’” Aiello said. “Ever since that day ... I’ll generally just give a little silent prayer to those who are out doing what I once did, and thank God for them.”

Aiello flew three more years after his heart surgery before he retired at the beginning of 2017.

“It’s a rewarding career. Many people think they want to do it because the flying will be amazing – and it

is. What they don’t realize is, so are the people,” Aiello said. “The people you serve with will be what keeps you there ... and I miss it.”

A year later, Aiello started the podcast.

And now his autobiography lets listeners know the story behind the host.

“The book was my way of not only sharing my experiences and telling my podcast listeners more about my life, but bringing hope to people that you can overcome your obstacles.

“You can persist, if you want something badly enough,” Aiello said.

Contact: madeline@the coronadonews.com



World War II veteran Jake Larson meets youths during ceremonies at the US cemetery to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the D-Day landings, on June 6, 2025 in Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy.
AP Photo/Thomas Padilla, File.

D-Day veteran and TikTok star ‘Papa Jake’ Larson dies at 102

» Continued from Page 10

In his TikTok posts and interviews, Larson combined humorous anecdotes with somber reminders about the horrors of war.

Reflecting to AP on the three years he was in Europe, Larson said he is “no hero.” Speaking in 2024, he also had a message to world leaders: “Make peace not war.”

He often called himself “the luckiest man in the world,” and expressed awe at all the attention he was getting. “I’m just a country boy. Now I’m a star on TikTok,” he told AP in 2023. “I’m a legend! I didn’t plan this, it came about.”

Small-town museums and groups around Normandy that work to honor D-Day’s heroes and fallen shared tributes online

to Larson, one of their most loyal visitors.

“He was an exceptional witness and bearer of memory,” the Overlord Museum posted on Facebook.

“He came every year to the museum, with his smile, his humility and his tales that touched all generations. His stories will continue to live. Rest in peace Papa Jake,” it read.

“Thanks for everything.”



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SPORTS

NASCAR will hold first street race on active military base at Naval Base Coronado in 2026

Associated Press

NASCAR will hold a street race on Naval Base Coronado in Southern California next June as a replacement for its downtown Chicago event that ran the last three years.

The move to the San Diego area does not eliminate a return to Chicago, where NASCAR will still maintain an office and effort an eventual return, perhaps as early as 2027.

But the shift next year will allow NASCAR to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Navy by hosting all three of its national series over a three-day weekend on June 19-21.

“As part of our nation’s 250th anniversary, we are honored for NASCAR to join the celebration as we host our first street race at a military base, Naval Base Coronado,” Ben Kennedy, executive vice president and chief venue and racing innovations officer, said Wednesday. “NASCAR San Diego Weekend will honor the Navy’s history and the men and women who serve as we take the best motorsports in the world to the streets of Naval Base Coronado.”

It will be NASCAR’s second street race in the sport’s history, following the three-year run in Chicago, and first on an active military base. The course layout is not complete but is expected to be around 3 miles.

NASCAR has seen Auto Club Speedway close after the 2023 race. It built a temporary short track inside Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum from 2002 through 2024 but moved that event to North Carolina.

Kennedy, who has been bullish on new endeavors for his family business, was the brains of the races at the Coliseum, Chicago, this year’s vis-



The guided-missile destroyer USS Stockdale leaves Naval Base Coronado Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2016, in Coronado, Calif. AP Photo/Gregory Bull, File.

it to Mexico City and now next year in San Diego, a venture the Navy is excited about.

“NASCAR embodies the very best of the American spirit through speed, precision and an unyielding pursuit of excellence,” Navy Secretary John C. Phelan said. “Hosting a race aboard Naval Air Station North Island, the birthplace of naval aviation, it’s not just a historic first, it’s a pow-

erful tribute to the values we share: grit, teamwork and love of country.

“From the flight deck to the finish line, this collaboration reflects the operational intensity and unity of purpose that define both the United States Navy and NASCAR.”

The base is known as the “West Coast Quarterdeck” and is a consortium of nine Navy installations that stretch from San Clemente Island 50

miles off the coast of Long Beach to the Mountain Warfare Training Facility 50 miles east of San Diego.

NASCAR named Amy Lupo, who has been with the series since 2021 and helped launch the Coliseum, as president of the race. She spent more than 20 years at ESPN expanding the X Games when she lived in San Diego early in her career. She still lives in Southern California.

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SPORTS



Los Angeles Chargers wide receiver Ladd McConkey (15) gestures during practice at the team's NFL football training camp, Wednesday, July 23, 2025, in San Diego. AP Photo/Denis Poroy.

Chargers rave about wideout McConkey

Harbaugh says he's 'uncoverable' 1 on 1

Associated Press

Wide receiver Ladd McConkey is making such an impression with the Los Angeles Chargers that coach Jim Harbaugh says he's "uncoverable" one on one and linebacker Daiyan Henley is still arguing about a catch the second-year pro made in workouts a month ago.

McConkey is coming off a sensational season in which he set team rookie records with 82 catches and 1,149 yards receiving, while scoring seven touchdowns.

Everyone is expecting more from McConkey — except for maybe Henley during their friendly practice rivalry — as he and quarterback Justin Herbert continue to develop the chemistry that has made them one of the NFL's top pass-and-catch duos.

Harbaugh, who brought the Chargers to their former hometown for two days of training camp practices this week, said fellow receiver Quentin Johnston and Ladd are "playing at an elite level."

Then he added about McConkey: "Ladd, he's even better than he was last year. It's not like hyperbole. It's not. He's uncoverable right now by one guy. That's awesome."

McConkey let out a little chuckle when asked about Harbaugh's comment.

"I don't know about that," McConkey said on July 23 at the University of San Diego, where Harbaugh began his head coaching career in 2004.

"Obviously, as receivers, like yeah, we're striving for that. But other guys, they're getting paid on the oth-

er side of the ball, too. You're going to win some and lose some. Hopefully I win more than I lose.

"It's obviously a great feeling knowing he has confidence in me," said McConkey, a second-round draft pick out of Georgia in 2024. "You go out there and make plays, he believes in me, go out and show him what I'm about."

After completing 332 of 504 passes for 3,870 yards and 23 touchdowns last year, Herbert has the most completions (1,945) and yards passing (21,093) by a player in his first five seasons in NFL history.

Herbert said McConkey is "the perfect combination of athleticism and intelligence. The way he understands the game of football and how he sees defenses, I think that's what makes him like that. he's just got a great understanding of how people are going to try to guard him and where the leverage is and just the way to break it. He's done such a great job with the quarterbacks, just being friendly and always being in the right spot, so it's been huge to see."

Offensive coordinator Greg Roman said the Chargers are "hoping for a long, long fruitful career for Ladd," and his relationship with Herbert will be a big part of it.

"I think we're seeing that right now. It takes two to tango and those guys getting more time on task together, more chemistry, 'Hey, if you see this, I want you to hook up here and I'll put it on your inside shoulder,' those types of things, those next-level type things," Roman said.

The coordinator said there were a few times during the first four games last year where McConkey "wasn't perfect at all. We had to correct some things, a couple plays in particular. He learned from it and

it never happened again. He got that and he moved on and he kept climbing the ladder and you saw that chemistry grow."

McConkey said there's plenty to work on despite his success last year, including running better routes.

"When I go back and watch games, I want to just eat myself up over it because there are so many plays we left out there last year that we've been working on throughout this offseason," he said. "There's so much more to gain and we're going to continue to try and build on that and hopefully it takes off as the season goes."

During workouts last month at the team's base in El Segundo, McConkey did a quick curl route in the end zone. Herbert threw it low and Henley, heading into his third year, went down with the receiver. Harbaugh signaled touchdown, but Henley still disputes that.

Henley was asked about a sack during practice on July 23 and immediately pivoted to last month's disputed pass play.

"I watched the playback. I hope you watched the playback. The ball hit the ground. OK, well I've got the tape. You know how you guys are, offense, offense, offense."

Asked about the rivalry with Henley, McConkey said: "He hasn't come over there for one-on-ones yet, so still waiting on that one. It's all fun and games. Obviously, Daiyan's a heck of a player. but if we line up one on one, I like my chances."

The Chargers played in San Diego for 56 seasons before moving to Los Angeles in 2017 after failing to secure a deal for a new stadium. They pay \$1 a year to play at SoFi Stadium, built by Rams owner Stan Kroenke.

The Chargers were 11-6 last year before losing at Houston in the wild card round.

Peter Rice to oversee opening and closing ceremonies for 2028 LA Olympics and Paralympics

Associated Press

The former chairman of Walt Disney Television and head of 21st Century Fox has been hired to oversee the opening and closing ceremonies for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and Paralympics.

LA28 organizers said on July 23 that Peter Rice will serve as head of ceremonies and content and be responsible for the creative vision and physical production of the LA28 Games, which run July 14-30, and the Paralympics, which run Aug. 15-27.

"Peter is one of the rare individuals whose expertise seamlessly combines creativity, operational insight and physical production of the LA28 Ceremonies that will captivate audiences around the world," said LA28 president and chairperson Casey Wasserman, who will supervise Rice.

"He's been a leading figure in shaping the modern television and film landscape and is the perfect asset to reimagining the delivery of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies for the digital age, leaving a legacy well beyond the Games."

The opening ceremony be held July 14 at 8 p.m. ET, with events at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and SoFi Stadium in Inglewood. The closing ceremony will be July 30 at 9 p.m. ET at the Coliseum.

"I look forward to delivering Ceremonies that honor the legacy of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and celebrate the cutting-edge future of the 2028 Stadium," Rice said. "These venues have hosted some of the most legendary moments in sports history, and I'm thrilled to deliver a powerful artistic experience that adds a new chapter to LA's Olympic and Paralympic story."

Rice, a British-American, began his career at 20th Century Fox in 1989, rising through the ranks before being promoted to president of 21st Century Fox in 2017. Following Disney's acquisition of the company, Rice became chairman of Walt Disney Television and chairman of General Entertainment for The Walt Disney Co.



Chairman of Disney General Entertainment Content for The Walt Disney Company Peter Rice attends the premiere of Hulu's Original Series "Life & Beth" at the SVA Theatre, Wednesday, March 16, 2022, in New York. Photo by Andy Kropa/Invision/AP, File.



Los Angeles Chargers offensive tackle Rashawn Slater (70) walks on the field before an NFL football game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Dec. 15, 2024, in Inglewood, Calif. AP Photo/Kyusung Gong, File.

Chargers lock in Rashawn Slater with a multi-year contract extension

Associated Press

The Los Angeles Chargers on July 27 agreed to a multi-year contract extension with left tackle Rashawn Slater, keeping him as Justin Herbert's protector.

Slater has started all 52 games at left tackle since being chosen 13th overall in the first round of the 2021 NFL draft out of Northwestern.

Last season, he started 16 games including the postseason, as the Chargers' offense committed eight

turnovers — the fewest in franchise history and tied for the second-fewest offensive turnovers in a single season in NFL history.

As a rookie in 2021, Slater was a second-team All-Pro after leading a front that protected for the No. 4-ranked total offense in the NFL (390.2 yards per game) as Herbert threw for an AFC-best 32 touchdowns. Slater was also named the starting left tackle for the AFC in the Pro Bowl, becoming the first rookie tackle to do so since 2012.

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SPORTS

The grueling 135-mile journey of a 66-year-old runner through one of the hottest places on Earth

Associated Press

When the running gets hard in this desert dubbed “hell on Earth,” Danny Westergaard tells himself: “Slow and steady” or “smooth as butter.”

For 18 years, Westergaard, 66, has braved the scorching summer heat of California’s Death Valley in an ultramarathon billed as the world’s toughest.

The week of July 7, 99 runners from across the globe embarked on a grueling 135 mile (217.26 kilometer) competition from the lowest point below sea level of North America to the trailhead of the highest peak in the contiguous U.S. They had 48 hours to do it. Few have completed the competition as many times as Westergaard, a retired aerospace project manager, though finishing is not a given.

“It’s just become like a summer ritual and a family reunion,” he said. “I feel at home when I’m here. It’s my tribe.”

For the 37th year, the Badwater 135 Ultramarathon challenged athletes to withstand stretches of this dry, searing desert. The race takes place in July, when temperatures have soared into the 130s F (54.44s C). Even as a place of extremes, Death Valley is not immune to global warming. Seven of its hottest summers have occurred in the past 10 years, according to the National Park Service. And if planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions continue at their current pace, more places could experience its broiling temperatures.

Over two days, Westergaard would trek up and down mountain ranges, past sand dunes and salt flats, through quaint towns and vast deserts amid temperatures as high as 117 F (47.22 C). He tried to smile throughout, even when he felt miserable.

“It just lifts you up,” he said of smiling so others smile back.

First night: The race begins

At 8 p.m., the first wave of runners take off. Westergaard jogs up a ramp into the pale light of dusk. It’s 113 F (45 C), and it feels like a blow dryer to the face.

Leap frogging in a van behind him is his cheer squad and support crew – Jennifer Drain, his smiley cousin back for the 17th year, and daughters Meagan, who has attended before, and Madison, a first timer. The crew, who playfully call Westergaard “wiener dog,” are hauling everything he needs: food, ice, water, electrolytes.

This heat can kill. Soaring body temperatures can lead to organ failure and strain the heart, especially for people with heart disease, and cause heat stroke. To prevent that they keep him cool. They spray mist on him and pour ice into his hat and a bandana wrapped around his neck. His drinking water is ice cold.

A few hours in, Meagan asks her dad if he’s peed. “Long stream,” he responded of his amount of urine. Staying hydrated is critical. As he sweats, he’s losing liquids that can critically stress kidneys if not replenished. Dehydration can cause organs to fail from lack of blood, oxygen and nutrients, leading to seizures and death.

No runners have died doing the competition, but heat-related issues are common, said Megan Dell, the race’s medical director. Stomach issues can lead to vomiting and dehydration. Hyponatremia – which happens when your blood’s sodium is too low – has sent runners to the hospital.

Westergaard has learned to embrace the rollercoaster. One moment



Danny Westergaard, left, cools off with water with pacing help from daughter Madison Westergaard as the sun rises during the Badwater 135 Ultramarathon, Tuesday, July 8, 2025, in Death Valley National Park, Calif. AP Photo/John Locher.



Danny Westergaard cools off with water before starting up after a short break during the Badwater 135 Ultramarathon, Tuesday, July 8, 2025, in Death Valley National Park, Calif. AP Photo/John Locher.

he feels like Superman – the next he could be throwing up on the side of the road, questioning if he’ll make it. “You just suck it up, just like in life, and get through the lows, and it always gets better.”

The next day: Running through “the oven”

The runners dash toward mile 50.8 (81.75 kilometers), the critical cut off point they must get to by 10 a.m. or be eliminated. The sun is peaking over the mountains, casting a warm glow over dune fields. It’s 85 F (29.44 C).

“Living the dream, ey?” Westergaard said with a smile, his perky strut now a droopy shuffle.

He pours water on his face and arms and munches some watermelon. Madison paces behind him as they crack jokes. “Get er done! Junior wiener in training!” Meagan yelled.

Westergaard makes it to the cut off point before 9 a.m. It’s 90 F (32.2 C).

Mile 56 (90.12 kilometers): After moving for 14 hours straight, Westergaard rests and eats some avocado toast. “Great! Let’s motor!” he said after 10 minutes sitting on a chair.

Miles later, he begins his descent into “the oven” that is Panamint Valley, usually the hottest part of the race

during the hottest part of the day. It’s 96 F (35.56 C) and the heat sizzles from above and below. Westergaard runs on the white line on the road because it’s cooler. In hotter years, the asphalt got so hot the bottoms of his shoes felt sticky on the ground.

Westergaard trains year round to acclimate to the heat. As he gets older, he doesn’t tolerate heat as well and has slowed down. His two-hour sauna sessions are now one, and he runs a few times a week instead of daily.

“I’m just out there longer,” he said, “but still getting it done.”

Tony Wolf, kinesiology professor at the University of Georgia, said aging adults generally have reduced heart function compared to younger adults. When combined with the cardiovascular demand of exercise and heat stress, it can cause difficulties.

There isn’t much research about how the bodies of fit older adults, including competitive athletes, regulate internal temperature. “There aren’t a ton of people in their 60s and older who are doing those kinds of events,” said Wolf.

Studies focused on adults before and after a training program found that exercise improved heart function and thermoregulation. That could suggest that the heart and ther-

moregulation impairments linked to aging are largely mitigated by lifelong fitness, Wolf said.

Second night: Sleepy hallucinations

The runners are spread out now, their flashing lights twinkling in the distance. This night is the toughest for Westergaard as sleep deprivation sets in. He zigzags on the road, barely awake. The runners ahead of him look like they’re running toward him.

In past years, his hallucinations have included people luring him to rest on couches that were actually bushes. Another time, he struck up a conversation with a kid skateboarding by him with a dog. And once, he watched for hours as a guy swung off the edge of the crescent moon, waving down at him.

“It was just clear as day,” Westergaard said of the hallucination.

At 3:10 a.m. at mile 98 (157.72 kilometers), he sleeps for 15 minutes under the moonlight.

“No one really quite understands” why he does this, said Madison.

Final day: The push toward the finish

At 11:50 a.m. and around mile 123 (197.95 kilometers), Westergaard shuffles through the town of Lone Pine. Mount Whitney, the tallest peak in the continental U.S., soars some 14,500 feet (4,420 meters) into the blue sky.

A crowd claps and cheers as he runs by.

“Go Danny, go!” yelled a man.

It’s 92 F (33.33 C) as he approaches the final 4,750 foot (1,447.8 meters) mountain ascent to the finish line. Westergaard is walking at a snail’s pace and says he’s falling asleep. But his smile hasn’t waned.

“We’ve come a long way,” Westergaard said, Madison pacing behind and spraying him.

“Long way for a burger!” she responded. They giggle while thinking about the veggie burger they’ll buy upon finishing.

Then he does, crossing the finish line with his crew at exactly 45 hours and 29 minutes.

It was his most special Badwater 135 race by far, he says misty eyed, having Meagan and Madison at his side.



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