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ABOUT THE COVER



The cover is inspired by a 1979 poster promoting The Buzzcocks' Los Angeles show, the last stop on their first-ever U.S. tour.



ON TO A NEW ERA

What's up?

We're stoked that you picked up our print edition. This one is special because it's the last time *el Don* will look like what you are holding in your hand.

What started in 1924 as an insert in the Santa Ana High School newspaper has taken on many forms since — from text-only broadsheets to newsletters, and from podcasts to social media.

We're always evolving to meet the needs of our audiences and delivering the news in ways that work for them. Our latest innovation? Transforming this publication into something more magazine-like that is comfortable to hold. The new version of print will be anchored by the same trustworthy reporting that you've come to expect from us but will allow our staff a different format to flex their writing and design skills.

There are people out there who say print is dead, but people will always value the feel of something beautifully crafted. This has been especially true since the pandemic forced us online: many people have been trying to get away from screens and slow down because everything became so fast-paced. No, *el Don* isn't dying. You

can still find us online and on Instagram. We're simply anticipating changes in the media landscape, and we're ready to deliver an updated version of our print product.

This current issue features exceptional campus and district news coverage, sassy opinion pieces and a special section dedicated to food in Santa Ana. So kick back and read this banger issue that we stayed stupid late working on.

You'll know when el Don is in print again, because you won't be able to not pick it up.

— el Don staff

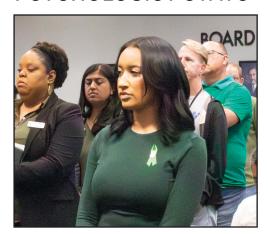


STAY INFORMED @eldonnews



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

PSYCHOLOGIST STAYS



At the March 24 board meeting, the board approved the recommendation to renew a tenure-track faculty psychologist's contract after weeks of back-and-forth conflict and the resignation of her colleague. Geena Guerrido urged the college to hire another psychologist to replace Rashida Mosley. "My hope is that voices and concerns will be taken more seriously earlier on so that current and future faculty might never be put in the situation that I was put in," Guerrido said. / Ash Mojica

LGBTQIA+

COORDINATOR HIRED



Beck Miller is the first Interim Student Services Coordinator for SAC PRIDE! and is eager to foster a safe environment for members of the LGBTQ+ community. "I'm very passionate, very passionate about the work with our queer community and our LGBTQ+ students and allies," said Miller. She wants students to know that she is an advocate and will support them in whatever they need. She currently works in VL-205 in the Outreach Office. For more information, visit sac.edu/pride. / Ash Mojica



DECEIT / Trustee Phillip Yarbrough says the rebate account was kept hidden from the board for 30 years.

A \$12 MILLION SECRET?

The district seeks legal advice after denying the findings of independent audit of the 30-year-old off the books rebate account

WORDS BY ASH MOJICA • PHOTO BY GEOVANNI ESPARZA

District officials have authorized the spending of up to \$50,000 for a legal team to evaluate misconduct accusations regarding a \$12 million rebate account kept hidden from the public for nearly three decades.

The board of trustees voted during their May 12 meeting that board president Daisy Tong will collaborate with the district's general counsel — without the involvement of other board members — to review recommendations for legal services.

Trustee Philip Yarbrough voted in favor of Tong moving forward with general counsel but emphasized urgency in selecting a legal team.

"It's the only way I'm going to get a legitimate legal opinion that I can then use to discipline those who are responsible," stated Yarbrough via text after the meeting. "The forensic audit was good enough for me, but not for the others."

Tong argued against any change to the process. "I'm taking these issues diligently, and I'm going to take them in the way they need to be dealt with currently...I will move with the speed I feel is accurate."

The Board Fiscal/Audit Review Committee, comprised of three board members tasked with examining the district's financial reports, met on May 6 to assess the district's response to the findings of the independent audit. While the district does not deny the existence of the fund, it

refutes that any wrongdoing occurred.

"The auditors frequently made assumptions about facts not in evidence," said Vice Chancellor of Business Services Iris Ingram, reading from a presentation at the committee meeting.

"No funds were missing or misappropriated," she said.

The audit had also concluded that the involvement of former district vice chancellors, John Didion and Peter Hardash, as Alliance of Schools for Cooperative Insurance Programs executive members was a conflict of interest.

A name displaying the Former Vice Chancellor of Business Operations/Fiscal Services, Peter Hardash, appeared in the Board Fiscal & Audit Committee Zoom meeting. Hardash changed his display name to the initials PH after an *el Don* reporter asked for comment.

The district also claimed that quarterly statements were given and that statements were accounted for.

After the presentation, Yarbrough asked Ingram if she had notified the annual auditors of the money in the fund.

"No, I would not have specifically called out that amount or that fund to the auditors, because they audit all of our funds," said Ingram. She also stated that in a budget of over \$300 million, \$7 million is not "considered material."

All About the Audit

REPORTING BY GEOVANNI ESPARZA AND ASH MOJICA

District administrators and board members have been pointing fingers, blaming one another and denying misappropriation of funds after a nearly 30-year-old off-the-books rebate account was discovered last year. The final audit that was released in March stated there were multiple code violations and misuse of funds. The district claims they broke no laws and did not violate educational codes. Here are five facts from the audit and the district officials' responses:

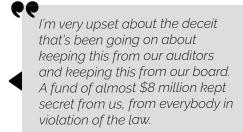


SCAN HERE TO READ
THE FULL AUDIT



The funds in the account were kept from the public and the board

The "Risk Management Deposit Fund" has collected rebates from unused medical insurance payments that were not reported in any of the district's fiscal audits, nor was it officially disclosed to the board of trustees. Which violates the California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 58300, which states, "each community college district shall prepare and keep on file for public inspection a statement of all receipts and expenditures of the district."



-Trustee Phillip Yarbrough, March 24 board meeting



The audit concluded District administrators who served as board members was a potential conflict of interest

Two former RSCCD vice chancellors, John Didion and Peter Hardash, served as board members of Alliance of Schools for Cooperative Insurance Programs while they were also full-time employees at our district. ASCIP is a non-profit public agency and joint powers authority that provides various types of insurance to public school districts, charter schools and community colleges.

This was appropriate, as members of the board must also be full-time employees of JPA member districts. There is no evidence presented that they benefited financially in any way from their participation on the executive committee, or that their participation in any way disadvantaged the district.

–Vice Chancellor of BusinessServices, Iris Ingram, May 6 Fiscal/Audit Committee Meeting

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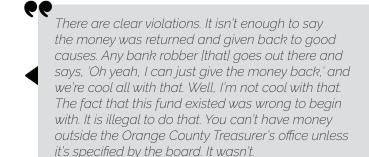
Former officials used the funds for over a dozen miscellaneous purchases

The audit provided a list of over a dozen purchases made with money from the fund going as far back as 2010. District officials justified using the rebate money from the risk management deposit fund because all the purchases were used to address risks. The total amount withdrawn from the account since 2010 was over \$12 million

Date	Source of Funds	Use of Funds by the District	Amount		
8/4/2010	Withdrawal from RMDF	Reimbursement for District purchase of Prius vehicle from District's Safety Parking fund	\$32,296		
3/15/2011	Withdrawal from RMDF	Replace plexiglass gates at SAC CDC with metal gates	\$16,183		
10/13/2011	Withdrawal from RMDF	Fencing at SAC CDC to prevent a safety hazard	\$5,250		
3/27/2012	Withdrawal from RMDF	Additional fencing at SAC CDC to prevent a safety hazard	\$11,000		
11/5/2014	Withdrawal from RMDF	Reimbursement of expenses for Mr. Didion to attend ATIXA training	\$2,500		
12/19/2014	Withdrawal from RMDF	Purchase for production of Title IX video	\$10,000		
1/9/2015	Withdrawal from RMDF	Football helmets with InSight Safety system for concussion prevention	\$37,000		
8/13/2015	Withdrawal from RMDF	Payment of 3-year membership with ATIXA	\$6,250		
2/10/2016	Withdrawal from RMDF	Payment for Title IX training	\$5,000		
7/3/2018	Withdrawal from RMDF	Payment of legal settlement to Marissa Hernandez	\$1,132,881		
2/4/2019	Withdrawal from RMDF	Purchases related to Emergency Blue Phone projects (purchases of blue phones and installation)	\$1,000,000		
10/15/2019	Withdrawal from RMDF	Payment of 3-year membership with ATIXA	\$13,000		
9/29/2020	Directly from ASCIP	Funding to balance the budget for FY2019-2020 (estimated budget deficit of \$2.2 million).	\$403,528		
10/16/2020	Withdrawal from RMDF	Funding to balance the budget for FY2019-2020 (estimated budget deficit of \$2.2 million)	\$1,400,000		
6/25/2024	Directly from ASCIP	Deposited into the District's Property and Liability Fund	\$878,105		
6/25/2024	Withdrawal from RMDF	Withdrawal of all funds held in RMDF as of June 24, 2024	\$7,167,249		
Total			\$12,120,242		

There was no evidence that's ever been found that there was a secret scheme and plan to keep the board away from that. Because if there was a scheme, then you would maybe have found that there was misuse of funds, that the funds were misappropriated, and the funds were used to do things that you should not be using them Iforl.

-Chancellor Marvin Martinez, el Don interview



-Trustee Phillip Yarbrough, March 24 board meeting



At that time, there was no parameters provided on how the monies were to be used, you can use it for almost anything.

—Chancellor Marvin Martinez, March 26 el Don interview



Current administrators used the fund to balance the budget

One of the final withdrawals from the rebate account was in 2020. During spring 2020, SAC saw a steep and immediate decline in enrollment and was on track to present an unbalanced budget. District officials used \$1.4 million from the account to balance SAC's budget.



The fund's existence may violate more than a few codes

The audit concluded that the account's existence is in violation of not only the district's budget allocation model but also in violation of the district's administrative regulations. The administrative regulations state that when district officials manage district investments, they should avoid any transactions that might impair public confidence.



This is where you need to ask the experts. The accountants were trying to do their best. But they're not attorneys either. Let's have some real attorneys (look at it).

—Chancellor Marvin Martinez, March 26 el Don interview



Time out for T-Building

While inspectors determine structural integrity of one of the oldest facilities on campus, students are forced to take classes off-site.

WORDS BY GEOVANNI ESPARZA AND MAXWELL REED ILLUSTRATION BY ALEJANDRO JAIMES

The district approved nearly \$4 million for building repairs and accommodations for affected classes after the Technical Arts Building was evacuated due to structural damage on March 10.

The Rancho Santiago
Community College District
Board of Trustees voted March
24 to designate an estimated
\$2.5 million for furniture and
equipment replacements as
well as alternate building leases
for relocated classes, and \$1.2
million for initial repairs and
testing of the T-Building.

The relocated classes include the culinary and manufacturing technology programs and two engineering classes.

With the change of location, some students have run into scheduling issues. "I work at the ISAC Cafel in the afternoon, and I have to get right back there after this class," said culinary major Justin Gonzalez.

Classes have continued despite the building's closure. According to Santa Ana College Public Information Officer Ethereal Reyes, "Culinary classes are being conducted in kitchens at the Johnson Student Center, Centennial Education Center and Valley High School. Some manufacturing technology classes have been moved to the Cesar Chavez Building, and an alternate site is being identified."

"It sucks over here," said culinary student Frank Cruz about the kitchen at the Centennial Education Center. "It's smaller, we have less access to equipment, and it takes more time to get here."

No classes were cancelled following T-Building's closure. "The goal is to utilize alternative instructional locations. If sections are to be canceled, students would not have to pay for the canceled sections," said Reyes.

One culinary student did have a positive outlook on it all.

"Honestly, to me, you need to be able to adapt yourself in any place, and I think that makes you stronger even if something is bad," said Jeysson Villa Rios.

Students and faculty were informed that the building would be immediately evacuated, and classes held there would be moved to another location.

The building was being prepped for roof repairs when major structural damage caused by rainwater seeping into the second floor was discovered.

"...There is damage to not only the concrete roof deck but also the existing structural beams below. We just completed a meeting with the structural engineer and architect team and have been advised to have an immediate emergency closure of the entire Building T," stated Assistant Vice Chancellor Carri Matsumoto via email.

Administrators were advised to close the Technical Arts Building immediately with no occupants or visitors "until further notice."

A further investigation of the T-Building will be conducted to determine what repairs need to be made.

"Our faculty are resourceful and care for our students, and we're going to overcome this situation and ensure our students receive the instruction they need to achieve their goals and objectives," said Hoffman.

Technical Timeline

DOORS OPEN

The Technical Arts Building is one of five buildings built in the late '60s during a five-year expansion project that had an estimated cost of \$7 million.

CLOSURE

On March 10, major structural damage caused by rainwater was found, and the facility was immediately evacuated.

► FUTURE

Following an inspection, it will be decided if T-Building will be reopened or demolished.



A BETTER FISH TACO

This Santa Ana food truck serves specialty seafood tacos, tortas and homemade tamales with love.

WORDS BY ARIANNA CHAVARRIA • PHOTO BY ALEXIS VEGA

A blue-and-black truck strung with colorful lights pumps out the sound of happy pop music as hungry customers file in line. Chef Amanda Rios greets you with a smile. If you're a regular, she'll probably call you by name or simply say, "Hi, how are you?" before serving you a \$6 fish taco that's worth every penny.

Playa Baby is Santa Ana's local food truck dishing out fresh seafood for customers. The truck serves 1,500 customers a month and aims to stay mobile so they can serve people of color delicious and nutritious food. It's open Wednesday through Sunday from 7 p.m. to midnight and is mainly located at 2300 S. Birch St.

The menu specializes in fish tacos but also offers shrimp tacos, tortas, tamales and a house-made lemonade.

"[They have the] best shrimp tacos. I love this truck," said customer Jennifer Molina, who comes to Playa Baby not only for its tacos but also for their great customer service. Playa Baby's founder, Red Feather, opened for business in 2019. Now, he and his partner, Rios, run the food truck together.

"My idea was to create something that was very delicious and unique," said Red Feather. The fish that they use is tilapia, which is perfectly coated in batter and then fried in garlic oil. The fish and shrimp tacos are topped with purple and green cabbage, and the customers may choose either chipotle or habanero sauce.

"People of color should still be able to go places and be treated like a VIP, and actually get delicious food that's not crazy processed," said Red Feather.

WHAT'S HOT

SONG



"Gnarly" KATSEYE

KATSEYE launched last year as a six-member international K-popinspired group. The girls took over media, hooking viewers on catchy tunes and the sisterhood they formed during training. "Gnarly", released on April 30, is the group's comeback single for their new EP Beautiful Chaos, launching June 27. The song is camp with its funny lyrics and electro-pop beats. Prepare to shake your ass. / Kaitlyn Han

FRANCHISE



Mission: Impossible Final Reckoning

Tom Cruise returns as the iconic spy Ethan Hunt for the eighth time (and hopefully the last). We have seen Hunt survive the impossible for seven times now—breaking into a CIA black vault, holding onto swaying helicopters without harnesses and riding a motorcycle off a cliff. It'll be exciting to see what else Hunt can pull off in this grand finale. Head over to theaters on May 23.

DRINKS

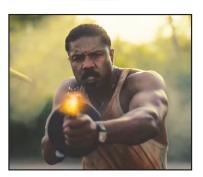


Cordova Creations 1227 W. Edinger Ave.

What started with hot cocoa bombs turned into a mobile coffee and pastry business rooted in culture and connection. Grab a cute Instagram-worthy coffee with a fun, Spanish-phrase sticker or a traditional house-made drink with horchata and mazapán flavors. Cordova Creations is more than a business; it's a reflection of family, heritage and community.

/ Arianna Chavarria

FILM



SinnersWarner Bros.

Ryan Coogler is an expert filmmaker and dealmaker. He negotiated a deal to earn the full rights to his surprise blockbuster *Sinners* starting in 2050. Studio big suits are spouting how this deal is "very dangerous," Coogler paves the way for Black filmmakers to recieve favorable treatment in Hollywood by revealing moviegoers' taste for original films with more diverse representation. / Nico Escobedo

MATCHA

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY KAITLYN HAN

This spring belongs to banana matcha. Orange County especially seems to be taken by the viral drink. More than 10 shops in the OC have jumped on the trend and created their own version. I tried five and rated them based on taste, presentation and cost. My takeaway? Not all banana matcha is created equal. From best to worst, here are the rankings:

#1 Brew Story

16889 Beach Blvd. Huntington Beach

As you take the first sip of this latte, you can taste real bananas! The matcha hits with a wave of grass and a slight umami flavor. It has a bitter taste, almost a roasted flavor that coats the tongue. Bite into a small triangular toffee bit, and the caramelized flavor enhances the banana and matcha flavors. The banana creme is thicker and pudding-like, but after stirring, it settles into more of a foam. The color of the foam is golden and has real bits of banana in it. The matcha is a vibrant, bright green. Price: \$6.75



#2 Da Vien Coffee

9731 Bolsa Ave. Garden Grove

The taste and texture of the banana pudding/cream is identical to JELLO banana pudding. It's a solid choice if you want a good quality matcha and don't mind it paired with a somewhat artificial banana flavor. The color of the matcha was a deep crocodile green, and the color of the pudding resembled fresh butter. Price: \$7



#3 Okayama Kobo & Cafe

155 W. Center St. Promenade Anaheim



The sweet grassy flavor of the matcha was revealed only after the powder had settled to the bottom of the latte, which then mixed with the artificial banana flavor of the cream. Strangely, it tasted more like an almond or vanilla matcha combination. It was mediocre at best. The latte had an olive-colored body and a sprinkling of Nilla wafers on top that offered a welcoming crunch. The cream top was a pastel lemon yellow with more of a thick pudding-like consistency. Price: \$5.75

#4 Trung Nguyen E-Coffee

427 N. Fuclid St. Santa Ana

Traditional matcha lovers would hate this drink, but it's perfect for banana Laffy Taffy lovers. The beverage didn't have any matcha flavor in it whatsoever. The latte was beautifully ombréd with pastel yellow banana milk at the bottom of the drink, sage green matcha in the middle and a pale blond cream foam on top. When you stir the drink, the matcha bleeds into the banana milk, turning the color of the beverage an almost aquamarine green. Price: \$6.75



#5 Ape Coffee

2817 E. Chapman Ave. Orange

The only thing incredible about it was how little it tasted of banana and how much it did of onion and refrigerator. To be more precise, it tasted like someone had left a banana peel in a glass of milk in the back of the refrigerator for three days and then dropped a banana chip on top. The only saving grace was some cinnamon sprinkled on top which acted as a scent barrier. The matcha had an aesthetic mossy green color, and the foam was pale, closer to white than yellow. Upon stirring, the foam disappeared and didn't have any banana flavor. Price: \$7

BARBECUE HOMECOMING

Santa Ana natives Brenda and Daniel Castillo bring Heritage Barbecue's awardwinning smoked meats to a beachside stand and a new diner in Logan Barrio.

WORDS BY ARIANNA CHAVARRIA • PHOTOS BY GEOVANNI ESPARZA

hairs were scattered across the sand, and pallets of beer sat stacked near the entrance of SeaSalt Honky Tonk on the Beach at Bolsa Chica State Beach. Around me a team was setting up a performance stage for the opening weekend of the new beachfront eatery. They worked quietly so that the sound of waves filled the space. I sat wondering what it would be like to meet Brenda Castillo, one half of the married couple behind Heritage Barbecue, the Michelin-awarded restaurant in San Juan Capistrano that helped define Southern California barbecue. It's not every day you get to speak to one of the region's most respected names in food.

Brenda approached me wearing brown cowboy boots and a big smile. "I hope you weren't waiting too long." Instantly, the nerves disappeared. Her voice was upbeat and full of excitement.

From serving at Stagecoach to vending at the U.S. Open, the Castillo's Heritage Barbecue is rapidly expanding and evolving. The Castillos, now considered barbecue royalty, are collaborating with SeaSalt's concession stand to provide eats this summer. Earlier this year, they opened the American diner-inspired Le Hut in a bright and airy quonset hut within Santa Ana's Logan Barrio neighborhood.

Brenda handles the bookings and manages the day-to-day of all the business while raising the couple's three children. Her husband Daniel may be the famed

pitmaster, but Brenda is the backbone of the barbecue empire.

Born and raised in Santa Ana, Brenda met Daniel when she was 15 and became a mother at 17. "We became parents young and had to grow quickly. That's why we learned how to hustle and make ends meet." This year, they celebrated their 22nd wedding anniversary.

The idea of barbecue started on a trip to Texas, where meats are dry rubbed with salt and pepper. "I don't like sauce," said Brenda. After the trip, she asked her husband if he could recreate the Texas taste at home. Heritage was born.

They began by serving smoked brisket, ribs and sausage to family and friends. Soon, they realized their expenses were growing, so they decided to start selling their food to the public.

The couple was eventually offered the opportunity to open their own restaurant in San Juan Capistrano in early 2020. On top of opening a restaurant during the pandemic, Brenda was also nine months pregnant. "It was such a whirlwind, but we needed to keep moving forward because it was our livelihood," she said.

The next year, they were awarded a coveted Bib Gourmand by the famed Michelin Guide for serving quality food at affordable prices.

"We crumble it up and throw it to the back of our mind and think what's next," said Brenda. "Because if you focus on it, it's a distraction." One thing at the front of her mind right now is Heritage's new spot in Santa Ana. The original concept for Le Hut was a brisket-taco wine bar, but the Castillos didn't want to be pigeonholed into barbecue. When their executive chef Ryan Garlitos pitched them the concept of American diner food, they were all in. "We give our chefs free rein... you want to do something cool? Let's do it all week."

Le Hut now dishes out comfort food classics like patty melts but with an elevated Castillo touch. Think: patty melts with caramelized onions and American cheese but with prime brisket patties smashed with milk bread from 6100 Bread and smothered in special sauce.

She credits the couple's success to their high level of care which goes into every detail of their process, even down to picking firewood. "We use clean wood because this is our product, and we're not going to serve anything dirty."

This level of dedication comes at a cost though. Often Brenda feels guilty about not being able to be at each business every week, or not being able to make every child's baseball practice. Other times it means giving away Post Malone tickets because your restaurant is named a James Beard Award finalist and you have to attend the awards ceremony.

But, problems like these only exist when you're building something worthwhile.

"We still have problems but they're good problems."



WHERE TO EAT HERITAGE BARBECUE IN OC

HERITAGE BBQ: The original location in San Juan Capistrano opened in 2020 and always has a concept in Logan Barrio. 730 N. line. 31721 Camino Capistrano

LE HUT DINETTE: In February, the **BOLSA CHICA BEACH:** Grab Castillos opened a diner-inspired Poinsettia St.

Heritage meats this summer at SeaSalt Honky Tonk on the Beach. 18751 Pacific Coast Hwy



BOSS / Brenda Castillo is the backbone of the barbecue empire, managing bookings and the day-to-day of the several businesses.



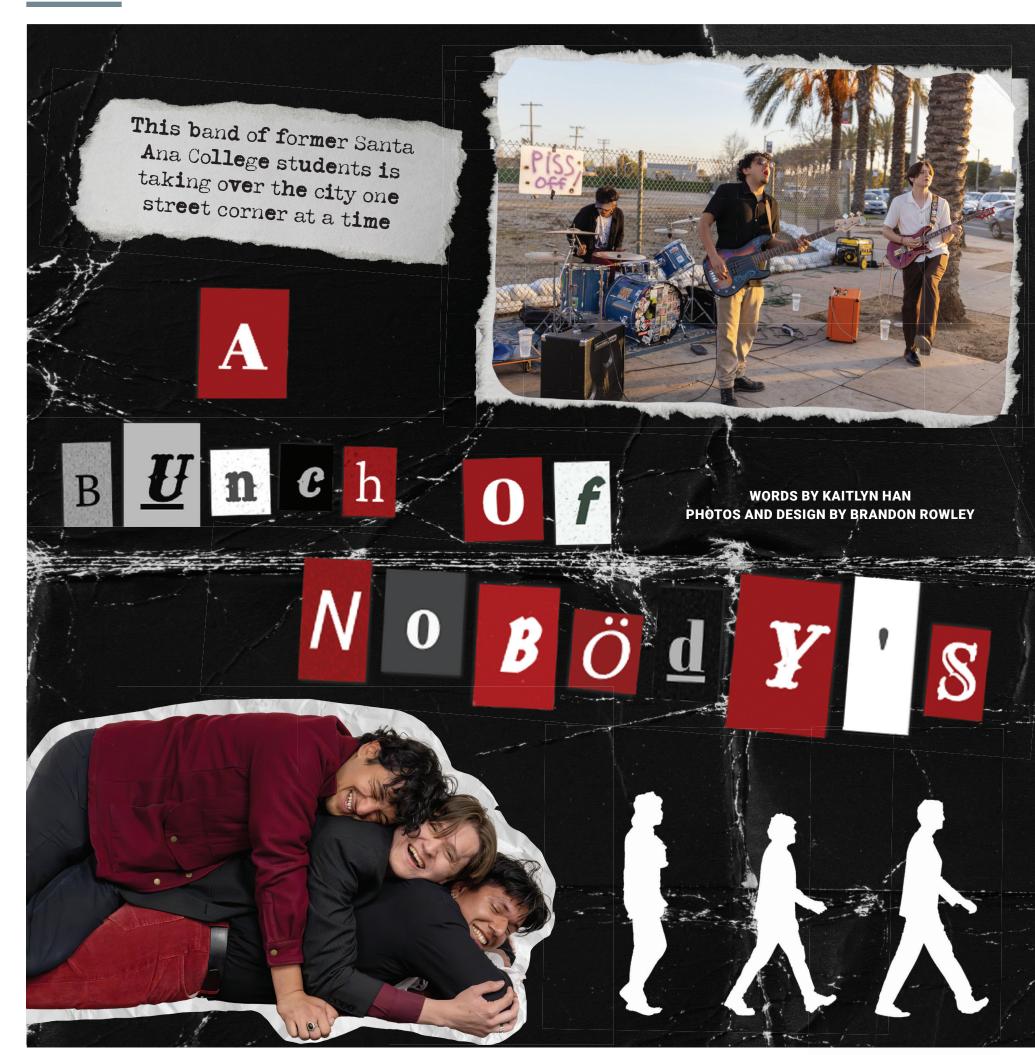


BRUNCH / A bright and airy quonset welcomes in customers and serves them comfort food classics with an elevated Castillo touch.





YUMMY / Le Hut Dinette serves American diner-inspired eats with a barbecue twist, including a patty melt and ground brisket chili cheese fries.





clink
clank
crASH
KABOOM!

Sitting in traffic at the corner of Bristol and 17th, you hear what sounds like a power drill in a washing machine. You check your engine light but your motor hasn't exploded, instead, it's three headbanging rockers outside thrashing their instruments.

In February the trio performed on the sidewalk of the congested intersection in front of a purple spray-painted "Piss Off" sign that hung on the chain-link fence behind them. It sounded as if they were playing dodgeball with their instruments or like a swarm of bees had engulfed you.

Born out of an edible trip gone wrong, The Nobödy's have performed throughout California but mostly play in public in Santa Ana, among other places in the OC, whenever they feel like it. They've played on First Street, in DTSA and have been kicked out of UCI's campus twice.

The sidewalk on Bristol Street is a favorite spot as the police have never given them trouble and the intersection is often busy.

"Instead of just doing shows, might as well just perform for the people," said bassist Angel Castañeda.

"Do you want to sit in traffic, or do you want to listen to music?"

Former SAC students Mateo Mejia, Aztlan De La Cruz and Angel Castañeda formed The Nöbody's three years ago while at a house party. The three had tinkered with their chosen instruments for a year and flirted with the idea of a band but it took Mejia's bad experience with marijuana to make them take the plunge.

As the group learned to create music, they experimented with different sounds and musical genres such as garage, alternative, disco and experimental. The layering of guitar, bass and drums in their songs like "Someone's Crazy" or "Bratz" doesn't follow typical rhythms but instead exudes chaotic and rushed energy through quick key changes and high-pitched guitar riffs.

"I guess we do give off a punk energy," said Castañeda.

The three members strive to be different and create something new and meaningful. They think of The Nobödy's more as an art form than a band as they are also developing original skits and short films to accompany their music. One day, they hope to incorporate these characters from their skits into their performances.

"Music is universal," said Castañeda. "I think anything you create is good. That's why I don't think we're stuck to a genre, because the more people you can have enjoying your music, the more people listen. And it's just fun experimenting and creating different things."

Their ultimate goal? Bring the artistic culture back to Santa Ana.

"When we were growing up, I remember that [downtown] was really artistic and stuff, and it is still very much so, but with the gentrification, it doesn't feel the same anymore," said De La Cruz.

The Nobödy's may not be able to stop development and rising costs, but they believe that their music, punk spirit and willingness to experiment can spark a shift in their city.

"We're planning to throw a couple shows at houses and stuff, like backyard shows, and bring that local scene back. We want to bring back the Santa Ana music scene together again," stated De La Cruz.

The band plans to drop their new album on May 26. Follow them on Instagram @thenobodys.o for updates.

SOFTBALL

SLUGGING SOPHOMORES



The Dons softball team finished the season with a 14-26 record, closing out with a three-game win streak against the Riverside Bobcats on April 24. Bright spots for the Dons offensively were infielder Aidee Mendoza and outfielder Kaitlin Murphy, who both batted over .400. Freshman pitcher Kalani Gonzales tallied six wins on the year.

/ Brandon Rowley

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

GETTING BACK TO FORM



The Dons beach volleyball team returned after not having enough players to compete last year and ended its season with a record of 3-15. Sophomore Taylor Vagana and Freshman Dianna Nguyen lost on the second day of the season-closing OEC Pairs Tournament on April 23 but still earned All-Orange Empire Conference Second Team honors.

/ Brandon Rowley



TWO BIG BOOMS / The Dons' signature home run celebration has the dugout erupt into a thunderous yell.

BASEBALL BRINGS THE BOOM

Record-setting offensive performances led the Dons back to the college baseball playoffs for the fourth consecutive year.

WORDS AND PHOTO BY BRANDON ROWLEY

After a succesfull regular season, the Dons fell short in their first-round playoff matchup against the San Diego Mesa Olympians. In a best-of-three series at home, they lost 4-2 on May 2 and 3-1 on May 3, to end their season with a record of 25-17.

Led by Tom Nilles in his 10th year as head coach, the Dons haven't had a losing season under his guidance.

"With the hand that we got dealt, they got nothing to hang their heads on about, they absolutely dominated as best as they could with all the injuries we had," said Coach Nilles. "Wish I could have done more for them. Ultimately, it falls on me to try to coach them up a little bit better."

The Dons were quite a young team with only four sophomores starting regularly, and had a lot of young talent sprout up and spread. Freshman Ken Tomitaka had an on-base percentage over .500 while freshmen Jack Mueller, Garret Allen and Nathaniel Williams

had OBP's over .400.

Sophomores Kian Sanchez, Connor Dietsch, Christian Altamirano and Mason Kelly also had impressive years for the Dons, all with a batting average over .300.

Pitchers Spencer Johnson and Andrew Parker both had great years on the mound. Johnson tallied six wins and three saves with a 3.07 ERA, while Parker closed with a 5-3 record with 48 strikeouts. Both earned All-Conference honors.

The Dons went on quite a winning streak, winning 13 straight, including a four-game stretch in which they scored 89 runs, including a record-breaking 39-run game.

Despite the quick exit from the playoffs, the Dons had a great year. Nine players earned All-Orange Empire Conference Honors, and the team finished third in the OEC.

"I'm proud of this team and everything we've done," said Dietsch. "Everything we've accomplished this year, and everything we've been through. So it's bittersweet for sure."

Basketball teams close on high note

Both teams in the program reached state playoffs for the first time since 2014.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BRANDON ROWLEY

Mens Basketball

Ending their season with a final record of 18-14, the mens basketball team won its first playoff game in over a decade.

"It's all about players, we got the right players in there," said head coach David Breig. "Our conference is the toughest in the state and all of our close losses from previous years flipped to wins and that made the biggest difference."

Jackson Brennen and Kelvonte Ellis earned First Team All-OEC nominations while Mac West earned a Second Team nod.

The Dons scoring was led by West, a top-five scorer in the conference. "I'm just happy that my teammates trust me to put the ball in the hole and put me in positions as an offensive leader." said West.

Womens Basketball

Closing the season out with a record of 20-9, the womens basketball team achieved its best record since 2002 and first playoff appearance since 2017—a big step in the right direction for the program.

"This is one special team," said head coach Flo Luppani. "But more importantly, they are just excellent human beings."

The Dons also had a great season on the individual level with four players awarded All-Conference or All-State Honors: Anaya Beard, Lorissa Robles, Mia Rivera and Kiki Graham.

"They've earned it, and we're proud of them," said Luppani. "We're proud to celebrate them. We're proud that everybody recognizes what we see in them every single day."

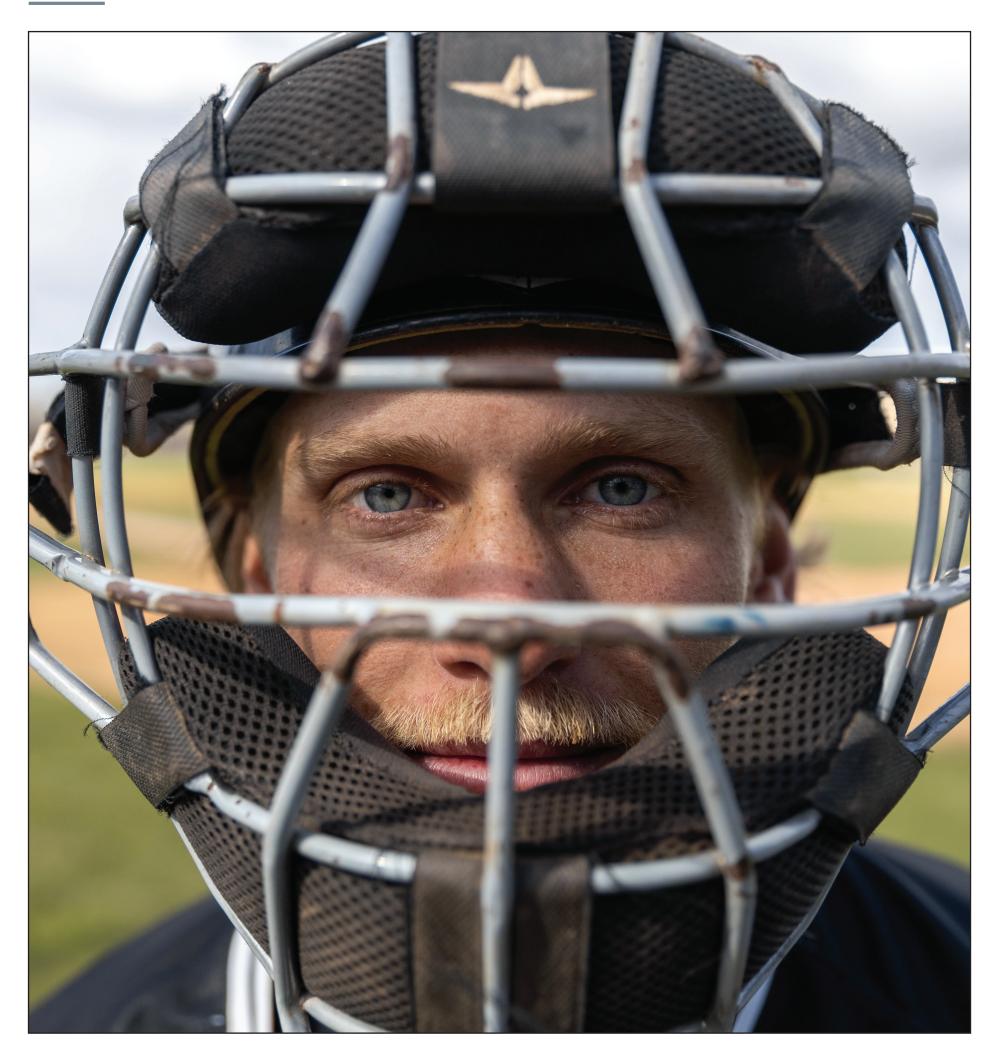


CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF / High-flying guard Mac West led the Dons charge offensively with over 14 points per game.

ROBLES ON A ROLL /

Sophomore guard Lorissa Robles was selected First Team All-OEC and Third Team All-State.







Dietsch at the Dish



Veteran backstop Connor Dietsch has been through the ups and the downs, but he continues to push through and persevere.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BRANDON ROWLEY

It's a late May evening in 2024 and the Dons are in a nail-biting playoff game against the Mustangs. The Dons forced extra innings when they scored two runs in the bottom of the ninth, which felt like an eternity ago, as the game is now in the bottom of the 13th inning.

Down 11-10 with the bases loaded and two outs, freshman catcher Conner Dietsch steps up to the plate with all the eyes on him.

Just last year, he was watching from the dugout as the Dons won the state championship while he was sidelined with a knee injury. He had seen success from afar, but it was now his time to shine.

"It was a very high-pressure situation," said Dietsch. "It's something you dreamed about since you were a little kid."

With all the tension on the freshman's shoulders, he steps up to the plate — and strikes out. The season was over in the blink of an eye, and it was time to go home.

"When you come that close and make it that far, it gives you that extra push," said Dietsch. "That's the main motivator for me."

In the long offseason, Dietsch got to work. He hit the weight room regularly, worked on improving every facet of his game, and most importantly, helped young pitchers develop through his position as catcher. He became one of the top hitters on his team and began acting as a bridge between the coaching staff and players.

"I just wanted to come back and be a better leader, being the guy who's a little bit older, especially this year when we've got a young team," said Dietsch. "Coming back and trying to help this team get back to where we were last year is something I work towards."

The veteran Don has a tall and lanky frame, unusual for the catcher position. Perhaps that's why he shares a warmup routine with similarly tall Logan O'Hoppe, the catcher of his favorite team, the Angels.

Dietsch had been playing baseball since before he could remember, starting in T-Ball and Little League with his brothers. He learned a lot from his older brother Nick, and being able to watch and learn from him helped him immensely.

"He was real quiet when he first got here," said Dons head coach Tom Nilles. "He's become a lot more vocal with our group, knowing he's the guy. I can't tell you what it means to have a guy who's been through it multiple times with you, which can help carry the load. You can't replace that."

Now Dietsch speaks fast-paced, precise and confident, like a seasoned MLB veteran.

"We've been through the ups and the downs together. He's someone you want on your side," said Kian Sanchez, a teammate of Deitsch's for the past three years.

But being a veteran for the team does have occasional downsides, including the nickname given to him by his younger teammates, "Gramps."

"I guess I gotta own it, these guys have fun. Also, it doesn't help that I have arthritis in my knees, but I know it's all out of love," said Dietsch.

With Gramps behind the plate, the Dons were on fire, going 25-12 this year, including a 13-game win streak. Eventually they earned a spot in the playoffs once again.

With another shot at the championship, the team looked towards Deitsch to guide them to victory. It was what Dietsch had been waiting for two years to realize.

"We've been there before," said Coach Nilles. "He's been here for the last two big runs, and we know what it's going to take. Guys with leadership qualities are invaluable this time of year."





Despite his five hits in the two-game playoff series against San Diego Mesa College, the Dons would be upset at home in the first round by the Olympians, cutting their season short.

The loss was unexpected, and it hurt. As the Olympians celebrated their gamewinning home run, Dietsch could only stand there in shock, a solitary figure against the backdrop of the opposing team leaping in unison, almost reminiscent of Stefon Diggs standing in front of a cloud of confetti after the 2021 AFC Championship game against the Chiefs.

"It's hard to get over, and it definitely took a while for me," said Dietsch. "But at the end of

for players to get discouraged and lose their love of the game. It takes a strong mind and a strong will to bounce back from failure and push forward.

Although it was his final playoff push with the Dons, Dietsch doesn't want to put down the bat and hopes to continue his career on the Division I or MLB level. He won't be deterred.

"I want to take baseball as far as possible and give the game all I have because it's done so much for me," said Dietsch. "I've learned a lot about being a better baseball player, and also being a better man and the relationships that I've made on the way are something that I'll cherish forever."

the day, this sport is about failure, and being able to accept that you gave it everything you had."

In a sport where the best players in the world only succeed 30% of the time, it's easy

BY THE NUMBERS

.350

Batting Average

.987

Fielding Percentage

77

Career Hits

55

Runs Batted In





NEGLECTED FACILITIES

Students shouldn't have to worry about whether the buildings that host their classes will close at any given moment.

Our college's administration often does not communicate problems on campus and work on providing solutions until their hand is forced. There is a major problem with facilities and amenities not being properly maintained, breaking and then the college not being prepared.

From fire alarms to elevators and building evacuations to closures, Santa Ana College administration could have prevented facility issues, but chose passiveness over urgency.

The sudden closure of the Technical Arts Building left students frustrated and confused. While those aware of the age of the building may not have been surprised to see its fate, many students were thrust into the chaos of moving classes and scrambling faculty.

If the T Building, which is over 50 years old, is no longer deemed a structurally sound building, then what about the other buildings on this campus that are older, like the Phillips Hall Theatre, Hammond Hall and the Nealley Library? Maybe we should just wait until they collapse.

A walk around the campus makes it clear that facilities continue to be neglected.

Amenities are lacking as well. Has anyone checked on our empty pool?

Even today, paper notices of broken fire/smoke dampers that hang around the Fine Arts building.

This isn't the first time that fire alarms have caused problems. Back in 2008, *el Don* covered a story on broken fire alarms that went unrepaired for more than two years in six buildings. Once the story hit the *LA Times* admin felt the pressure to react

Many of these same problems continue to persist. Problems that threaten the safety of students on this campus should not have to reach major news outlets for action to be taken.

The T Building was discovered to be inadequate because of roof repairs. Had it not been for those repairs, students and faculty would have continued to conduct classes in a hazardous space.

Administrators get paid way too much to not perform their due diligence and keep this campus efficiently running. It's the bare minimum for facilities to be properly maintained. At the very least, they can keep us informed.

OPINION Ash Mojica

RIDE GREEN, BE FREE

Not only is my best friend reliable and environmentally conscious, they also happen to be my ride-or-die. Me and the bus go way back. I began taking the bus as a young child, and by the time I was a teenager, I knew every bus route in the city.

But most people would sooner jump through hoops to find a ride than take the bus.

It's okay bestie, I've got your flowers.
Maybe you and your best friend have
friendship bracelets; my BBFF (best bus
friends forever) and I show our friendship in
another way. As a Santa Ana College student,
I can ride the bus for free.

Like most best friends, we share secrets. Between destinations, the bus shares the latest gossip like the rider next to me breaking up with her boyfriend.

I love having the time to read a book or scroll through my phone. I can enjoy a safe ride that takes me to the newest coffee shop two cities over.

The bus and I spend environmentally friendly time together. The OC buses run on "clean, renewable energy." Talk about a green thumb (or wheel).

Some people love to hate on my bestie, but like a true friend, I am here to defend the bus

Sure, you have long wait times. But you can plan accordingly by looking at the estimated bus schedule.

The bus's bullies say, "I can go wherever I want, whenever I want." But cars break down, accidents happen, insurances go up and gas prices only get higher.

Friends who save together, stay together. Maybe the bus isn't always available. Even the most loyal friend misses a text. But the next day, you are sure to wake up to a "good morning" text and the promise of an adventure.

Let's catch up next time, bestie.





RIPTHE CLUB!

Night life sucks. I'm staying home and skipping the hangover.

WORDS BY ARIANNA CHAVARRIA · ILLUSTRATION BY HALEY POWERS

orget roses. Empty beer bottles, cigarettes, and a bag of questionable white powder are left behind at the club's tombstone. Clubbing was born in the 1970s and boomed in cities like Los Angeles and Las Vegas. It died in 2020. The club raised GenXers and millennials to be the people they are today. It taught them about getting drunk and dancing to the newest hit songs like "Low" by Flo Rida and T-Pain. It may have been a dark time, but it filled the previous generations with so much light. Some people miss the club, but I don't. I'm happy that it died.

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of the club is the early 2000s. Girls dressed in their tightest mini skirts and dresses, their hair flatironed with the silly bump in the front, makeup on point, too eager to hit the dance floor.

Clubbers would wait in endless lines to shake off or grind away the worries of the work week. Once inside, the dark engulfed them and the speakers blasted their eardrums.

You had to scream to tell your friend that you were going to the restroom. Ladies, can we talk about the line for

the bathroom for a sec? It was like the lines at Disneyland. Sometimes a girl just needs to go. I have a bladder the size of a peanut. Then, you would have to wait in another line to get another drink that will inevitably lead you right back in line for the bathroom. Let's just say biology wasn't considered in the club scene.

And then there was the cost. Going out has gotten way too expensive. If you were to go to the club today, you would need an Uber or Lyft, which is never cheap. Then there's the cover charge just to get in. Once inside, drinks are usually \$10-\$15 each. You can easily spend half your paycheck at the bar.

After all that effort, you're probably craving some fast food, but since you're Ubering, you're going to spend even more by ordering delivery because after having one too many green tea shots, your common sense went out the door.

By the end of the night, you could easily drop over \$100. Then, you are left dealing with a hangover that makes you promise never to drink again. Instead, I'd rather stay home in pajamas, watching a rom-com with a face mask on. Why deal with the hassle of going out when staying in feels just as good, if not better?

USE YOUR BRAIN NOT AI

Students are afraid to make mistakes. But it's okay to be wrong sometimes. How else do you learn?

WORDS BY KAITLYN HAN • ILLUSTRATION BY TAMMY LA

roud cheaters using artificial intelligence to complete their coursework rather than doing it themselves. Artificial bot "students" running AI to compose their discussion posts. Students fumbling over words they can't pronounce in their PowerPoint presentations because they've never actually used those words before.

As a student, I have personally suffered from how AI has infected higher education. Instead of refusing to use this demon tool — you know, like in favor of actually learning in the classes you paid for — students largely have embraced it. What's worse, educators have drunk the Kool-Aid too.

Supposedly, this software tool can help students with personalized learning or professors with creating course content, but let's be real: students and educators are using AI software as a replacement for thinking. Either you are developing your cognitive skills or you are not. There's no substitution for human creative thinking. This, somehow, is not a popular opinion at colleges across the country, even our own.

Santa Ana College's School of Continuing Education and Community Services has been offering classes to students and the community on how to use Chat GPT and GenAl in writing or in the classroom because, you know, "it's the future." The California Department of Education is encouraging and implementing Al tools into K-12 education so that students can be prepared to use Al in their future careers and education. The CDE also emphasizes the importance of ethical and moral mindsets that students must have when using Al to

understand that some uses may be harmful.

How cute...but an "Al curriculum" is not going to stop millions of college students from using these apps freely and without guilt. The ethical solution here isn't as simple as returning a shopping cart at Trader Joe's.

I am tired of new Al apps that are slowly being embedded into every category of society from healthcare to art. Enough is enough. Stop pretending that students are using Al for anything other than cheating and that is a huge problem. Need some more proof? I've never met a student who has talked about using AI for research or pulling information from data sheets. Instead, I've had to endure wannabe

tech bros and others bragging about how they simply loaded their assignments into ChatGPT

and submitted them.

Instead of using AI bots, students should be going to the library for tutoring sessions like our millennial ancestors did. Where did the focus on the basics go?

And it's not just the students who are getting lazy. Peers of mine have almost received failing grades because professors use Turnitin (an AI detecting AI software) to determine plagiarism and it falsely flags and doesn't question the work itself or take into account the student's ability. Students and professors alike are blindly trusting in AI. I'm scared for the future generation's education, creative thinking and individual thought.

This may sound more like a rant than a solution. But hey, at least I wrote it myself.

GO TO HELL LABUS

Trinket culture has taken over, but these freakylooking elves bring shame to the game.

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION BY LIZETT GALLO

y Christmas edition Sonny Angel sits on my desk, staring at me with its signature innocent glare. When I'm at home, I look over at my sister's vanity table where she has an elephant Sonny Angel hipper, a chicken Sonny Angel that I gifted her and a knock-off "angel" that my mom got for her on her last trip to Mexico.

TikTok popularized Sonny Angels, then it was Smiskis and Monchhichi. There's a good chance you've seen these trinkets all over your feed.

Trinket culture has taken over TikTok and it seems like everyone is dying to get in on the trend. Labubus were popularized by Lisa from Blackpink, a K-pop girl group, who posted her giant Labubu plush toy on her Instagram Story. Now Labubus have taken the spotlight and are hanging off of every trinket collector's purse.

I've seen many collectibles in the trinket world come and go, but Labubus have me wondering if we've descended into madness. Labubus are freaky-looking elves that have a mischievous grin and serrated teeth. They come in many different variations, tempting buyers to collect as many as they can.

These trinkets are noticeably different from all the other ones that have cycled out of the public eye. These collectibles bring shame to trinkets. They don't bring me peace and tranquility. They are disturbing to look at. I'm being gaslit to believe that these gremlins are cute enough to put on my purse.

Trinkets are supposed to be

visually appealing. Sonny Angels were created to bring relief to the women of Japan in 2004 when the country was going through a recession. Labubus don't achieve that goal. They look at me like they'll come alive and attack me.

No shade to the girls who love Labubus, but I just don't get it. Buying clothes and accessories for your mini monsters does not make them cute.

Celebrities are going to continue posting pictures of their trinkets, and people are going to buy them to keep up with the trend. At what point does it go too far? People aren't buying trinkets for their own personal enjoyment. They're buying because they want to keep up with what's popular.

What's going to happen when Labubus aren't trendy anymore? People are going to be left with these creepy little creatures, not knowing what to do with them. Trinket culture is becoming more about trends and less about the passion for simplicity.

In this economy, I am not spending more than \$30 on a stuffed animal that brings me anxiety. Beanie Babies were created to be an affordable and adorable animal in the 90s. The ridiculous price you pay for these Labubus cannot be justified by its popularity.

Don't waste your money on something that's going to die out once a new trinket hits the market. Be responsible with your money and ask yourself if you really find this Labubu worth your cash. It's most likely not.



Take a dive into el Don history

Innovations Over The Years

FROM THE ARCHIVES

el Don has been serving its readers for the past 101 years. You can now find editions of the award-winning publication spanning from 1924 to 1999 in our new online database in the Internet Archive. Take a look at some of the different designs and iterations el Don has taken on over the years.

SAC's first newspaper, Junior College News, was released on Dec. 17, 1924. The publication's coverage centered primarily on campus events.





el Don in 1935 became the first junior college newspaper to publish news photos from around the world. It became many readers' first look at worldwide news events.



As the Vietnam War was underway, students at Santa Ana College held a protest to fight against it. *el Don* was there to cover the scene.



West 17th was SAC's student magazine from the 1990s to 2005. Previous versions were *The Graf* in the '80s and *El Vivaz* in the '70s.



el Don won an Innovation Pacemaker award in 2022 for its zines, becoming the first community college to ever receive the award. In the 2010s *el Don* moved away from newspaper broadsheets to a news magazine.





Scan here to access our recently digitized newspapers from 1924-1999.



Starting in 2011 *el Don* had its own website at eldonnews.org along with the Instagram account @eldonnews.

COMPILED AND DESIGNED BY MAXWELL REED