

MAY 2026

WEST

17TH

RENAISSANCE ISSUE • VOLUME UNO



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EDITOR'S NOTE

WE'RE BAAAAACK.

One evening during winter break, I visited the *el Don* newsroom. When I walked in, I saw our business manager, Joanna, and our instructional aide, Alex, at our big table, with a century's worth of newspapers and magazines in archival boxes with sticky notes on them. Joanna looked up and asked me, "What do you want?" but followed it with a chuckle. I said I was there to use the computer. She said it was fine as long as I didn't touch anything. I, obviously, did not listen. I wrapped up, went over, and started to flip through the issues that were laid out on the table. When I made my way over to the magazines, I began looking for the 1999 issue of *West 17th* magazine, the year I was born. I don't remember if I found it, but I do remember finding other issues

from the late '90s and early 2000s. I was hooked, mesmerized by the page designs, the images and the writing. Before I knew it, like my grandpa with his cigarettes, I went through four boxes.

The last edition of *West 17th* magazine was published in 2005, the year our creative director was born. However, students were still reporting and designing layouts for a few years after. The class which produced the magazine was canceled in the late 2000s due to recession-era budget cuts. Last semester, *el Don* reporters made an "in-between issue," a product that was a mix of our old and new print products. This is the *West*

17th rebirth issue. The pieces in this magazine include some of the finest reporting produced throughout the semester, all which carry the spirit of renaissance. Jack Mueller was given a second chance after losing a baseball scholarship after a hand injury (page 26). Our reporting also covers the Related Bristol project (page 16), which will give a section of Bristol Street a facelift for better or worse. On page 30, one staff reporter's snarky opinions about rock music explain that the genre

has changed and is the better for it. Elsewhere, we talked with the district publications supervisor Michelle Ramos about balancing life as a professional, artist and a mother.

Change is inevitable, and we've noticed the changes. Santa Ana is evolving; people's interests are shifting, attention spans are diminishing, the price of paper is

climbing, and readership rates are plummeting. In response to this, we innovated to meet our audience's needs. So sit back and read the longer pieces in this issue and take in the creative designs and images. Hopefully, one day, the kid who is being born today, who will eventually become editor-in-chief of *el Don*, will find this issue in a box that's being put away into storage, and it will inspire them to do something different. **W**



Geovanni Esparza
Editor in Chief

Q & A

Michelle Ramos

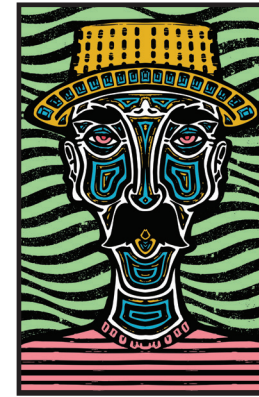
Words by Maxwell Reed
Photos by Geovanni Esparza

Since joining the RSCCD Publications Center team in 2018, Michelle Ramos has had an undeniable impact on Santa Ana College's print shop. As the district publications supervisor, she also is a working artist and hosted her first ever solo art show before the start of the spring semester. We caught up with Ramos to get a peek inside her world. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.



What does a typical workday look like for you? Is there anything you've been focusing on more lately?

I start my day early, usually before 6 a.m. My coworker and I typically handle between 50 to 100 projects each day, which can range from posters and banners to books, packets, custom signage, flyers, and more. With just the two of us, we're constantly busy. Despite being understaffed, we've focused on meeting all required deadlines and making sure everyone is aware of the full scope of services we provide. Even with such a demanding schedule, I make a point to take a moment during lunch to sketch or read. This helps me to recharge and stay motivated.



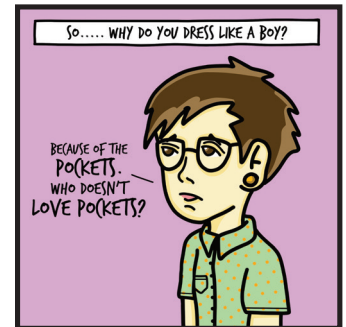
How difficult is it to balance your work at the publications center and your life outside of work?

Life can be overwhelming, especially with the demands of work, family, and caring for loved ones. But I've learned that taking brief moments for myself is crucial for my well-being. Whether it's creating art, journaling, or simply taking a breath, those small breaks help me stay centered and positive. By prioritizing my own growth, I've discovered that I can better navigate life's challenges.



Do you have a specific vision for your art?

My art explores a wide range of themes. It celebrates the human face, brings nostalgic memories from my childhood to life, offers commentary on the ignorant interactions I sometimes encounter as part of the LGBTQ community, and emphasizes the beauty of simplicity through lines and shapes. Although each piece is unique in its subject matter, they all share a consistent tone of humor. This approach reflects my personality deeply. I tend to navigate life with a sarcastic outlook, and I believe that attitude is strongly embodied in my artwork.



What did hosting your first art exhibit before the semester started mean to you?

Having the opportunity to present a solo show was truly a meaningful milestone for me. My lifelong dream has always been to be an exhibiting artist, but life and responsibilities can sometimes lead us away from our goals. While I have participated in a few group shows over the years and sold art periodically, this solo exhibition was a realization of a long-held dream. It also provided a valuable opportunity to demonstrate to my children that it's possible to pursue your passions and achieve your dreams at any stage in life. I hope to have another chance in the future. The conversations I had with the people that attended were truly rewarding.



ANALOG

Words by Dylan Burch
Photos by Geovanni Esparza

Everyone is online, yet a growing majority are looking for something more tangible. On social media this year, the phrase “going analog” or “analog” has been an ongoing trend. The popularity of social analog reels, combined with market sales of physical media, paints a clear message.

Millennials and Gen Z are burned out on social media, subscriptions and algorithms. Platforms disappear, servers get turned off, but a physical item stays with you. Here are the physical media items you should use in 2026.



Journal Today, roughly half of adults write in journals as a means of self-reflection, with one third citing use on a regular basis.

Instant camera Analog photographs strike a nerve that digital photography does not with today's youth. Since 2013, Millennials and Gen Z have been the driving force behind Polaroid's resurgence in popularity.



Wristwatch While a smartphone can tell time, it also has text messages, DMs, email notifications, and other distractions that lead you down the path to doomscrolling.

Book The difference between reading online and reading a physical book is night and day. When the book is in your hands, it demands your attention.

Vinyl More popular now than ever amongst Millennials and Gen Z, vinyl records have enjoyed a steady upward progression of market sales each year for close to two decades—outselling all other audio formats.



KNOTT'S vs. DISNEY

Words by Clay Arritt

Mickey Mouse or Charlie Brown? Snoopy or Goofy? Having money or being broke? If you live in Orange County, there are only two theme parks that really compete for your affection and wallet: Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm.

Sure, you can talk about the churros and the nostalgic smell of Pirates of the Caribbean, but there are two things Knott's does better than Disneyland ever could: great deals and actual thrills.

Knott's is constantly offering affordable options for a season pass; you can get one for \$120 for the remainder of 2026, which also features a monthly payment plan. At Disneyland, that price would barely cover a turkey leg and a pair of Mickey ears.

As far as Disneyland's cheapest pass option? The SoCal Pass will run you \$599. The pass requires a reservation, is only available to Southern California residents, is blocked out on the weekends and offers a slightly insulting 10% dining discount. The far better dining deal is at Knott's, and it's one people may not know about. For an extra \$25/month, you can enjoy two free meals per visit, which includes

ZERO blackout dates.

If you're an adrenaline seeker, Knott's dunks on Disneyland any day of the week. What at Disneyland compares to the electric rush you get from real rollercoasters like Xcelerator, HangTime, Silver Bullet, Ghost Rider or Supreme Scream?

Disneyland rides can be charming, but let's be honest, most of them are floating benches with some storytelling

sprinkled in, which is great if you want to relax or stare at some animatronic Pirates. At Knott's, the rides hurl you into the sky and have you valuing your life in new ways when you come back down.

For Orange County locals and college students looking for an exciting night out without emptying their bank account, the choice is not so complicated after all.

Category	Knott's Berry Farm	Disneyland
Price Tag	\$\$	\$\$\$\$\$
Water Rides	2	9
Coasters	7	4
Sweets	Churros	Chopsticks
Grub	Chicken	Turkey Leg
Immersive	Knott's Bear-y Tales: Return to the Fair	Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance
Halloween	Knott's Scary Farm	Halloween Time at Disneyland

BLACK LEGACIES

Words by Samantha Chavez

Photos by Kathy Rafferty & Christopher Michael

Pastor Ivan Pitts spoke about the history and legacy of the Black church and the role it has played in various struggles for equality.

While February is recognized as Black History Month, the culture and the contributions of Black Americans are not just limited to 28 days. Black history is American history and is important to be shared, studied and celebrated all year long. The Black History Month events hosted on campus and stories that were shared are timeless and ongoing.

Santa Ana, often identified as a predominantly Latino city, historically had a substantial African American community during the early 20th century, with a notable 300% increase in population between 1940 and 1950. This history, particularly in relation to the Bristol Street area, emphasizes the need to honor and remember the legacy of Black Americans at SAC.

At Phillips Hall, during the Legacy of the Black Church event, Pastor Ivan Pitts spoke about the history and legacy of the Black church and the instrumental role it has played in various struggles for equality.

"Forgotten Images," an exhibit curated by David and Sharon McLucas, displays a physical connection to the past that textbooks cannot replicate, like Sharon describing

a plantation bell as a "clock" for her ancestors. Once students feel the physical weight of a slave yoke, history stops being something you read about; it becomes real, you can feel it in the room. The McLucas couple has brought their exhibit to SAC three times, each time bringing rotating artifacts.

Similarly, the "Mic Check Brilliance Edition" open mic event showcased black history as more than just images and artifacts, but alive today. Full of joy, protest and creativity. As Professor J. Michael O'Neal put it, "Black music is always in protest." Events like this are reminders that Black history isn't just about past struggles but also today's voices.

Professor Donato Martinez saw a connection among Chicano and Black experiences and stated: "Celebrate who you are, celebrate where you come from, and use that as a way to pursue your goals and guide you on a path of excellence."

Featuring these stories in many diverse formats serves as a reminder of the importance of understanding and celebrating Black History to ensure that nothing and no one remains forgotten. At SAC, at least, this legacy will carry on. **W**



David McLucas gives a tour of the exhibit. Objects like the plantation bell, the shackles, and the Aunt Jemima shakers aren't just old objects, but proof of the inhumane treatment that Black Americans went through



Poet Peacock Secrets gives passionate reading of excerpts from the book, *Poetic Justice*.



A singer from the Second Baptist Church of Santa Ana choir.

RALLY FOR DEMOCRACY

Words by
Artemis Shmuel
Photos by
Christopher Michael

More than 400 people gathered on the sidewalks and street corners near South Bristol Street and MacArthur Boulevard in Santa Ana for a massive No Kings rally on March 28.

The crowd drew a wide range of individuals, from representatives of different union groups and independent journalists to ordinary people donning an interesting

assortment of costumes. One was wearing a full-on stormtrooper outfit, while two others had a blow-up alien

costume and a frog costume respectively. The diverse group of protestors included men and women from various ethnic backgrounds, as well as many elderly and children.

"We're here to defend our country, abolish ICE and get rid of Trump."

The causes that led people to the protests were diverse. Unions were advocating for healthcare disparities caused by the Trump administration. The general crowd had a more diverse range of issues, including ICE overreach, dictatorial behavior by the current


administration, and the Epstein files.

The Defenders of Democracy organized the event, spearheaded by their spokesperson, Gayle Luiso.

"We're here to educate the public," Luiso stated. "We're here to defend our country, abolish ICE and get rid of Trump."

The crowd was lively, including people with megaphones who were shouting chants in protest against actions committed by ICE.

Brianna Lund, a protester of Native American descent and student at Chapman University, wielded a sign that displayed solidarity with Native Americans.

"I'm standing for those who can't protest themselves." 





Story by Talan Garcia • Photos by Christopher Michael and Gio Castro

Driving down Bristol Street from Santa Ana College, you first notice the 7-Elevens, crowded bus stops and run-down strip malls that sit on nearly every corner. Flower vendors are spread along the roads while loads of students, bike riders and old heads pass by. Palm trees distract from the never-ending

construction, barring bike lanes, playgrounds and open fields from use. Instead, they sit open and empty. On every other block lay long plots made up of concrete blocks, piles of dirt and metal pipes. The streets are shrouded with orange cones and caution tape. By sunset, cranes and bulldozers wait around with no

operator in sight.

As you make your way across Warner Avenue, the scene slowly changes. Freshly trimmed grass, more modern buildings, and a sudden heap of trees begin to show themselves. Skyscrapers start to line up along the horizon. Where did all the people go? It seems as though passing

through the Santa Ana-Costa Mesa border is a crossing between two different worlds.

Only a few hundred feet on the Santa Ana side sits the Metro Town Square mall, a once-hip spot where teased hair teens in the '80s would congregate to shop, flirt, and pass the time. The place has dried up since its

opening in 1973 and has since become a sea of empty parking spaces and drive-thrus. If it weren't for a few cars parked, it'd feel like you were passing through a ghost town, full of giant vacant buildings and large crossways leading to nowhere. A few establishments still hang on: Boiling Crab, Ross

and TJ Maxx.

They won't last long.

In October 2024, Santa Ana City Council unanimously voted to demolish the strip mall and allow a \$4 billion residential and commercial project named Related Bristol to take its place. The project is Santa Ana's most expensive development to date.



The mall now sits idly as the luxury developer,

Related California, prepares to transform the 41 acres into a “mixed-use urban village,” a plan that includes 13.1 acres of greenery, 350,000 feet of commercial space, residential apartments, senior care housing and a swanky hotel.

The build is controversial in a time in which residents complain of gentrification swallowing up the city, while a parking crisis, homelessness and lack of affordable housing grow more rampant and push long-time residents out. Because of this, the Related Bristol project has come to be seen by many as the first in a series of blows that will fundamentally upend Santa Ana, transforming it from a city of immigrants and working-class families into a playground for the wealthy.

I decided to meet with my homegirl at Jugos Acapulco on First Street, one of my go-to breakfast spots, to discuss my reporting. Posters advertising ensaladas de frutas, platillos, tamales, postres y jugos naturales in different colors and texts were plastered around the order window like an experimental collage. Faded signage of various fruits adorned the bright yellow walls around us.

To my left was an abuelita and her granddaughter sipping caldo de res; in line, a middle-aged couple held each other by the hips as a young lady wearing tight jeans and a tiny top loudly ordered a torta de asada. Singles were scattered about the room scrolling on their phones, donning Dodger hats and black leather purses, patiently waiting for their numbers to be called on the loudspeaker.

As we finished our food, my friend's neighbor, known locally as Doña Concha, passed by wheeling her carrito packed full of empty

bags. She had silver hair and a sweet, freckled face. I greeted her and began chatting as my friend helped translate.

Concepcion Lopez, or la Doña, has lived in the area since moving here from Mexico about 35 years ago. Since then, she's noticed a major shift.

“They don't want Hispanics here anymore, they only want Americans. And the Americans don't even eat, all they do is drink. Well, that doesn't affect me. I'm not the type of person who's out dancing in the middle of the night,” said Doña Concha.

“However, what has affected me is the raising of rent. Oh my god, the rent is so expensive everywhere! You go to the market with \$100 and come back with practically nothing, just tomatoes and chiles.”

Gentrification has sunk its teeth into Fourth Street as well, where the OC Streetcar project has blocked the entrances of several historic businesses. An influx of high-

end apartments and tourism-focused spots are popping up on the popular downtown street where safe spaces like the Northgate Market and Velvet Lounge once stood. Vaquero shops are being replaced by upscale restaurants brought in by outsiders.

Basic costs are rising quickly. All over the city, these changes are not going unnoticed.

“It seems like Costa Mesa is bleeding over this way,” said Eric Brenton, a 20-something blond nurse who rents nearby. “These kinds of projects have been the trend. This really changes the landscape. It's gonna look much different, be much busier. I see what they're trying to do, and with everything happening both economically and politically, it's a bit out of touch.”

Brenton added in a near whisper: “They're trying to build up these areas, and I get the sentiment, but it's disconnected from the actual public's needs. Everybody is pressed for cash right now.”

Some residents have expressed that the area could use a makeover, but others would argue back that it's new developments and outside investors that have gobbled up real

What has affected me is the raising of rent. Oh my god, the rent is so expensive everywhere! You go to the market with 100 dollars and come back with practically nothing, just tomatoes and chiles.

estate and jacked up the prices that caused business owners to pack up in the first place.

“I think this is something to look forward to...I mean, this place could use a facelift. The old look isn't that good,” shared David Scheller, a local shopper.

The Bristol project is expected to take up to 20 years, moving in five major phases. The first phase, named Project Groundbreaking, should demolish the site's southern half and begin construction the same year. The row of shops that fall within these borders have their leases ending on Jan. 1, 2026. As of March 2026, most businesses report still having no idea of when they'll be ordered to close shop.

Some of the mall's long-standing businesses, like Han's Homemade Ice Cream, were expected to relocate by said deadline. Instead, these businesses sit waiting until the first phase begins.

Han's has been promised a future storefront by Related California, but will have to relocate nearby until the project is completed. Eric Wagner, the store's manager for the last 20 years, was not enthusiastic about the developers' plans for the ice cream shop.

“With the way the economy is going, this is going to be a disadvantage to us. What are they gonna charge our customers to park?” Wagner asked, his green eyes moving around. “If I have to pay \$20 to go somewhere, I just won't go.”

Wagner wrinkled his brow as he told one of the young workers to get to work on the next batch. I watched as workers chopped it up with regulars, cooks chatted in the kitchen, and a father and son quietly worked on their cones as they stared out a huge window.

“It's so corporations can make money. It doesn't make the place better. It makes the people who actually live in this community and actually pay taxes and support this community for generations get kicked out,” he continued, getting louder by the minute.

“This is my city, I've been here. These people who bought this haven't been here.”

They don't live here, and they don't care about us." Wagner was almost shouting now. The dad and son sitting by the window watched as he wrote his contact information on a food ticket and sent me off.

Wagner may not be a corporate investor, but his hunch is spot on. The benefits of this development are purely fiscal. The project is expected to make \$500 million in net revenue to the city in its first 30 years, which would be spent on fixing prioritized issues.

Benjamin Vasquez, Santa Ana City Council Member, was one of the six unanimous votes in the city council that passed the divisive project. I mentioned to him over the phone the complaints I've heard of redevelopment being prioritized by the city over homelessness, a parking crisis and lack of affordable housing.

"This is not coming from public funds," Vasquez explained. "They are giving us money. Hopefully, with the taxes that are generated, that money can go towards all of those other concerns. But we didn't get as much as we could out of it."

On top of the tax revenue, the developer paid an additional \$22 million as a "community benefit payment."

"There was not much negotiating for the dais. I would've wanted more money for affordable housing, that's where I would've pushed for more, but then it could've been a 3-3 and then a no to do it," Vasquez explained. "Then we would've lost the project that would've serviced us, to build not the type of housing that we need, but the type of housing that'll bring us tax revenue. And we need that."

Related California paid \$18 million in

"in-lieu" fees as an agreement to fund affordable housing somewhere else within the city, instead of giving a percentage of their own apartments to the cause.

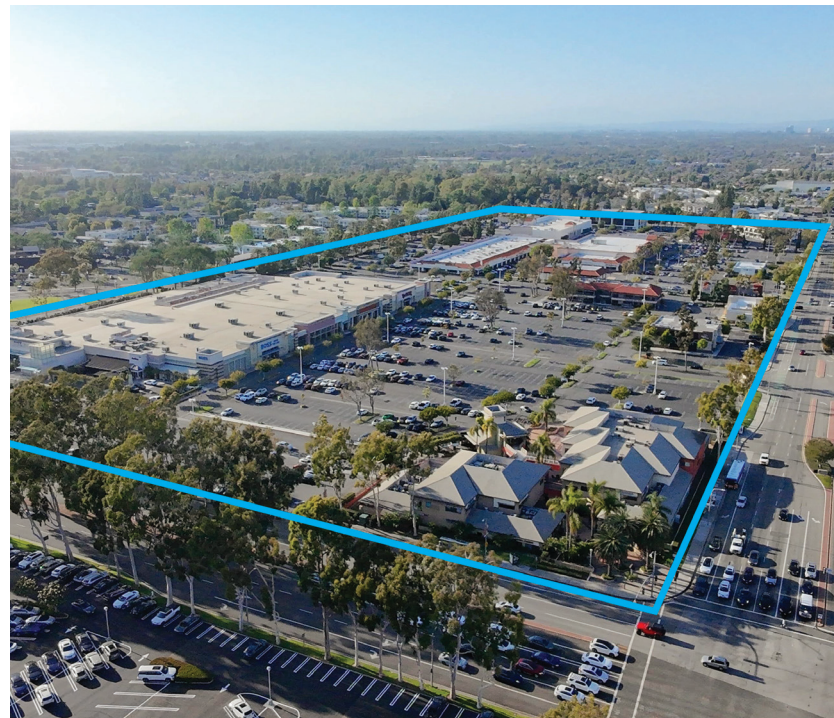
Roman Reyna, a life-long local and former councilmember for Wards 4 and 5 expressed his distaste for the city's option for developers to opt-out. By allowing developers to pay fees instead of including affordable units on-site, the city risks creating luxury enclaves with little benefit for existing residents.

Reyna explained over the phone: "I have more worries than hope, but it's challenging. Because the intent is to help the people that live there, but if you renovate a certain area you may have to remove people so you can make that greater impact. It is my hope that it helps the individuals and the areas that they're living in instead of displacing them."

From 2000 to 2019, Santa Ana's median rent jumped nearly 92% while median household income grew only 57%. With rent skyrocketing and wages lagging slowly behind, more residents are spending most of their paychecks just to keep their homes, making it harder to stay here.

I met up with Sopandi Pruong, a barista and popular local artist. His family moved to the Bishop area in town around the

The Related Bristol project replaces the aging Metro Town Square on South Bristol Street.



1980s, fleeing from Cambodia as part of a federal program. Since then, he's become a fixture of the block and has been spotted working at practically half the shops on Main and Fourth Street over the years.

We grabbed strawberry beers at Wursthau—the German sausage house offering tasteful brews—then strolled around the area, chatting, being interrupted whenever someone recognized Pruong.

"I've noticed that there's way more diverse people coming around, like different races. I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing, but we want

to make sure the culture and the community still stays the same. For me, being a minority within a minority, I feel a little more open and welcome now, though."

It was night now. Reggaeton and roaring engines could be heard in the distance. The stores we walked across were dark and gated shut,

while the many drinkeries and taco trucks started to wake with colorful lights and loud conversations flooding into the sidewalks.

"This project is messing up the

balance completely though." We went mute for a moment to pass a brewery blasting banda music. "You're putting in a whole different tax bracket into another place, displacing a lot of people who've already had their lives here."

A few days after our talk, the conversations about Santa Ana, the fears of the renters and shoppers and local artists, the dreams of the politicians, the profit margins and inflation and population data, was all swirling around in my head.

I decide to go back to Metro Town Square, walking around this time. Now without a windshield, the scale completely shifts. What looks from the outside like a negligible space becomes an expansive graveyard of lots and clusters of businesses. Peering through the windows reveals eerily empty, large-scale warehouses without a soul inside. It's hard to imagine now just how much this place once flourished. There used to be people and business, a thriving part of the city. So many stories. So many laid to rest here, soon to be paved over.

It's early morning as a handful of parents get groceries and young families amble into the clinics. People are few, but there's still some life left. I sit on the trunk of my car, watching the people go to and fro, and think about the inevitable cycle of change. Then, like everything else in this world, I leave.

The only thing in my control is to hope some good will come from this ending. **W**

The Mystery

Story by
Samantha Chavez

Photo by
Kathy Rafferty

Minh Pham sits across from me at Vietnamese cafe BAMBŪ Desserts & Drinks. He seems happy but tired because he just came from the gym. He's sipping his favorite drink, iced cold with coconut water, pandan jelly, basil seeds, brown longans and coconut. He has a slight build but is definitely in great shape, a sleeper build, as they say (he's something of a fitness fanatic). He wears black-rimmed glasses that somehow make him look pensive and younger than his 32 years of age. He speaks in a soft, almost playful voice. Minh smiles whenever he talks, whenever you're speaking, whenever he's thinking.

If you've been at SAC for a while, then you have probably seen him or even taken a class with him. Minh has 50 associate degrees. He's performed in theater productions and piano recitals and completed NASA internships. He's been at SAC for eight years and is addicted to running marathons.

I know that Minh went to UCLA and graduated with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. So why did he return to SAC after

earning his B.S.? What does Minh want to do with all of this?

By the end of our chat, I'm not sure if I really know. If anyone really does, but I do learn that he wakes up at 3 a.m. I also learn that he wants to earn a master's in public health and become a medical doctor. And a lawyer. An M.D., J.D.

So why is he taking dance classes this semester? Why did he spend a semester learning how to cook paella?

American Dreams

What's certain is that Minh arrived in the United States from Vietnam with his family when he was 15 years old. Minh's father was in the Army and fought with the U.S against the communists in Vietnam. His message to Minh was clear: "Make sure you get your education so you don't struggle and make decent money."

With limited English, Minh was enrolled at El Modena High School just three weeks later. By the time he graduated, he had mastered the language.

Minh then came to SAC, and like any student with a clear goal, he transferred to a nice university.

He graduated and claims he was accepted into medical school.

Yet, years later, Minh has fashioned himself into the ultimate renaissance man, taking anything and everything at SAC. He's earned the praise of teachers and students and staff and business leaders.

Going the Distance

The question today is if Minh is ready to move on. Believe it or not, there are more classes he wants to take at SAC. "Taking all these classes is a part of nurturing my mind," said Minh. "I want to be well-rounded."

Will the rounding out ever end though? When does the next chapter begin?

What happens when he's at a top-tier medical school surrounded by students who've been on the "right track" their whole lives? He's a big Minh in a little pond right now. Maybe it's scary to take the plunge.

This could be the case. It could not. And at the end of the day, it doesn't matter, because there are parts of Minh that haven't been fully explored. Parts that are more spiritual than practical, more like music than language.

The parts of him that enjoy dreaming about having a family one day with his girlfriend in Vietnam, in listening to Taylor Swift's "Exile" (yeah, Minh is a Swiftie), in helping a homeless person, not because it looks good on a resume, but because it makes him happy. The part that runs marathons not for recognition but because his body can. There's something sacred

about pushing past limits and discovering what you're made of.

He's a human who's striving. Who's brilliant and lost and determined and procrastinating all at once. He's mysterious, and why shouldn't he be?

Here's the truth about Minh Pham: all of Minh's roads lead to greatness, but no one, not even Minh, knows which one he actually wants to take.

In the meantime, he'll be at SAC, registering for classes, pursuing internships, and honing his mind, body and reputation for whatever's next.

The mystery of Minh Pham isn't who he is. It's how far he will go. And honestly, when the time comes, Minh will be ready. The only thing bigger than his transcript is his heart. **W**



of
Minh

LEGACY IN TRANSIT



The full "The Legacy of Cesar Chavez" mural before it was covered in March after the allegations around Cesar Chavez came to light. Photo by Brandon Rowley / el Don

Story by Jason Whitacre

On the morning of March 19, Santa Ana College President Annebelle Nery sent an email to students and faculty announcing the immediate covering of "The Legacy of Cesar Chavez" by muralist and alumnus Emigdio Vasquez, located in the college's Cesar Chavez building.

The order swiftly followed allegations of sexual assault against Chavez from several women, including civil rights leader Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farmworkers of America.

Minutes after a scheduled fire drill, maintenance workers arrived to shield the long central mural, depicting Chavez alongside Huerta and others, from view. A plaque and an attached staircase mural that prominently

displays Chavez in deep rose red were meant to be covered as well.

Darren Hostetter, art professor and head of SAC's mural arts program, witnessed the workers enter the building. Five days later, at the March 24 Academic Senate meeting, Hostetter explained that he stood between the men and the mural in an attempt to temporarily halt the process.

"It looked like they were going to put screws into the face of it. I asked them to stop, and they did stop. Thank goodness they didn't actually damage it or drill any holes."

Amidst the commotion following the fire drill, Hostetter flagged down Kristi Blackburn, dean of the Fine & Performing Arts division. Located only a few yards away from her office, Blackburn

was already on her way to investigate what was happening at the mural.

"Professor Hostetter stood there, momentarily, while I came back to send an e-mail to the president saying that nobody is disputing the covering up, but what we were asking is that the mural not be damaged in the process of covering it," said Blackburn. "[Nery] responded that yes, no damage should be done."

Despite the experience shared by Hostetter and Blackburn, there are alternative views about what may have happened that day.

"There was never, ever, any intention of drilling holes," said Vice President of Administrative Services Bart Hoffman. "I was on the phone on a regular and ongoing basis that morning, talking about how that mural was going to be covered with paper and tape."

Public Information Officer Ethereal Reyes, who helped draft the initial notice about the mural, provided additional context:

"I strongly believe the priority was to cover it up, but that awareness of the art and history wasn't at the top of [the team's] mind. Luckily, with a faculty member being there, they were able to give some context and education as to the mural itself."

Chavez's likeness is being scrubbed from public places across the nation, but the SAC piece is inviting conflicting thoughts about its future.

Mostly because of its status as an artwork by Vasquez, who is regarded as the godfather of Chicano art.

On March 23, the RSCCD Board of Trustees' public meeting opened the conversation about what should be done with the mural. Despite productive discussions, no actions will be taken on any projects. "We should not move with haste," advised Trustee David Crockett. "We should move in a fashion in which we get it right the first time."

Replacing Chavez with a full portrait of Huerta was floated as a possibility, as well as adding greater representation of the farm workers at the center of the movement. Both ideas have been echoed in the Academic Senate and have garnered strong support from Vasquez's family.

Since the mural was painted on the SAC campus in 1997, Hostetter has maintained an ongoing relationship with the Vasquez family, who declined to be interviewed while decisions about the mural are still ongoing. Hostetter spoke about the future of the mural at the senate meeting, noting that the family had been in contact with him and expressed that they are willing to help with any alterations.

Across campus, the sentiment about the future of the Vasquez mural has varied wildly.

Enrique, a graphic design major, feels the mural represents Mexican American history and should be kept as is. "His image changes, and nothing changes. That image is not him, because he's gone. [Dolores Huerta's] words are against nobody, so it doesn't make sense. You have to keep it, for the farm workers."

José Lopez, a recent recipient of a SAC biotechnology certificate, said that he believes depictions of Chavez no longer align with what the school represents, claiming that he would support the removal of the mural if that's the decision.

President Nery noted that recommendations have been shared with the facilities and safety department, as well as school governance groups, which will go to the college council.

Difficult conversations may be coming, but Blackburn is ready to hear them and ready to face them as a community. "We really want to hear what the students are thinking and feeling."

Decisions from the senate and trustees about the future of the mural are pending. Trustees have the final vote but will wait on choices to be made at the college level, which will be voted on by the district, according to Reyes.

"I'm happy with what the school was able to do at this point, and to just kind of stop and pause and cover it," Hostetter expressed. "I think that we can't hurry, and we can't rush this process. It has to be thoughtful and meaningful, not just to the students but the staff and faculty and the community."

This discussion is the beginning of an ongoing process; there are more topics that have yet to be presented. "We all need to listen to each other more and try understanding our fellow neighbors and colleagues more," said Reyes. "We all need to listen." **W**

BACK IN THE BOX

Story by Clay Arritt • Photos by Brandon Rowley

A shimmering sunset looms over Don Sneddon Field as the last crack of the bat and pop of the glove mingle with the whistles of birds as practice wraps up for the Dons. For Jack Mueller, these moments don't necessarily signal the end of the day, just a break before his next time on the field. It's been a long road for the 20-year old Mueller, but tireless, unseen hours grinding on the field and in the gym have brought his baseball journey to Santa Ana College and will soon carry him to the Pacific Northwest.

Mueller is a laid back, humble guy, so you wouldn't naturally guess that he's one of the best players to lace up the cleats for the Dons.

But, the stats don't lie.

In his two seasons at SAC, Mueller has become the engine at the top of the lineup. As the leadoff hitter, his job is to get on base and spark the offense, something he's done consistently.

He's compiled a .463 on-base percentage, leading to 101 runs scored in 75 games for the Dons.

It's those kinds of performances that help a team have a stellar season. The Dons are currently sitting at 33-4-1 and are ranked first in the entire state and 19th in the country. Needless to say, they've got their sights on the state championship after clinching their first Orange Empire Conference title since 2014.

Winning a state championship would be even sweeter than usual as the end of the last season left a sour taste in the team's mouth. The Dons got swept in the first round of the playoffs by San Diego Mesa, and as one of the returning sophomores, Mueller has assumed a leadership role to get the boys fired up to change their fate this season. "When playoffs come around, we'll definitely be ready. We're not going to treat it any differently. It's just a regular game, we just have to go out there and compete."

Mueller is focused on the present and on showing up for his team. The high rankings don't change his attitude, and his promising future doesn't get to his head either.

"I don't think the rankings mean a whole lot. We still have to go out there every day and compete to do our best." Mueller added:

"Our mindset hasn't really changed throughout the year. We want every game."

Learning to bounce back from failures and disappointments is what separates good from great for athletes. This is something that resonates with Mueller. Going into his senior year at Foothill High School, he committed to play baseball at Cal State Northridge, a Division I program, something every baseball player dreams of doing.

These dreams were put on hold when he slid into third base during his senior year, breaking

I think everything happens for a reason. The injury was the best thing that could have ever happened to me.



his thumb. The injury happened just a few games into the season, knocking him out until the playoffs. Northridge informed Jack that because of the injury, the college would have to retract the scholarship.

Later during his senior year, Mueller received a call from Tom Nilles, the head coach at Santa Ana College.

Jack and his father, Ed, remember not being familiar with playing baseball at a community college, often referred to as the JUCO route. "We didn't know much about JUCO," the senior

same dude there and be dominant. He's a good baseball player. Like, really good."

Mueller's teammates shared similar sentiments, including freshman Zach Ireland. "We have a Bible study. He shows up to that often and contributes. And I love him for that. I think he's just a really great dude."

Sophomore Barrett Ronson put it simply. "He's one of the best teammates I've ever had. Even when he's struggling, he's still picking other people up. He's a really good player, but a great person too."



Mueller said. But after a conversation with Coach Nilles, and with limited options, the father and son decided that SAC would be the best route.

Jack is beloved by many in the Santa Ana dugout and will be missed after this season. This is especially true when it comes to Coach Nilles.

"Jack's one of my favorites," he said. "He's arguably been the best player that I've been able to coach." Coach Nilles added: "I'm excited for his opportunity at Washington. I expect him to be the

An emphasis for Mueller during his time with the Dons has been getting in the weight room. Coach Nilles knew getting stronger was something that would do wonders for Jack. "He got on the phone and asked if he needed to go play summer ball," Nilles said. "I said no, you need to be committed to the gym and just get stronger, because you're a really good baseball player."

Since then, Mueller has packed on another 15 pounds of muscle, transforming his athletic slim

frame into a powerful build. The proof is in the pudding here too, with 42 extra-base hits in his two years with the Dons.

When he's not on the baseball field, Mueller is like any other health-minded, college-aged student. Two of his favorite activities include body boarding and mountain biking. During downtime it's watching movies, eating ice cream, or playing video games with the boys.

This summer, Mueller will be rewarded with a unique opportunity.

Mueller will be playing ball with the Portland Pickles, a professional collegiate wood-bat summer team with a hefty social media following. The Pickles play in the South division of the West Coast League, which is based in the PNW and Western Canada. It'll be a different schedule than he's used to, usually playing six games a week instead of three, though Mueller is expecting some off-days. The Pickles are filled with players from across the country competing in a high-level summer league in hopes to develop, gain exposure and prove themselves against tough competition.

"The fan base there is unreal," he said. "Getting to play in a city like that, where their professional team they watch is the Pickles, that atmosphere is going to be fun."

SAC assistant coach Evan Leibl, a former Pickles

player, was able to help set Jack up for this opportunity. "I told them if you need an infielder, we have one of the best guys in the state of

California," Leibl said. "It was the most fun I ever had playing, and I think it'll be a great experience for him."

Something Mueller is hoping to focus on this summer is simply enjoying his time. "Staying with the host family is going to be a great experience," he said. "Waking up, going to work out with the guys, meeting new guys and going to do cool things with them outside of baseball is going to be fun. It's gonna be a blast to compete with all these new guys on the field."

On March 23, Jack got another opportunity to live out his dream to play Division I baseball when he announced his commitment to the University of Washington. "It means the world to me," he said. "When you spend countless hours working your tail off to keep playing the game you love, it means the world to me."

Even with the Portland Pickles, the University of Washington and anything that could happen after that, Jack's eyes are on the rest of the season at Santa Ana. "Right now, I'm just focused on the Dons," he said.

"Winning as many games as we can, and trying to go win a state championship."

With that mindset, a championship for the Dons seems possible. So does so much else for Mueller. ▣



rocks not dead

opinion by maxwell reed

Imagine Dragons have been one of the most popular bands in the world since the 2010s. Musicians have increasingly stopped including the guitar in favor of synths, and traditional screaming-guitar-solo rock songs are struggling to make the Hot 100 more every year. To some, it's pretty obvious what's happening: "rock is dead."

That couldn't possibly be more wrong.

Change is the one constant in rock. The nu-metal, emo and post grunge of the 2000s were never going to rule the charts forever, and that's a healthy thing for music. Nobody cares that the Foo Fighters just released a new album this week, because it probably sounds like the last one; what makes rock special is how much it morphs and shapeshifts. If you listen to Malcolm Todd's "Earrings," which just reached a new peak of #33 on the Hot 100, you'll hear what's happening. Todd is using alternative R&B, soft rock, and one of the biggest up-and-coming genres of the 2020s, bedroom pop, to create a new and unique sound. It combines all of those genres to make the perfect dreamy and relaxed atmosphere for sites like TikTok to use for videos, providing a unique feeling to the track where he muses about his own feelings towards the music that he makes.

Rock is alive, but the people that are leading the charge are a new breed of stars. Think: Dominic Fike. Malcolm Todd. sombr. They're hard to classify as the 2020s have shown off a stronger

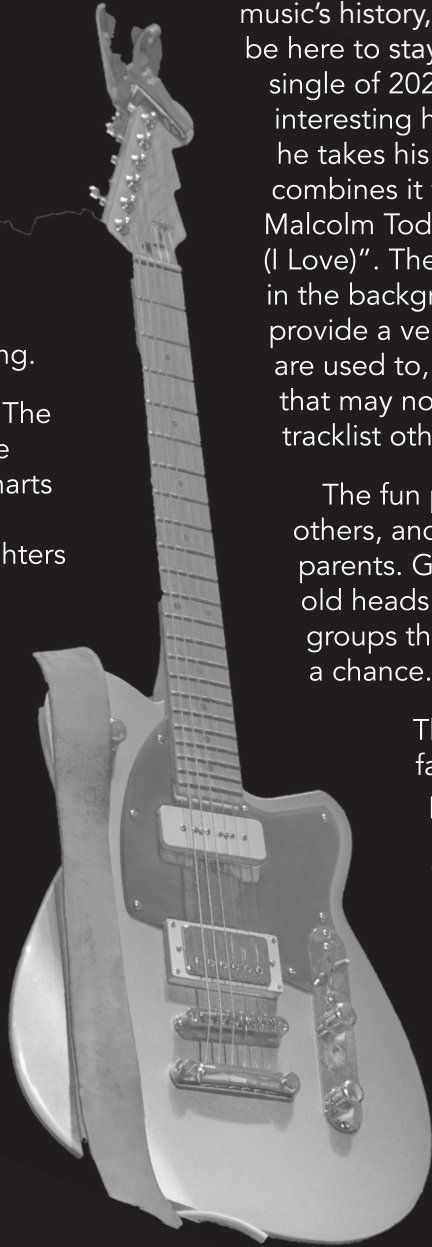
blending of genres than any other decade in music's history, and it's something that I hope will be here to stay. R&B star Don Toliver's biggest single of 2026, "E85", is one of the most interesting hit singles charting right now, as he takes his usual alternative r&b sound and combines it with vocals and production from Malcolm Todd's hit single last year "Chest Pain (I Love)". The scuzzed-out guitars that play in the background through most of the song provide a very different sound than Toliver's fans are used to, giving a rock-edge to the track that may not have stood out in his album's tracklist otherwise.

The fun part of music is sharing it with others, and that goes for your peers and parents. Give this new rock a listen. Most old heads will be able to find some current groups they love if they only give 'em a chance.

The Cure is probably my mom's favorite band, but I've got my Gen X parent into plenty of popular artists in the pop rock scene. She's a big fan of Wallows, a band fronted by the lead actor of 13 Reasons Why. She loves Royel Otis, a duo from the land down under, and we're going to see Canadian rockers Good Kid in May in our hometown of Santa Ana.

Rock isn't dead. It's a genre that has gone through many iterations in its past, and right now it's going through a change as big as ever. Whether you like it or not says more about you than the genre.

The real rockers will rock on all the same.



HIGHKEY

Gas prices.

Cesar Chavez.

The hype for Drake's three-album drop won't last.

Minh Pham is everything, everywhere, all at once.

Dons baseball is headed to the state championships.

OC VIBE

Santa Ana transplants sure will love OC Vibe.

What d4vd did wasn't romantic, but it was homicide.

SAC's new entrance was a much needed facelift for the campus.

Alysa Liu shows what she can do stateside.

Want to check out SAC's website? 404.

Klay Thompson should not have cheated on Megan Thee Stallion.

Masayoshi Takanaka's first U.S. tour in 40 years.

Dr. Lamb's Chicken. We don't get it, but we're here for it.

WACK

SAC's digital media program not having a new home.

TACONAZO

The best damn fish taco is at Taco Nazo.

The Angels can't do anything right...

Rest in peace, Spirit Airlines.

Going analog.

Welcome back West 17th!

Canvas getting hacked.

Santa Ana's jacaranda trees are sticky, get everywhere, and smell.

The Anaheim Ducks actually made it to the playoffs this year.

Chancellor Martinez is looking to run while in hot water.

Knott's Berry Farm

Knott's is lowkirkenuinely moggging Disneyland.

Ticket prices for LA 2028.

LOWKEY



Bristol Mktpl

