

## City explores crosswalk options near Solana Beach

By Kaila Mellos

ENCINITAS — As hundreds of pedestrians continue to scramble across Coast Highway 101 daily, the city's Mobility and Traffic Safety Commission discussed options for a safe pedestrian crosswalk at the Encinitas-Solana Beach border.

Recently, the cities of Encinitas and Solana Beach jointly hired a consultant to create plans for a protected crosswalk between Cardiff State Beach and Harbaugh Seaside Trails.

Abe Bandegan, a traffic engineer at the City of Encinitas, spoke at the May 8 meeting to give the commissioners three options for protected crosswalks.

The three options are to install a standard pedestrian crossing with a signal, similar to the underpass near Swami's Beach, install a HAWK (High-intensity Activated CrossWalk), or build a "Z"-shaped or staggered crosswalk cutting into a lane of traffic in each direction.

The commissioners largely discussed the signalized pedestrian crossing and "Z"-shaped crosswalk, both of which have their downsides, according to Bandegan.

The signalized crossing would have a potential installation cost of between \$30,000 and \$40,000 for the two cities and the po-

tential to raise concerns of nearby homeowners with obstructed ocean views from traffic lights and poles.

The "Z"-shaped crosswalk, while much cheaper without blocking views, would need approval from the Coastal Commission, which could take up to six months or more.

"As an engineer, I would like to see the pedestrian signal," Bandegan said. "Drivers respect it; they know what it is, everybody stops, and you cross safely. I would use a pedestrian signal, especially somewhere like this, where 200 to 300 pedestrians cross during the weekend. If we add a crosswalk, it will probably go up to 500 people crossing during one weekend."

Most of the illegal crossing on Coast Highway 101 has come from pedestrians from the Harbaugh Seaside Trail area in Solana Beach to reach the ocean. Along with this proposal, new bike and pedestrian routes are currently being installed in Encinitas, bringing more improvements as sidewalk construction is expected to finish by wintertime.

Commissioner June Honsberger said the signalized pedestrian crossing seems like the safest and most viable option but sees the appeal of the "Z"-shaped crosswalk, which may be the most attractive option simply due to cost.



IVEY RANCH volunteer Debbie George sprays Abe with a solution that prevents gnats from biting him. Photo by Samantha Nelson

## Horses transform lives at Ivey Ranch

By Samantha Nelson

OCEANSIDE — Horses have been an integral part of therapy for hundreds of North County and Camp Pendleton residents over the last 20 years at Ivey Ranch Park.

The Ivey Ranch Park Association has served children and adults with disabilities since 1981 but didn't start its equestrian program until 2003, after Executive Director Tonya Danielly proposed introducing horses at

the park to offer equine therapy services to the nonprofit's clients.

Equine therapy, also known as equine-assisted therapy, is a form of treatment that involves activities with horses, including riding, to promote physical, occupational and emotional health in people with anxiety, depression, dementia, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries and those who suffered from abuse and addiction.

Ivey Ranch has expanded its equestrian program to treat all those conditions and is also available to able-bodied riders to promote social interaction and integration.

In equine therapy, the participants learn about

themselves and others while working with and riding horses. During these interactions, horses recognize and respond to the emotions of humans.

"Horses are amazing partners because they're empathic," Danielly said. "They read the person as soon as they're near and can immediately tell if they are angry, nervous or happy, and they reflect that back — that's why they're such wonderful partners in psychotherapy, equine-assisted learning and counseling."

Danielly is a credentialed early education instructor, a state licensed site supervisor, certified therapeutic riding instructor and an equine specialist in mental health and learning.

Though some were skeptical at first given the challenges inherent in caring for horses, the equestrian program took off and grew from a single donated horse to 26 working horses today. The program also expanded its reach in Ivey Ranch Park, which the association leases long-term from the city.

Ivey Ranch is located within the city's Historic Preservation Area No. 1, which encompasses Mission San Luis Rey next door to the ranch. The white house on the ranch, where the Ivey Ranch Park Association is headquartered, was built in 1889. The house and the ranch went through sever-

al owners over the next 46 years before L.O. (Lott Otis) Ivey purchased the property in 1937.

The city acquired the property in 1981. That same year, a steering committee proposed a park on 20 acres of the ranch with the desire to provide a broad range of inclusive, recreational activities accessible to everyone, especially those with disabilities.

While the city owns the park, the Ivey Ranch Park Association runs and maintains it. The association offers after-school, summer and holiday care for all children and is specifically tailored to help children with special needs. The association also offers in-home care to provide respite for caretakers.

Of 67 staff members, 23 are employed specifically under the equestrian program, including the clinically certified therapists who lead equine therapy sessions with clients. They are joined during a session by at least one or two other volunteers who assist the therapist and client in handling the horse.

More than 1,000 volunteers contribute over 20,000 hours to taking care of the horses. Their tasks range from tending the stables to grooming to feeding, training and even performing with the horses.

Prior experience with horses isn't necessary to volunteer. Over time, a volunteer can become a certified handler.

Debbie George has volunteered at Ivey Ranch for nearly 14 years following her retirement as a pharmacy technician at Kaiser Permanente. She had no experience with horses at the time, but today she is well acquainted with the personalities and grooming needs of the ranch's horses.

George's favorite horses are Big Boy and Abraham, or Big and Abe for short.

"Big is such a sweetheart," she said. "People are sometimes afraid of him because he's so big, but he's just

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# Tomato farm builds dorms for workers

By Samantha Nelson

OCEANSIDE — West Coast Tomato Growers is building dormitories to house seasonal farmworkers on-site at its packing facility in the city's Guajome neighborhood near South Morro Hills.

The Planning Commission on May 8 approved the agricultural company's request to build four buildings that will house 338-bed dormitories, kitchen, dining hall, laundry and office space at 5780 Mission Road.

West Coast Tomato Growers cultivates 580 acres of tomatoes and Brussels sprouts in Oceanside between March and November with the help of more than 300 seasonal employees from central Mexico.

The workers are in the United States under the H-2A visa program, which requires their employer to provide them with housing while working in the U.S.

The company was previously leasing a nearby site to house its seasonal workers. With that option no longer available, West Coast has planned to build its own facility.

"It seems like a much needed project if you're op-



**HARRY SINGH JR.**, owner of West Coast Tomato Growers in Oceanside, is building new dorms for seasonal farmworkers. Courtesy photo/West Coast Tomato Growers

erating a fairly sizable agricultural operations," said Planning Commission Chair Tom Rosales. "Kudos to the applicant for recognizing need and stepping up to fund what looks like a really good project for the workers."

The new dorms will be constructed on four acres next to the farm's 25,000-square-foot pack-

ing facility. Two dorms will house the male farmworkers with up to 144 beds total, and a third building will house the female farmworkers with up to 50 beds.

Each dorm has eight rooms with eight to 10 bunkbeds and communal bathrooms. The fourth building will contain the dining and kitchen areas, while the fe-

male dormitory will include the communal laundry area and janitorial storage space on the ground floor. Additionally, the company will build a soccer field and basketball court as part of the project for the farmworkers during their stay.

Additionally, the dorm project will include a bio-filtration basin, overflow outfall and storm drain connection at the site's northwest corner to treat runoff. Due to the site's proximity to the San Luis Rey River, the project will include a 100-foot buffer from the riparian forested areas near the river. The project will include extensive landscaping and 25 new canopy trees along its perimeter.

Commissioner Louise Balma, who lives in South Morro Hills, where her property overlooks the West Coast Tomato Growers' fields, commended the agricultural company for bringing forward the project.

"I'm impressed with what you guys are doing and support you 1 million percent," she said.

The Singh family owns West Coast Tomato Grower and has farmed in North County for over 60 years.



**THE REPORT**, initiated by SANDAG's Independent Performance Auditor Mary Khoshmashrab, shows high contract awards and a lack of internal controls. Screenshot/KPBS

## SANDAG

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warned that not properly storing or reviewing individual score sheets could lead to collusion between staff and leadership to award contracts to preferred vendors and collusion between staff and vendors to award contracts.

## Vendor Z

The report examined a contract with "Vendor Z," originally awarded \$25 million for on-call environmental planning and architect and engineering design services. However, the final contract amount had ballooned to over \$128 million — a 412% increase from the original award.

Vendor Z was awarded 48% of the original advertised amount of \$260 million, which was "to be shared amongst all the on-call firms over a period of seven years." The auditor found excessive contract amendments, leading to "overuse of internal resources and ineffective government practices."

Additionally, 10 task orders associated with Vendor Z's contract required competitive bidding but were never offered for competition.

In October 2022, Khoshmashrab released the first part of the report, identifying \$290 million in questionable contracts from SANDAG's top 30 vendors.

# Video shows shooting of armed man at Vista church

By City News Service

VISTA — Authorities on May 17 released video clips of a deputy's non-fatal shooting of a seemingly suicidal 77-year-old man who approached sheriff's personnel and bystanders with a gun in his hand outside a Vista church.

The armed man, whose name has not been released, was slowly walking toward a parking lot in front of Iglesia Ni Cristo Church of Christ in the 1400 block of Calle Jules when Deputy Justin Williams shot him on the afternoon of May 7, accord-

ing to the San Diego County Sheriff's Department.

The man remained hospitalized this week for treatment of gunshot wounds to his legs. He is expected to survive, and the county District Attorney's Office does not plan to file criminal charges against him over the encounter, sheriff's officials said.

Williams' uniform-worn camera, a video surveillance system and a witness' cellphone captured images of the shooting and the events that immediately preceded it.

Deputies went to the church just north of East Bobier Drive about 12:30 p.m. in response to a 911 caller's report that a man was in a building there, holding a handgun to his head.

When deputies arrived, they learned that members of the congregation were inside the complex with the armed man, though he was in a separate structure.

The suspect walked outside into a breezeway with a cane in one hand and a pistol in the other, authorities said.

Despite deputies' repeated commands to drop

the gun, the man kept walking slowly in their direction, holding the weapon loosely at arm's length — seemingly clutching it by the end of the handgrip, not in a position that would allow him to readily fire it.

"I don't want to have to shoot you!" Williams is heard shouting. "Please drop the gun! Please!"

In response, the armed man yells back "shoot" several times. A moment later, the deputy fires a single round, prompting the suspect to drop the gun and collapse onto the pavement.

## IVEY RANCH

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so smart and gentle, and he's good with the little ones."

Big is a draft horse, a breed known for its larger size. He works with the vaulting team, clients who perform acrobatics while on horseback.

Irene Diggs, a board member and fellow volunteer, found out about the program five years ago from one of her students at Cal State San Marcos. "It's such a unique program," she said.

Diggs and George both enjoy seeing the transformation as clients and horses work together.

"It's great to see how people have come so far," George said.

Clients give back by volunteering their time to the program as well. Danielly said the program works with the Wounded Warriors Battalion from Camp Pendleton to provide therapy services to its veterans, who in turn help with other equine therapy sessions.

Ivey Ranch will soon have a new partner, The Hacienda Mission San Luis Rey, a new senior housing project

under construction next to the mission and Ivey Ranch Park. The new homes will provide independent and assisted living plus memory care for seniors.

Although its residents are not set to move in until September, they can visit the ranch beforehand to learn how they can continue to stay active in the community as volunteers.

"Many of our future residents have been raised on ranches and farms, and others are former teachers and educators who want to stay involved," said Mariano Perez, executive director of The Hacienda. "We're eliminating the labels of seniors and retirement as they still want to be part of the community."

Residents from The Hacienda's memory care ward may also find therapeutic outlets while at the ranch. Research has shown that people with Alzheimer's and dementia can benefit from spending time with horses.

The Hacienda plans to sponsor one or two of the ranch's horses, which helps the association offset costs.

To learn more about equine therapy and volunteer options, visit ivelyranch.com.



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