



We're all just walking each other home.

— Ram Dass

KINDNESS HAPPENS HERE



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NEWS OF A KINDER WORLD

kindnesshappenshere.org

INSIDE, PAGE 6

Wheels of Joya brings companionship to many who feel alone.

Sharing this newspaper is kindness.
Pass it along to a friend.



COMING IN APRIL

For Earth Day, meet San Diegans growing healthier food futures.

Arden Pala (left) noted that his parents, Zeynep Ilgaz and Serhat Pala, taught him empathy and instilled a love of volunteering.



JILIAN BURETZ

*The Parents Modeled Giving.
The Sons Turned it into Action.*

Kindness Runs In the Family

By Robert Krier, Staff Writer

Gratitude and giving are ingrained in the Pala family.

Brothers Kenan, 22 this month, and Arden, 17, were set on a life path of good works as soon as they could walk. As toddlers, they joined the family's volunteer trips to soup kitchens.

In their early teens, both founded nonprofits. By the time Kenan was 18, his Kids4Community had raised \$1 million to help people experiencing homelessness and mobilized a virtual army of young volunteers.

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Brothers Kenan (left) and Arden

CARLA TOSON PHOTOGRAPHY

A MONTHLY BEACON OF HOPE

Clinic Provides Free Care to Pets of Unhoused San Diegans

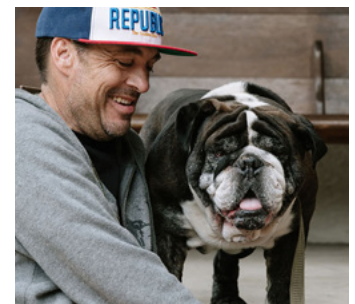
By Jeannette De Wyze, Staff Writer

Bro's paws were swollen, infected with a persistent yeast infection. His owner, a middle-aged man named Fredo, had run out of medicine to treat the condition in his 6-year-old bulldog. Then a friend, also living on the streets, suggested a place to get help: the monthly Street Dog Coalition clinic in Ocean Beach, where volunteer veterinarians provide free service.

Even though the clinic didn't open until 8:30 a.m., Fredo and Bro arrived before dawn, securing the second spot in line. Five hours later, Bro had been examined by Dr. Alejandro Cruz and received vaccines, paw medicine and pet supplies.

In the mass of wrinkles that constitute Bro's face, it was hard to read the bulldog's feelings — maybe time for a nap? But Fredo's

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JILIAN BURETZ

Fredo sought treatment for his bulldog Bro at The Street Dog Coalition veterinarian clinic in Ocean Beach.

Listening In

Sharing Ideas That Inspire

EDITOR'S NOTE

What We Gain When We Serve

"I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back." — Maya Angelou



At *Kindness Happens Here*, we dedicate a lot of space to volunteering — because again and again, we see how transformative it can be.

In this issue, Robert Krier writes about the two remarkable Pala brothers, both of whom created nonprofits before they were old enough to drive. Jeannette De Wyze introduces us to the volunteer veterinarians in San Diego who care for the pets of people experiencing homelessness.

Our Gift of Volunteering column features the stories of individuals who have discovered firsthand how deeply volunteering can shape a life. In our [January issue](#), Mary Rutland wrote about mentoring and befriending a South Sudanese family — especially their young children.

"I don't have grandchildren, so this filled that place for me," Rutland told me.

[Last February](#), Gail White shared the connections she formed with female inmates by writing poetry together through the nonprofit Poetic Justice.

Although she has never met her writing partners in person, she feels a deep bond with them. When she took risks in her writing, she felt seen and understood through their empathetic responses.

And in this issue, Pat Flynn reflects on the lasting friendships he has built over the years with fellow volunteers at Interfaith Community Services in Escondido.

Like so many expressions of kindness, volunteering does not just benefit the receiver. The giver receives gifts as well.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

A 2013 longitudinal study from Carnegie Mellon University found that adults over 50 who volunteered at least 200 hours a year were less likely to develop hypertension, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Volunteering has also been associated with greater psychological well-being and increased physical activity.

Researchers have consistently linked volunteerism to lower mortality rates, greater life satisfaction, a stronger sense of purpose, higher self-esteem and fewer symptoms of depression.

The science affirms what many volunteers already know.

My mother volunteered at the Galveston Humane Society, cleaning cat cages well into her 80s. Relationships

with fellow volunteers at the shelter sometimes became friendships outside it. She stopped volunteering only when she had to give up driving.

A cousin received a devastating cancer diagnosis when I was a young adult. After the initial shock subsided, he signed up for a delivery route with Meals on Wheels and continued driving it for as long as he possibly could. He credited those deliveries with extending his life — not medically, perhaps, but emotionally and spiritually. The route gave him purpose and a focus beyond himself.

We admired him in our family. We learned from him. We tried to mirror his example in our own lives.

The truth is, there is a volunteer opportunity for everyone. Maybe you don't have 200 hours a year to give. But even small efforts can change lives in unexpected and lasting ways.

Volunteering is one of the quiet ways kindness moves through a community. Being a volunteer doesn't always come with recognition. It doesn't always draw attention. But it transforms people — both the ones who receive and the ones who give.

We invite you to share your stories about volunteering. Write to us at info@kindnesshappenshere.org.

— Leigh Fenly

A Volunteer Opportunity Just for You

USS Midway Museum

It takes 800 volunteers to keep the USS Midway Museum, one of San Diego's most popular tourist attractions, in tip-top shape. If you are interested in joining the ranks, attend the museum's open house

March 12 at 10 a.m. Prospective volunteers will learn about basic requirements and available positions that range from docent to ship restorer. To attend, you must fill out an application and be 18 years old.

[Click here for the volunteer form.](#)

Does your organization provide volunteer opportunities you would like to see featured here?

Write us at info@kindnesshappenshere.org

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Rethinking Breast Cancer Screening

By Leigh Fenly
Staff Writer

Citizen science isn't always about counting birds or tracking tide pools. It can be deeply personal, and it can also be a two-way street. Sometimes, sharing your health information is a gift to research *and* can provide personalized guidance for your own well-being.

That's the idea behind the WISDOM Study (Women Informed to Screen Depending on Measures of Risk), a nationwide research project exploring whether breast cancer screening can be improved by tailoring it to a woman's individual risk.

Currently, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening mammograms every two years for women ages 40 to 74. The WISDOM study is challenging that recommendation by asking a bold question: Would incorporating personal risk factors such as genetics and family history lead to smarter, safer screening schedules?

Launched in 2016 by UC San Francisco researchers, WISDOM has enrolled 90,000 women across the United States. Participants complete an online, detailed health questionnaire, and they provide a saliva sample for genetic analysis and access to mammogram records. This can all be done at home.

Using that data, researchers estimate each woman's risk and suggest a screening plan tailored to her needs — from intensified screening for those at highest risk to potentially delaying mammograms for those at lower risk.

The first results were published in *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* in December. Researchers found that risk-based breast cancer screening (the WISDOM approach) was equivalent to routine annual mammograms for detecting more advanced cancers. This means the personalized approach is a safe and acceptable alternative to traditional screening,

WHAT IS WISDOM?

What it is: A national research study testing whether breast cancer screening can be personalized based on individual risk.

What you do: Complete a health questionnaire and mail in a saliva sample for genetic testing.

Who can join: Women ages 30–74 in the U.S. who have never had breast cancer.

Why it matters: Early results published in *JAMA* suggest risk-based screening is a safe alternative to routine annual mammograms for many women.

Learn more: wisdomstudy.org

WISDOM ASSESSES THESE RISK FACTORS

- Family history of breast cancer
- Breast density
- Age
- Lifestyle factors
- Race/ethnicity
- Breast biopsy history
- Hormone therapies
- Reproductive history
- Genes
- Body Mass Index

the researchers wrote.

Women in the highest risk category who were screened every six months had no cancers at advanced stages during follow-up. Also, biopsy rates did not increase overall despite fewer mammograms in lower-risk groups.

WISDOM also found that about 3 percent of participants carried a genetic mutation linked to breast cancer and 60 percent of those women had no family history of the disease — meaning they had no obvious reason to suspect they were at higher risk.

THE STUDY THAT GIVES BACK

I joined WISDOM three years ago and was surprised by how quickly I received something in return.

Within a few weeks, I had a clear, in-

dividualized screening recommendation based on my health data and genetics. In my case, the news was good: I had no genetic markers. Nothing in my family history or health records put me at higher risk, so I was advised to have a mammogram every two years.

Being able to shift from guessing to a fact-based plan was grounding.

More work is needed, but researchers hope this approach will someday influence national screening guidelines. WISDOM promises a future in which high-risk women are monitored more closely and diagnosed earlier, while those at lower risk avoid unnecessary tests without sacrificing safety.

For more information or to sign up, visit wisdomstudy.org.

Your Turn

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

THE GIFT OF VOLUNTEERING

Where I Needed To Be

By Pat Flynn

Before I retired from a 35-year career as a newspaper reporter and editor, I called several North County nonprofits. I wanted to make sure I would have something fulfilling to do in my free time. I found several volunteering options, but I was especially drawn to the food pantry at Interfaith Community Services in Escondido.

Since 2012, every Tuesday and Thursday morning — with a little time off for (good?) behavior — I have made my way to the pantry to work with dozens of caring volunteers and Interfaith staff.

I showed up for my shift the morning after my oldest son died in October 2018. The pantry was where I needed to be.

Serving up to 30 families three days a week, the pantry typically distributes an assortment of frozen meat, fresh produce, bread, eggs, rice, beans, canned food, sweets, condiments, toiletries, hygiene products, drinks (sometimes including fresh milk) and

more. These goods are donated by nearby grocery stores, a bakery, generous individuals and community organizations.

Through the years, what a collection of souls I have met and friends I have made. A writer could craft many stories around characters like the gruff-on-the-outside softies, the eccentrics, the retired admiral and the professional organizer. I've encountered extremely wealthy volunteers and a few who had less than some of our clients.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an exuberant youth pastor volunteered. He brought his boom box and asked us to choose between praise music and hip-hop as an accompaniment to our work. One day, after running a few orders outside in the summer heat, he sought comfort in the industrial freezer — not for a minute, but to the point that we wondered if he was at risk for hypothermia.

Often, bright young folks help out until they climb the next academic rung or snag the career job they are seeking. Working professionals come, making it a point to squeeze volun-



COURTESY INTERFAITH COMMUNITY SERVICES

Pat Flynn (left) and his friend Aj Devine share a moment at Interfaith Community Services, where Pat has volunteered for 14 years — and where service has blossomed into lasting friendships.

teering into their schedules. We have had missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I work with one volunteer in his 90s and another in his 80s.

Some come to complete a court mandate — volunteering in lieu of a less desirable outcome — and to a person, they joyfully embrace the work. As a colleague and dear friend puts it, “You just don’t find a lot of grouchy, unhappy people working in a food pantry.”

As for me, my back and joints bark a little bit more at shift’s end than they did in 2012.

And it is hard to say what is more sustaining — the life-altering friendships I have made or the genuine smiles from our clients and the blessings the clients call forth.

Regardless, my Tuesday and Thursday mornings will remain booked for some time to come.

CONNECT WITH INTERFAITH COMMUNITY SERVICES

interfaithservices.org

[communications@](mailto:communications@interfaithservices.org)

interfaithservices.org

760-489-6380

550 W. Washington Ave.,
Escondido, CA 92025

YOUR TURN

We Want to Hear Your Story

We invite you, our readers, to share your personal stories of volunteering. Tell us in about 500 words how you benefitted and what you learned. Include a photo and background information on the organization that provided your volunteer experience. We will pick one of your stories for this space each month. We’re looking forward to hearing from you. Send your story to info@kindnesshappenshere.org

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

Your Turn

SNAPSHOT



PHOTOS COURTESY RADY CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

The Grammy-award-winning band Switchfoot performs at the first session of Music Mondays, a monthly program that brings live music to patients at Rady Children's Hospital.

Switchfoot Helps Bring Live Music to Young Patients

On the first Monday of every month, live music fills the lobby at Rady Children's Hospital, offering a welcome pause for young patients and their families. Music Mondays is a collaboration between the hospital and Switchfoot Bro-Am Foundation, the nonprofit created by the San Diego rock band Switchfoot.

The idea is to share the healing power of music. Research suggests that live music can help ease anxiety, reduce pain and promote healing — especially in hospital settings.

Since its beginning last year, the program has featured a range of performers, including Olympic skateboarder Bryce Wettstein on ukulele and Karl Anthony, a healing arts musician, leading a drum circle. Music Mondays encourages kids to leave their rooms and gather for a shared experience, something families say has been especially meaningful.



Your TurnYour Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.**WHY WE STARTED A NONPROFIT**

A Mother and Daughter Turned Grief into Giving

By Mary and Hannah Joya

Mary Writes:

For 27 years, my husband, Dr. Danny Joya, lived as a quadriplegic. Shortly after taking his medical board exams in 1990, he was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of Guillain-Barré syndrome, which left him paralyzed from the neck down. His dream of becoming a doctor was taken away in an instant, yet he faced life with love, patience and dignity.

Those years after his diagnosis were some of the hardest of our lives. They were marked by exhaustion, heart-break and constant uncertainty, but they were also full of lessons I could never have learned anywhere else.

Throughout that time, hospitals and nursing facilities became our second homes. As I spent day after day beside him, I began to truly see the residents around us. I did not just see patients; I saw people. Mothers and fathers. Veterans. Grandparents. Individuals who had lived full, meaningful lives and now found themselves isolated by illness, disability or circumstance.

Many had no family. Some had no one at all. Their loneliness was quiet but heavy. Even in grief and exhaustion, I felt a growing conviction: This could not end with us. The people we met, the relationships we built, the lessons we learned, these needed to continue.

When my husband passed in 2018, the loss was overwhelming, but it became a calling. Wheels of Joya, the nonprofit my daughter Hannah and I formed, was born from a promise to carry forward my husband's love of life and to make sure people who are often overlooked are never forgotten.

Continued on Next Page

COURTESY MARY JOYA

Mary Joya (left) and her daughter Hannah based their nonprofit on the shared belief that even small gestures can change lives.

CONNECT WITH WHEELS OF JOYA

Wheels of Joya, created by Mary and Hannah Joya, a mother-daughter team, is always looking for volunteers to help spread its mission of caring for those in nursing homes and in the homeless, disabled and special needs communities.

info@wheelsofjoya.org

wheelsofjoya.org

14781 Pomerado Rd. PMB #128, Poway, CA 92064

Your Voice. Your Story.
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Your Turn

Continued from Previous Page

Hannah writes:

My dad was a quadriplegic my entire life. Growing up, I watched him face every day with courage despite unimaginable challenges. I watched my mom walk beside him, showing strength and dedication that inspired me. Together my parents taught me what resilience, grace and compassion truly mean.

In nursing homes, I saw residents waiting for someone to notice them, speak up for them and remind them they still mattered. Seeing that was heartbreaking but also inspiring. I realized how much even a small gesture — such as sitting with someone, sharing a smile or remembering their name — can change a life.

The hardest part for me was knowing that when my father died, their lives would continue much the same. My grief after my dad passed was heavy, but it also clarified my purpose.

Now, through Wheels of Joya, we host fun events and give personalized attention to nursing home residents. For those with dementia, we create tailored activities that gently engage and stimulate. Last year we showed our support for Paralyzed Veterans of America by delivering gifts and creating moments of joy and connection.

In all we do, we prioritize being with individuals, listening, engaging and sharing experiences to show that everyone is valued and loved.

To us, Wheels of Joya is more than a nonprofit. It is a legacy. It is a promise to continue serving people who are often forgotten, to honor my dad's life and to walk alongside those who need someone to care.

Mary and Hannah Together:

Starting Wheels of Joya while carrying grief was not easy. What remains hardest is seeing how many people are still waiting for care and hope. Loneliness and isolation do not end. But small gestures do make a difference.

The name “Wheels of Joya” comes from Dr. Danny Joya — his wheelchair, his wheels, the love he showed every day. Everything we do carries forward his legacy. Wheels of Joya is love in motion. On wheels.



COURTESY MARY JOYA

Hannah Joya surprised a woman in her home with a special care package and visit.



COURTESY MARY JOYA

Mary Joya with her late husband, Dr. Danny Joya, who was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome in 1990.

YOUR TURN

We Want to Hear Your Story

We are proud to introduce a new Your Turn column written by individuals who have taken a leap of faith and started a nonprofit organization — often with little more than conviction and deep love for their communities. These first-person stories come from founders who saw a need and built something that didn't exist before.

If you have started a nonprofit and would like to share your story, we'd love to hear from you. Contact us at info@kindnesshappenshere.org

Your Turn

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

KINDNESS, ACCORDING TO YOU

Teachings That Became Gifts

Kindness Happens Here grows richer when our community joins the conversation.

Each month, we invite readers to pause, reflect and share moments of care, generosity and insight that have shaped them. Your responses remind us that kindness is not only something we give, it's something we can pass along. We are honored to share your reflections.

LAST MONTH'S QUESTION

What's something someone once taught you that felt like a true gift?

KEYS TO A LIFE IN MUSIC

I met George Trovillo, my music and life mentor, when I was 23. After George's illustrious career as an international concert accompanist and recording artist, he retired to San Diego with his life partner, Bill Graham.

I had come to San Diego a year earlier with a degree in music education from the University of Michigan that had yielded a teaching job. But public school music teaching yielded boredom and frustration.

After two years, I quit to take a low-paying staff accompanist position at United States International University's School of Performing and Visual Arts. At my new job, my days were spent playing piano as an accompanist for voice lessons, dance classes and musical productions. I loved it!

George was highly sought after as a vocal coach who helped singers learn the nuances of foreign languages. I came to his studio as an accompanist; after one hour I realized I had a lot to learn.

I began private study with George, working through the art songs of Schubert, Debussy and Strauss, plus the pantheon of opera arias. I studied German and Italian and improved my French — all to support the singers.

One day after a coaching session, George made the point of telling me, "Accompanists are born, not made. You are a born accompanist."

He recommended me to many singers and voice teachers. One thing led to another until I became pianist for the San Diego Symphony, a position I would hold for 40 years. I made a recording on Naxos with concert violinist Zina Schiff, and I helped found Camarada Chamber Music Ensemble. I had found my musical bliss, and it all started with George Trovillo.

Always, George and Bill supported me by attending my concerts and meeting my family and close friends. I considered them my surrogate fathers.

In 2009, George and Bill gifted the bulk of their estate to the

Musical Merit Foundation. Through the endowment, worthy singers and instrumentalists receive generous monetary prizes to continue their musical studies.

— *Mary Barringer, La Jolla*

...

A BROTHER'S LOVING WORDS

My brother Rudy taught me that regardless of my learning disabilities, I was smart. Due to my disabilities, I feared college — failure. I dreamed of going to college but never saw myself as smart enough to do it.

At the age of 39, I started talking about the idea of pursuing a college education. My brother is a teacher, and that summer we went on a trip to Canada together. While there, my brother helped me understand how I could use my strengths to influence my learning. He taught me that I could be successful in college.

When I came home, I signed up for college, and four years later, I had an associate's degree in American Sign Language and Deaf Studies. It was all because of my brother.

— *Nicole Shaffer, Rancho Bernardo*

...

PUTTING SELF FIRST

What I was taught was that I couldn't take care of others if I didn't take care of myself first. My therapist helped me understand that my self-care and my self-love needed to come first.

— *Mary Ellen, San Diego*

NEXT MONTH'S QUESTION

Do you have an unsung hero in your life?

Please email your answer to info@kindnesshappenshere.org by March 10. We'll pick a sampling of responses to feature here. Together, your words create a shared space where kindness is noticed, valued and passed along.

Cover Story: Kindness Runs in the Family

Continued from Page 1

Donations and grants to Arden's Sports4Kids top \$350,000, and he has enlisted hundreds of his peers to bring sports programs to inner-city schools in San Diego. He was named Sports Illustrated 2024 SportsKid of the Year. The award recognizes superior performance on the field, in the classroom and in service in the community.

"They're both five stars — special, special young men doing really impactful work that a lot of people don't do in their lifetime," said Drew Moser, chief executive officer of the San Diego non-profit Lucky Duck Foundation, which has worked with the boys' charities. "Both of these boys are incredibly selfless. They're just next-level."

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

For the Pala family, giving is a generational affair.

The boys' parents, Zeynep Ilgaz and Serhat Pala, learned altruism as youngsters growing up in Turkey. Zeynep's parents were small-town doctors who treated patients for free if they couldn't afford care. Serhat remembers joining toy drives and other events for the local orphanage with his father, a police officer.

"Witnessing those things, seeing people do good things not necessarily for any other reason than to see a positive impact, I guess that leaves a mark," Serhat said during an interview at the family's home in Rancho Bernardo.

The couple graduated from Bosphorus University in Istanbul, where they met, and arrived in San Diego in 1998 as newlyweds. They brought little more than entrepreneurial zeal and acceptance letters from San Diego State University's Master of Business Administration program.

After receiving MBAs, the couple experienced lean years.

"We came with very low means," Zeynep recalled. "If it wasn't for the kindness of so many people in our circle, strangers and people we know, we wouldn't be able to stay here and make a living and build a life."

Working mostly out of their garage in the early 2000s, the couple launched several companies, including one in the



SPORTS4KIDS

Arden leads a basketball clinic at Perkins Elementary. Many of the Barrio Logan students have no other access to sports programs.

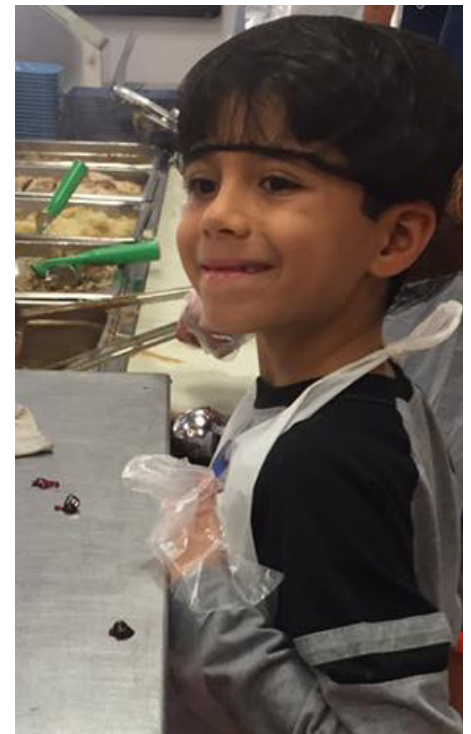
clothing industry. Nothing really took off. But they vowed that if success did come, they would never forget the kindness and generosity people showed them.

Success did come when the couple launched Confirm Biosciences, which developed COVID-19 test kits that were eventually sold nationally in 20,000 stores. Confirm Biosciences made the Inc. 5000 list of the country's fastest-growing private companies for five years starting in 2013.

Before the couple sold the business to a private equity company in 2020, Confirm Biosciences gave 10 percent of its profits to homelessness relief efforts, mostly in San Diego. "It just came from a point of view of being grateful," Zeynep explained. "It was important for us that (our sons) grow up knowing that we have to help each other as people."

The message sank in.

"I credit almost everything I do to (my parents) because of the things they set in me when I was very young," Arden



COURTESY PALA FAMILY

Arden Pala began volunteer work at a very young age.

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Cover Story: Kindness Runs in the Family

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explained. “And they continue to inspire me.”

No argument from older brother Kenan.

“The older you get, the more you realize your parents make you who you become,” he said during a phone call from Yale University, where he is now a senior. “They instilled in me a lot of the values I carry with me now.”

The admiration goes both ways.

“As a mom, and I’m sure Dad feels the same way, I get inspired by you every day,” Zeynep told Arden in a conversation around their kitchen table in January. “I want to be a better person and a better mom to you.”

INSPIRED BY A FLAW

In addition to their impressive charitable endeavors, the Pala sons have remarkable resumes and lists of accomplishments. Arden has performed in numerous professional theatrical productions, including the Old Globe’s “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” (twice) and “A Thousand Splendid Suns.”

In fifth grade, he wrote a book called “The Adventures of Noah’s Flying Cars,” about a boy traveling the world celebrating diversity. In eighth grade, he wrote, directed, narrated and produced a documentary on homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kenan is on Yale’s track and cross country teams. He has run a 4:13.47 mile and finished in the top three in college long-distance races.

Like his younger brother, he attended private Francis Parker School in Linda Vista, where he set several school track and cross country records, was the California state champion in cross country and was all-league and team MVP three times.

In an indirect way, it was running that prompted Kenan to form Kids4Community in 2017. One day while he was running on the beach with his dad, they came across a sick baby seal.

“There were a lot of people around it, trying to care for it,” Kenan remembered. “On the way home, we drove past homeless people who were just being ignored. It was like they were invisible. I thought,



COURTESY PALA FAMILY

Kenan Pala (top left) and his Kids4Community nonprofit ignited the giving spirit in countless youth. The Girl Scouts pictured helped at a Bags of Hope event, where care packages were assembled for low-income families.

this is a fundamental flaw in society.”

To draw attention to homelessness, Kenan and his middle-school friends created a huge mosaic, using 8,000 donated cereal boxes, that set a Guinness World Record.

Through these efforts, Kenan and his friends set in motion a youth volunteer movement to help people experiencing homelessness. At one point, the group had 10,000 volunteers in its database, Kenan said. “The idea was to inspire youth and show the power of youth. You get kids to volunteer when they’re young, it becomes natural. You realize it’s fun. You imprint that on kids at an early age, it compounds.”

ACTING ON THE NEED

The volunteer ethic was imprinted on his little brother. But Arden said he felt no pressure to replicate Kenan’s efforts.

“I went to his volunteer events,” Arden said. “I think being around that atmosphere growing up, seeing him create a charity out of nothing but an idea, really inspired me to do my own thing. Now I knew what was possible.”

Arden’s thing was sports. He loved

basketball. When he was 11, he visited Perkins Elementary School in Barrio Logan, where a third of the students are experiencing homelessness, and learned that funding cuts had wiped out the sports program.

Arden later launched Sports4Kids. He began coaching Perkins’ girls and boys — some taller than he was — after school in basketball and other sports. He enlisted peers to help, purchased sports equipment with donations and arranged visits from professional athletes.

“Arden recognized a big need,” said Moser of Lucky Duck, a philanthropy that focuses on homelessness in San Diego County. “I have very fond memories of going out to Perkins for the first time to see his program — the smiles he put on those kids’ faces. Those kids lit up just by having a basketball in their hands.”

Fernando Hernandez, Perkins’ principal, cannot praise Arden enough. Despite the significant differences in their economic backgrounds, Arden developed an instant and lasting rapport with students, Hernandez said.

“I’ve never seen anyone like him. He

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Cover Story: Kindness Runs in the Family

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makes everyone feel comfortable,” the principal added. “The kids all give him a high level of respect. He earns their trust. With Arden, there’s no power trip. You kind of feel that his mission is to make the world a better place.”

Arden’s biggest contribution, Hernandez said, is time. Arden has spent hundreds of hours with Perkins students, who often have limited social interactions.

“He models fairness. He models gentleness,” Hernandez said. “And these social skills are best learned when they’re modeled.

“If the world was full of people like Arden, we would be in heaven.”

Sports4Kids has expanded to six inner-city schools and introduced 1,000 kids to youth sports in San Diego. In 2025, the nonprofit purchased backpacks for needy students, served more than 1,000 meals, assembled 6,500 hygiene kits for the homeless and logged more than 8,500 volunteer hours from 250 kids.

Kevin Dunn, director of community engagement at Francis Parker, is familiar with both brothers. “What is unique about them is they have this innate ability to strike up a conversation with a nervous 8-year-old, then transition to a conversation with a client at a homeless shelter, then switch back to a conversation with a peer or a peer’s parent. I think they are uniquely social and really enjoy connecting with people.”

Because their sons’ nonprofits began long before the boys could drive, Zeynep and Serhat spent countless hours shuttling them to schools, fundraising pitches, food drives and programs for the homeless.

“My parents were very, very busy people, but they always found time to help me with Kids4Community,” Kenan said.

Serhat said he and his wife gave some guidance and assistance, but the boys took the initiative with their charities. They were very resourceful and creative, and they had the wherewithal to follow through.

“Our job as parents was just to support them,” he said. “We are very grateful that when they asked for support, we were able to provide it.”



COURTESY PALA FAMILY

Arden Pala (lower left) learned the volunteer ethic by participating in his older brother’s events. Kenan Pala (upper left in blue) helped set up this Interfaith Community Services dinner.

CONNECT WITH KIDS4COMMUNITY & SPORTS4KIDS

kids4.org

sports4.org

10121 Carroll Canyon Rd

San Diego 92131

484-854-3742

LOOKING AHEAD

The members of the Pala family are not resting on their laurels. Besides their work on numerous nonprofit boards, Zeynep and Serhat have started Cross Ocean Ventures, an investment fund for international startups.

Helping schools is standard family practice. At SDSU, the couple created the Ken Marino Entrepreneurship Excellence Award, named for an associate dean who helped them in their early years. They also created an endowment fund to help startup companies find SDSU student interns. Zeynep is on the board of the Campanile Foundation, which raises funds for the school, and she is chairwoman of the SDSU Women’s Athletics Fund. She also mentors young entrepreneurs at University of California Berkeley.

Once they found success, Serhat said, they felt an added need to express gratitude. “It is important, especially for

immigrant families, to show some extra care and love to this country,” he said. “It is basically a land of opportunity. Many of the things we did here, yes, it was hard work, but it was in the way the United States operates. We feel like we have to do a little more than the average family.”

For Arden now, “a little more” includes a full schedule of five AP classes as a junior in high school, running his Sports4Kids charity with help from fellow students and preparing for the ACT test. Stanford is his dream college, he said, because of its excellent economics program.

He wants to follow in his entrepreneurial parents’ footsteps after college, but he’s not waiting. He started Helptivo, a business that provides his own software to small organizations to help them track their activities. He already has 60 clients.

Kenan, an economics major, will graduate from Yale in May, but not before wrapping up his last year competing in NCAA track and field. He said he loves testing his physical limits. Despite his busy senior year, he volunteers at soup kitchens. He has a job lined up after graduation at a San Diego investment firm. Coming back to San Diego is a way to return to his youth, he said. “It’s definitely my city.”

Once here, he plans to ramp up his charity work.

“Volunteering is a big part of my life,” he said. “My life feels wrong without it.”

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big smile made it clear how grateful he was.

“For a lot of this population, all they have is their pet,” said Dr. Sydney Lopez, one of four lead veterinarians overseeing The Street Dog Coalition operations in San Diego County. “When you’re down on your luck, living on the streets, your dog may be your only friend. Maybe you’re a woman in a marginalized population and your dog is your only protection. That’s a big deal, you know?”

In 2015, Dr. Jon Geller, a veterinarian, founded the nonprofit Street Dog Coalition in Fort Collins, Colo., to provide free care to pets of people experiencing homelessness. Today Street Dog Coalition clinics function in more than 60 cities and have treated more than 33,000 animals. In San Diego, the clinic started in 2019.

In addition to Lopez, three other veterinarians manage San Diego operations — Nicole Del Pino, Michelle Ku and Scharlet Kelly. Lopez and Del Pino first started volunteering with Street Dogs during veterinary school at Colorado State University and continued when they moved separately to San Diego.

None is paid. All four work full-time in private veterinary practices while raising young children. In addition to these four, other veterinarians and veterinary assistants, drawn from a list of hundreds who have expressed interest, work at the monthly clinics.

Lopez explained her reason for participating. “I think it’s always a good reminder of why we’re here. For me, my faith is a huge part. I’m a Christian, and I just really care for the poor.”

FLEAS, FLEAS, FLEAS

By early morning, at least four dozen pets and their owners mingled on the sidewalk in front of the Episcopal Church Center on Sunset Cliffs Boulevard. Owners used a QR code to provide basic information about themselves and their animals. Clipboards served as a backup for those without cell phones.

Five veterinarians and a couple of assistants arrived early. For exam space, they set up folding tables. A bench held plastic crates containing vaccines, flea



JILIAN BURETZ

K.D. and her dog River arrived at the clinic with an all-too-common problem — fleas. Veterinarians sent them home with free prescription treatment and a little peace of mind.



JILIAN BURETZ

As she moved from one patient to the next, volunteer veterinarian Scharlet Kelly wore her mission across her back: It’s a good day to save animals.

medicine, pain relievers and antibiotics.

The toughest part of the clinic is getting a good flow, Lopez said. “If we don’t know who’s coming in for what or what they need for follow-up, it’s hard to help many people.”

Through the years, the clinic’s popu-

larity has grown, and it now sometimes attracts as many as 70 animals. Typically, only about 35 can be seen in the clinic’s 90-minute time frame.

“Every month, we struggle with, how

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do we tell these people we can't see them today," she said. "We're always over capacity."

At one table, Dr. Shehnav Sekhon, lanky and bearded, gently examined a fluffy 6-pound puppy named Moca who had been licking her paws and private parts obsessively. The puppy's owner also inquired about a voucher for spaying. Those surgeries are performed at the Pet Hospital of North Park and paid for by The Street Dog Coalition.

The next patient was River, a 5-year-old female dog with beautiful brown and white markings, accompanied by her owner, K.D. The two had spent the night parked nearby in her car, tormented by fleas even though K.D. had spent \$30 on Advantage 2, a flea treatment. "That \$30 was gas money for a month," she said.

Sekhon nodded, sympathetic. He noted that San Diego has more fleas than anywhere in the country. Plus, they are resistant to all over-the-counter products. He provided prescription flea medication and offered a spay certificate for River.

Nearby, one of the clinic's most dedicated volunteers, Cynthia Love, moved in to help calm a bouncy pit bull named Blue, nervous about getting his ears examined. His antics seemed to worry tiny Bambi, a 3½-year-old chihuahua wearing a coat emblazoned "Naps & Treats."

Love, who lives across the street from the Episcopal building, rises early on clinic day to hang the QR code sign so pet owners can begin checking in. "These are all animals that would not get veterinary care otherwise," she explained. "Some of the doctors come right from an emergency shift and then go back to another shift when they're done here. It's incredible. They're all so compassionate."

A SPECIAL POPULATION

A few cats peered from carriers, but most clinic patients are dogs. All are here for routine health issues; the team isn't equipped to handle acute injuries or medical emergencies. The doctors refer those cases to animal hospitals that might help.



PHOTOS JILIAN BURETZ

Dr. Shehnav Sekhon was among five veterinarians at January's clinic, offering free basic health care to dogs and cats owned by people living on the streets.

In dispensing care, staff members don't ask pet owners about their financial means. The Street Dog Coalition is funded primarily by contributions.

Lopez draws a compelling contrast between her paid job as a veterinarian and serving pet owners experiencing homelessness. "A lot of my clients in my day practice have the means to treat their pets to the very best and highest degree. As a doctor, you can almost always do everything you need to do for that pet, which is great.

"But getting to serve this population is special," she reflects. "I feel like these clients are always in tune with what



their pets need. And they're so thankful, so grateful every time."

CONNECT WITH THE STREET DOG COALITION

The Street Dog Coalition offers free veterinary care for the pets of people experiencing homelessness.

When: 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. the fourth Saturday of every month

Where: Episcopal Church Center, 2083 Sunset Cliffs Blvd., San Diego

thestreetdogcoalition.org

Contributors

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."
— African proverb (Origin unknown)

Meet the Team

FOUNDER & EDITOR



LEIGH FENLY was a staff writer and editor at *The San Diego Union-Tribune* for 30 years, where she edited the award-winning Quest science section. She is co-founder and past co-president of Women's Empowerment International, a nonprofit that provides microfinance loans and other support to women across the world. She has volunteered as a tutor for refugee children and at her neighborhood food pantry. Currently, she is a volunteer docent at Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve.

STAFF WRITERS



ROBERT KRIER

wrote and edited for *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

for 32 years. He covered local weather for 20 years and also reported on climate-change issues. He retired in 2020. He now spends much of his time outdoors, marveling at weather, trees, wildlife and nature.



MARY CURRAN-DOWNEY

has been interviewing people her whole life — and

writing those stories for radio, magazines and newspapers for more decades than she cares to disclose. Her sons are now grown and flown, so she concentrates on reading, quilting, traveling, spending time with friends and family — and always, always asking questions and interviewing everyone she meets.



LISA PETRILLO

is an award-winning journalist, science writer

and author devoted to reading and discovery and her adopted California home. She's a former competitive figure skater who has written extensively about murder and mayhem, the space program, the wonders of physics and the world's most powerful lasers.



SCOTT LAFÉE is vice president of communications at Sanford Burnham Prebys. Previously, he was director of media relations for health sciences research at UC San Diego. Before that for 18 years, he was a science writer/ editor for the *The San Diego Union-*

Tribune, covering all scientific disciplines for the Quest science section. With Dilip Jeste, MD, he is co-author of "Wiser: The Scientific Roots of Wisdom, Compassion and What Makes Us Good" (2020)



JEANNETTE DE WYZE worked as a staff writer at the *San Diego Reader* for 30 years. Today, in addition to raising puppies to be service dogs for Canine Companions, she's a frequent contributor to the Friends of Bonobos blog. She and her husband

also serve as the volunteer liaisons between Women's Empowerment International and the Nyaka Grannies Project in Uganda. She travels often and maintains an active travel blog, [At Home and Abroad](#).

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Meet the Team

COPY EDITOR

MARGARET KING has worked since 2009 as a writer and editor for Sally Ride Science, a nonprofit based at UC San Diego that seeks to inspire girls and boys of all backgrounds in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Previously, she was an editor at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. She received her bachelor’s degree in English and history from UC Berkeley and her master’s degree in journalism from Columbia.



ART DIRECTOR

AMY STIRNKORB is an art director and designer. After a decade at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, she launched her own design studio and cookbook publishing company. She has been involved with a number of nonprofits including Rescue House, Women’s Empowerment International, and co-founded Educreate to inspire and empower young creators through art and technology.



PHOTOGRAPHERS

ROBERT SCHNEIDER

retired as professor emeritus at Southwestern College after teaching photography for 33 years. During his tenure, he co-created a film and video production curriculum. He served as a founding board member of the Museum of Photographic Arts in Balboa Park. He was also a founding member of the Binational Association of Schools of Communications, which comprised colleges and universities from both sides of the border. He continues his involvement with photography and video production.



JILIAN BURETZ

is a San Diego-based portrait and event photographer known for authentic, story-driven imagery. Drawing from her background in social work, she approaches every assignment with a genuine love for people and community.



ILLUSTRATOR

CRISTINA BYVIK

is an award-winning illustrator and designer who has worked with clients such as *The Washington Post*, Starbucks and The Old Globe Theatre. Most recently she served as the graphics director at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. She has received recognition for her illustrations, designs and information graphics from the Society of News Design. Cristina grew up in the Republic of Panama and has a B.F.A. in illustration from Ringling College of Art and Design. A lifelong *futbol* fan, she lives in Encinitas with her husband, son and golden retriever.



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