



Looking has been
my greatest joy
all my life.

— David Hockney,
1937-2026

KINDNESS HAPPENS HERE



Scan to Subscribe

July 2026 • Vol. 2, No. 7

NEWS OF A KINDER WORLD

kindnesshappenshere.org

INSIDE, PAGE 8

A walk on the beach can be so much more
when volunteers become citizen scientists.

Good stories deserve company.
Share this issue with a friend.

INSIDE, PAGE 6

Readers tell us their stories about
when strangers came to the rescue.



JILL BURETZ

"I love being the bridge," says Kitchenista Maria Wapnowski, who translates Cooking for Salud classes and helps families discover healthier ways to cook and eat together.

MEET THE

Kitchenistas

Graduates of Cooking for Salud Program
Become Healthy Food Ambassadors

BY LEIGH FENLY, STAFF WRITER

In a recent morning, a row of women sat shoulder to shoulder on stools clustered around the wide kitchen counter inside the Victorian-era house at the nonprofit Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center in National City.

Small cups of chia pudding topped with tangerine segments and cilantro sprigs sat in front of them. Behind the counter, volunteer chef Joe Burns demonstrated the recipe while Kitchenista Maria Wapnowski translated his instructions into Spanish. The women sampled the pudding with obvious enjoyment, then peppered the pair with questions.

Continued on Page 10

The Children Upstairs

Volunteer Helps Migrant Youth Heal Through Friendship and Learning

By Howie Rosen

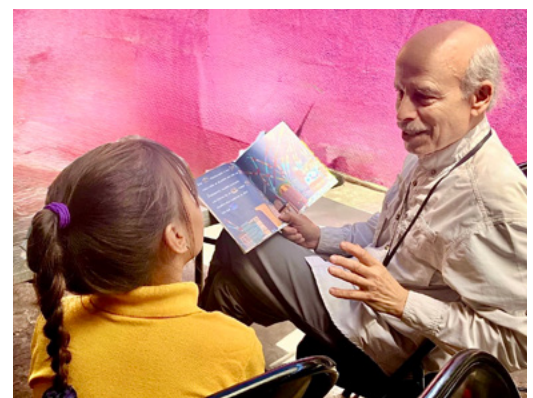
For the past few years, I have volunteered near the San Diego border, first in makeshift camps in Jacumba, where immigrants waited after crossing through, around or over the border fence. Often there were hundreds of people gathered in the open desert, where many spent days without shelter.

We prepared food — peanut butter

and jelly sandwiches, fruit, hot meals — and handed out water, blankets, jackets and diapers.

I also volunteered near the San Ysidro Port of Entry, where large tents were set up on the San Diego side, adjacent to the tall steel slats of the border fence. To individuals hoping to cross the border, we passed food, clothing, medicine — and, most coveted

Continued on Page 9



COURTESY HOWIE ROSEN

Reading with children is one of the many ways volunteer Howie Rosen has supported migrant families through his work with *Al Otro Lado*.

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

Sewing Seeds of Change

*One Founder's Vision
Brings Textile Arts to
Thousands of Students***By Tracey Herriot**

My mother, a single parent, worked hard to provide me with the best education she could, making sure I was introduced to music and art. I chose the clarinet. Through years of practice, I learned discipline, perseverance and the power of creative expression — lessons that would shape my life and career.

After studying business and entrepreneurship in college, I launched and operated a successful chain of retail fashion and accessory boutiques. In 2015, I made a major life change. I closed my stores, moved from Canada to San Diego and enrolled at the San Diego College of Continuing Education, where I completed free career training courses and earned a certificate in Clothing and Textile Arts.

Inspired by a new vision — and a used school bus — I founded Clicbitz, a mobile textile arts and technology education company. I filled the bus with sewing machines, fabric, patterns, 3D printers, laptops and supplies and began traveling throughout Southern California. From Riverside County to San Ysidro, I brought hands-on sewing classes to youth and families.

As I worked in these communities, I began to see a growing need. Many young people had few opportunities for extracurricular enrichment. I wanted to reach more students, regardless of their families' ability to pay. I realized that a nonprofit structure would allow me to pursue grants, accept tax-deductible donations and make these programs accessible to more youth.

In 2023, I took the leap and founded



COURTESY TRACEY HERRIOT

Tracey Herriot, Educreate founder and creative director, teaches young students in Encanto how to use a sewing machine to make zipper pouches.

Educreate, a nonprofit focused on textile arts education, while continuing to operate the for-profit Clicbitz.

Launching a nonprofit was not easy. Building a volunteer base, creating programs and navigating paperwork with only \$100 in the bank proved daunting. Yet overcoming those challenges made

the work even more meaningful.

In the first year, we had two important breakthroughs. Zero Waste San Diego became our fiscal sponsor, and we received a grant from the City of San Diego for our Sewing Seeds of Change program.

Today, we give young people the tools,

Continued on Page 3

YOUR TURN

We Want to Hear Your Story

In this column, founders of nonprofits tell their stories of taking leaps of faith and building something that didn't exist before. If you have followed the path to creating a nonprofit, we would love to hear your story. Write to us at info@kindnesshappenshere.org

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

Your Turn



COURTESY TRACEY HERRIOT

Summer campers learn how to create tote bags from old kitchen curtains at Southcrest Recreation Center.

Continued from Page 2

encouragement and space to create. Through sewing, design and technology, students learn practical skills while developing creativity, confidence and curiosity. We also encourage students to think about sustainability and become thoughtful stewards of the planet. My hope is that they will grow into lifelong learners and positive forces in their communities.

Last year, Educreate provided sewing lessons to more than 6,500 young people through partnerships with public libraries, recreation centers and community organizations. We hope to reach even more students this year.

The impact often extends beyond the classroom. One story that stays with me comes from Southcrest Recreation Center in Southeast San Diego. One of my students, an 8-year-old girl, told me she had started sewing with her abuela (grandmother). What began as a class

project had become a cherished activity they shared together. Experiences like that show how creativity can strengthen family bonds as well as build skills.

Our programs have also helped fill gaps when opportunities disappear. When Mount Miguel High School in Spring Valley lost funding for its after-school sewing club, we stepped in so students could continue learning.

In Chollas View, we taught a group of enthusiastic boys at Millennial Tech Middle School how to sew their own hoodies. And last December, more than 200 children and family members attended a free family sewing night at the Elementary Institute of Science in Valencia Park, where they decorated holiday stockings together.

Every time a child proudly holds up something they created with their own hands, I am reminded why this work matters. In that moment, you can see on their faces newfound confidence. Sometimes, all it takes is a needle and thread.



CONNECT WITH

Educreate

Educreate.us
admin@educreate.us
619-879-4360

Listening In

Sharing Ideas That Inspire

SNAPSHOT

Every Neighborhood



For families in South Encanto, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Pool has long been a place to escape the summer heat, learn to swim and spend time together.



A ribbon-cutting ceremony in early June marked the reopening of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Pool after its first major renovation in more than five decades.

The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Swimming Pool in South-eastern San Diego reopened last month following its first extensive renovations since it was built in 1969.

Before it closed in November 2024, the pool was one of the busiest among the 16 community pools operated by the city. For decades, the pool in South Encanto has been more than a place to swim. For many local families, it has provided relief from summer heat, affordable recreation and access to swim lessons in a community where private pools are uncommon.

The upgrades include pool deck resurfacing and new flooring, windows, roof, HVAC system, lighting and plumbing. A second round of upgrades will take place in the coming months.

The reopening has been years in the making, requiring a coalition of public agencies, elected officials and nonprofit organizations. A \$2 million State of California grant championed by State Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego) provided the largest share of funding. This was supplemented by a \$410,000 grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development obtained through the efforts of Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-Calif). Community partners then stepped in to expand access to the renovated facility.

The CEK Foundation contributed \$40,000 to sponsor free swim days this summer. The Prevent Drowning Foundation of San Diego added \$20,000 to help address equity gaps in swimming education, while the American Red Cross provided another \$20,000 to fully fund toddler swim lessons.

"This is what investing in our neighborhoods looks like," City Councilmember Henry L. Foster III said at a ribbon cutting ceremony in early June. "This pool has served our community for generations, and these improvements can ensure it can continue serving our kids, seniors and families for years to come."

The pool is also a reminder of what can happen when elected officials, nonprofit organizations and community leaders come together around a common goal. Together, they preserved a neighborhood gathering place and reaffirmed the dream that a cool plunge on a hot summer day should be available to everyone.



Deserves a Pool

A large photograph of a swimming pool at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Pool. Several children are in the water, playing with large, colorful beach balls. One child in the foreground is holding a yellow and orange beach ball. Another child is holding a red, green, and white beach ball. A woman in a black top and patterned pants stands on the pool deck, looking towards the water. In the background, there are blue tents with "SAN DIEGO" and "www.preventdrinkingfoundations.org" written on them. The pool is surrounded by a concrete deck and a chain-link fence.

Children play with beach balls during the reopening celebration at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Pool, where free swim days this summer are helping ensure everyone can enjoy the water.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. POOL

Free admission
Fridays and Saturdays
during July and
August.

6401 Skyline Dr.
San Diego 92114
619-527-3451

[WEBSITE](#)

Your Turn

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

KINDNESS, ACCORDING TO YOU

A Bible, a Wallet and a
Helping Hand at the DMV

Kindness Happens Here *is more than a newspaper — it's a community conversation.*
Each month, we ask readers to share the small, meaningful moments of generosity and insight
that have shaped their lives. Together, your reflections remind us that kindness is
something we can keep passing from one person to the next.

JULY'S QUESTION

Have you ever received
help from a stranger at just
the right moment?

A NEEDED LIFT AND
A LOST WALLET

I have two stories to share:

Just after I graduated from college, I got a job selling fresh fruits and vegetables door-to-door. It was difficult work. As you can imagine, this kind of job often came with some pretty rough reactions from the people who answered the door. But I will always remember one customer who was just the opposite.

I was having a tough day. I had already had several doors slammed in my face, and I was starting to feel discouraged. Then I knocked on one door and a woman answered. I explained what I was doing and gave her my pitch. She ended up buying the service, and, as we were wrapping up, she said, "Now wait just a moment. I have something for you."

She went back inside her house and returned with a small Bible. She opened it to a passage she had highlighted. The verse was about someone good coming to provide produce to people. She looked me in the eye and said, "That's you. God sent you."

Then she handed me the Bible and told me she hoped I would have a wonderful day.

I am not a terribly religious person, but what stayed with me was the way she saw me in such a positive light. As a door-to-door salesman, I was used to people seeing me as a nuisance. To be seen instead as someone with purpose, even just for a moment, made a huge impact on me.

I kept that Bible for a long time and always remembered what she said. During difficult seasons in my life, that moment helped me stay on the path when things got tough. It also taught me a lesson I still try to carry with me: to see the best in people, even when others might not.

My second story is about losing my wallet. When I lost it, I was extremely stressed out about it. I was upset about losing my cash, cards, ID and everything else inside.

But the very next day, I opened my front door and found my wallet sitting on the welcome mat. I opened it and all my things were exactly where I had left them.

A huge feeling of relief came over me. Then I looked through the bills and found a note tucked inside. It said, "God has blessed you and has a wonderful plan for you."

It was such a kind gesture. Someone had found my wallet, brought it back to me and left me with a message of encouragement. I kept that note in my wallet for many years. Whenever I felt stressed or discouraged, I would read it and remember that kindness. It remind-

ed me that someone had looked out for me when they did not have to.

— Chris Dudley, Linda Vista

...

KINDNESS AT THE DMV

I had been thinking of getting my REAL ID for travel purposes in 2022, but procrastination settled in and I did nothing.

Fast forward to 2026. I planned to attend a very special military graduation in July, and now I needed a REAL ID in order to go. I started the process by logging onto the Department of Motor Vehicles website and filling out the preliminary information. I tried to download the documents but it didn't work.

I tried to get an appointment, but the wait time was too long. I needed to go in person without an appointment.

I pulled up at the DMV around 7:45 a.m. There was a gathering of about 30 people. Suddenly, a woman in her mid-20s came up to me and said, "I've done this before. Let me help you." She led me to the front of the crowd and scanned a QR code on my phone to secure a place for me in their system.

This wonderful person came by multiple times to make sure I was navigating the process. What an angel! I felt so blessed that she knew how to reach out and show such kindness. I'm so grateful for her help.

—Diane Taylor, San Diego

Continued on Page 7

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

Your Turn

Continued from Page 6

We also received answers
to a previous question:

JUNE'S QUESTION

How have libraries
impacted you?



KIND LIBRARIANS CHANGED MY YOUNG LIFE

I read your recent newspaper about libraries and I got misty at times. I enjoyed reading about the history, which I did not know much about. I remembered my extremely awkward kid-self sitting on the floor of my school library between the stacks, reading, hating recess and loving the kind librarians.

A few years later in high school, boy, was I lucky. I grew up in Princeton, N.J. The remarkable, and I mean remarkable, Firestone Library, on the Princeton University campus, was a short walk away. And for some reason, they let all of us public school kids in for no charge. I was there all the time. It shaped me.

Fantastic newspaper!

— *Karen Lisi, Del Mar*

AUGUST'S QUESTION

Who have been your
greatest teachers?

Please email your answer to info@kindnesshappenshere.org by July 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.

“

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

Join the Good Work

LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

Restore the River Park

Need community service hours? Join the volunteer team at Lakeside's River Park Conservancy and help restore native habitat while learning about local plants and the environment. Volunteers work outdoors with park staff removing invasive species, planting natives and maintaining trails along a 2-mile segment of the San Diego River Trail. Community service hours are verified for students.

• **Contact:** [Lakeside River Park](#)

Conversations Across the Globe

Stop worrying about productivity for a bit and explore someone else's world. Acquaint matches volunteers with people from around the world for guided one-on-one virtual conversations focused on listening, curiosity and cultural exchange. No teaching or mentoring required — just an open mind and a willingness to connect.

• **Contact:** [Acquaint](#)

STEM Tutoring for Students

Help open doors for San Diego students by serving as a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) mentor. Volunteers provide personalized tutoring and encouragement to middle and high school students throughout the county. A few hours a week can help build confidence, curiosity and future career opportunities.

• **Contact:** [STEM For Others](#) (Scroll to the bottom of the homepage and in the search bar type San Diego.)

Make a Difference at GiGi's Playhouse

GiGi's Playhouse provides free educational, therapeutic and career-development programs for individuals with Down syndrome. Volunteers support tutoring, classes, events, administrative projects and more. Almost all GiGi's Playhouse programs are driven by volunteers dedicated to helping participants reach their highest potential.

• **Contact:** [GiGi's Playhouse San Diego](#)

**Does your organization provide volunteer opportunities
you would like to see featured here? Write us at**
info@kindnesshappenshere.org

Listening In

Sharing Ideas That Inspire

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Watching Over the San Diego Coast

By Leigh Fenly
Staff Writer

What if a walk on the beach could be more than a walk on the beach?

What if an afternoon spent watching surfers, kayakers and the changing tides could also help scientists protect the coast?

That's exactly the role of volunteers with the [San Diego Marine Protected Area \(MPA\) Watch Program](#). These citizen scientists spend time along San Diego's coastline enjoying some of the region's most beautiful places while helping scientists better understand and protect them.

California's Marine Protected Areas, or MPAs, are sections of ocean and coastline set aside to protect marine life and habitats. The designation helps safeguard kelp forests, reefs, tide pools, fish populations and other coastal ecosystems throughout the state. In San Diego County, 11 coastal areas have been designated as MPAs.

The idea started more than two decades ago when the California Legislature passed the Marine Life Protection Act, calling for the formation of a statewide network of protected ocean areas. The state completed the task in 2012, creating the country's first science-based network of marine protected areas. These areas help preserve biodiversity, protect important habitats and support healthy ocean ecosystems.

The network has a long history of community involvement. Once the network was established, volunteers with MPA Watch programs throughout the state began to conduct surveys that record data on ocean users and their activities, such as surfing, kayaking, fishing and boating.

These activities are recorded using standardized survey methods, producing data that scientists and resource managers can analyze to better understand how protected coastal areas are



WILDCOAST

MPA Watch volunteers monitor human activities along San Diego's coastline, collecting data that helps scientists and resource managers better understand how California's Marine Protected Areas are used and protected.

TO VOLUNTEER CONTACT WILDCOAST

[WEBSITE](#) | [EMAIL](#)

being used over time.

Locally, the program is coordinated by [WILDCOAST](#), an international conservation nonprofit founded in San Diego in 2000. Trained volunteers monitor four of the county's MPAs: Swami's State Marine Conservation Area, Matlahuayl State Marine Reserve, South La Jolla State Marine Reserve and Tijuana River Mouth State Marine Conservation Area.

"What has surprised me most as an MPA Watch volunteer is hearing the same thing over and over from visitors — that they want these places protected for future generations," explained Skye Porter.

In 2025, Porter and other San Diego volunteers conducted 238 land-based surveys and documented more than 25,000 recreational activities. Twenty-three volunteers participated in the

effort; WILDCOAST's ocean team conducted additional boat-based monitoring.

Together, their observations contributed to a larger statewide picture of how people interact with California's protected coastal waters.

"MPA Watch has been integral in teaching me how to be a scientist in my San Diego community, not only by observing changes along our beautiful coasts and in our oceans, but also by understanding how residents, visitors and businesses use marine protected areas," explained volunteer Gabby Williams. "This on-the-ground data helps us make informed decisions that benefit both our communities and our oceans for my generation and future generations to come."

Volunteers like Williams and Porter turn regular walks on the beach into meaningful data collections that help marine sanctuaries stay healthy and resilient. Volunteers do not need a scientific background. With a little training and a few hours each month, anyone who loves the ocean can help protect it.

Cover Story: The Children Upstairs

Continued from Page 1

of all, hot coffee — through openings in the fence. People would hand us their cell phones to charge, a critical need, as families and friends were often separated by the Border Patrol.

The stories I heard stayed with me long after I returned home from these trips. An alcalde (mayor) of a small town in southern Mexico recounted how gang members threatened her life after she banned young boys from openly selling drugs along a busy road. She fled with only the clothes she wore.

A young couple said that on their journey north, bandits threatened to take their 3-month-old baby from them unless they gave up all their money.

SHIFTING SOUTH

With immigration now largely shut down at the border, my volunteering has shifted south to Tijuana. Twice a week, I drive 20 minutes to the Iris Avenue Trolley Station in Otay Mesa. This is partially to avoid the \$12 fee at parking lots near the border crossing, but mostly it is to enjoy my fellow trolley passengers. They smile, laugh and carry on animated conversations with a rare ease.

The trolley takes me to the border crossing. From there, it is a short ride-hailing trip to my Tijuana destination: Al Otro Lado (On the Other Side), a binational nonprofit that provides free legal and humanitarian aid to immigrants, refugees and deported families.

During clinic days on Tuesdays, while young volunteers and staff lawyers meet with adults, I take the children upstairs to a loft filled with bilingual books, board games, puzzles and art supplies. Many of the children are newly arrived in Tijuana. Some have made months-long journeys from their homes, often on foot under unimaginably difficult conditions. Many have left behind other family members. Most have not seen the inside of a school or even a book for far too long.

One event revealed how quietly childhood trauma can lurk beneath the surface.

One of the kids lived down the street from the center, so I saw him weekly. Once he casually mentioned, without



CONNECT WITH

Al Otro Lado
(On the Other Side)

[EMAIL](#) | [WEBSITE](#) | [VOLUNTEER](#)

any visible emotion, that his much older brother in his hometown had been killed the day before. He then told me that earlier that year his mother and another sibling had also been killed.

The news moved through the staff like a lightning bolt; management made sure he had access to a therapist.

SEARCHING FOR SMILES

Many of the children read below grade level, and a few don't read at all, but most possess an uncanny ability to accurately pronounce English words from the books I read with them.

They are often completely absorbed with drawing with watercolors, highlighters and crayons; tracing stencils; creating collages; or turning colored pipe cleaners into bracelets.

The kids are also highly competitive board-game players. One boy was so determined to win that he blatantly removed my checkers, disregarding the rules entirely!

At lunchtime, we clear the tables and bring out hot meals that vary day to day, including tamales, beans and rice, pizza or chicken mole.

My goal every time is to put smiles on the kids' faces. While we eat, I ask the children to guess my age.

They'll stare at me for a bit, then usually begin around age 25. I point upward with my thumb as they move through the decades, their eyes widening each time. Eventually, someone arrives at 75, and I signal that they have reached the right answer. The room erupts in laughter.

I ask them about what they want to be when they grow up. The most common answers are professional soccer player; policeman or soldier (to protect people); and doctor (to help people).

On Thursdays, we have a new "Club de Tareas" (homework club) to help the children who come regularly. For those without homework, there are games with prizes that are learning opportunities in disguise. Somehow, multiplication tables, learning English and writing become fun.

By afternoon, the children and I are usually good friends. When their parents come for them, I am always rewarded with hugs from the kids.

At the end of every session, I become part of one tired, smiling family of like-minded volunteers and staff at Al Otro Lado.

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

Cover Story: Meet the Kitchenistas



JILIAN BURETZ PHOTOS

In the Olivewood kitchen, chef Joe Burns gives instructions for healthy cooking. Kitchenista Maria Wapnowski translates his words into Spanish for participants.

Continued from Page 1

“How can I use less salt?”

“What can I cook for someone with diabetes?”

“What can I substitute for sugar?”

The answers flowed easily. More herbs. More spices. Fresh ingredients. Dates or honey instead of maple syrup. Small changes that can make a big difference.

The women are part of Cooking for Salud, a free bilingual nutrition and cooking program. Since Olivewood launched the nine-week course in 2010, more than 700 participants have completed it and earned the title of Kitchenista. These graduates often go on to share what they have learned with neighbors, schools and families throughout the South Bay.

Kitchenistas give presentations at National City School District campuses, speak with parents about meal preparation and food labels, and participate in community outreach programs. They receive ongoing training in nutrition, leadership, public speaking, emotional wellness and financial literacy.

“It’s not just a cooking class,” explains Angelica Gastelum, Olivewood’s communications and marketing manager



Graduates of the Cooking for Salud program become Kitchenistas — community ambassadors who spread the concept of nutritious eating.

and a 2016 graduate of Cooking for Salud herself. “It’s really about giving families the tools and confidence to make healthier choices at home.”

Situated on nearly eight acres, Olivewood Gardens is an oasis of vegetable gardens and orchards graced by the Noyes House, built in 1896 by Oliver Noyes, National City’s first postmaster.

In 2010, Olivewood began inviting elementary school students to tour the grounds. During 2-hour field trips, children explored the gardens, learned about nutrition and prepared simple recipes. Soon, the adults wanted to get



A luscious chia pudding, topped with tangerines and cilantro, was on the menu.

in on the action.

When students returned home, they shared the recipes with their families, Gastelum explained. “Parents got interested and started asking questions. They were saying, ‘How about me? I want to learn how to make these recipes.’”

Cooking for Salud (Health) was born.

FOR THE FAMILY

Today, the program is offered three times a year and has a lengthy waitlist. The current class represents the 34th generation of Kitchenistas.

Wapnowski says the program transformed her life.

A National City resident for 15 years, she first encountered Olivewood with her young daughter Vivian on a field trip sponsored by a parent-and-child program. But it was seven years later that Wapnowski learned about the cooking classes from a friend and signed up.

“As soon as I started the program, I understood that this could be something that could change my life, and I wanted Vivian and my husband to be part of it,” Wapnowski said after her translating duties were completed and we had found chairs in the shade.

“I liked that the program was presented in a way that you could share it with family and friends without it sounding like a lecture. It’s an easy way to talk to kids about healthy eating.

“I gained a greater awareness about food. Most people go straight to salt for seasoning, but I started using more herbs and different seasonings.”

Continued on Page 11

Cover Story: Meet the Kitchenistas



COURTESY MARIA WAPNOWSKI

Vivian Wapnowski was a toddler when she first visited Olivewood with her mother, Maria. Now 13, Vivian hopes to follow her mother and become a Kitchenista herself.

Continued from Page 10

The lessons quickly spread to her family.

Vivian, now 13, has grown up learning about nutrition, fruits, vegetables and the importance of healthy choices. Young visitors to Olivewood are asked to “pledge to eat one big bite,” even if it’s a new and suspicious looking food. They are also encouraged to eat “the rainbow.” But Olivewood has offered this mother and daughter something else as well.

Because Vivian is hard of hearing, her mother has always looked for places where her daughter would feel welcomed, included and known. Wapnowski said that over the years, Vivian has attended children’s cooking classes, helped teach hydroponic gardening and participated in many functions at Olivewood.

“Everybody here knows her,” Wapnowski explained. “She feels welcome and special.”

The beauty of the gardens has also become an important part of the experience.

“There are just not a lot of green spaces in National City. So this has been special to her, to be surrounded by gardens and nature,” explained Wapnowski.

Vivian has become so attached to the program that she frequently asks when she can become a Kitchenista herself.

“I told her the other day that she has to be 18,” Wapnowski said with a laugh. “So she started counting how many years that would be — six.”

Then Vivian asked a question that

caught her mother off guard. She wanted to know if her mother would still be a Kitchenista then.

“I took a moment and thought about that. It just took me by surprise,” Wapnowski recalled. “It would just mean the world to me to be here with her. I would just love that.”

SAYING YES

Like other graduates, Wapnowski participates in a variety of Kitchenista programs.

She is a member of the composting group. She receives support for her jewelry business through the entrepreneurial group. And most recently, she joined a new group exploring a future catering program and commercial kitchen at Olivewood.

But one of her most meaningful roles is serving as a translator for the Cooking for Salud classes.

“I get to speak my mother tongue,” she explained. “I love helping others get information. I love being the bridge.”

New programs encourage Kitchenistas to stretch beyond their comfort zones. The latest is the Cooking with Kitchenistas YouTube series, filmed in a professional studio built at Olivewood with support from Cox Conserves, a sustainability initiative of Cox Communications.

For Wapnowski, being a Kitchenista has been a path to discovering strengths she didn’t know she possessed.

“Now I try to say ‘yes’ every time to opportunities,” she said.

VISIT OLIVEWOOD GARDENS

Whether you’re looking for fresh produce, a peaceful morning outdoors or a memorable evening under the stars, Olivewood Gardens & Learning Center offers plenty of opportunities.

WEEKLY HARVEST STAND

Every Friday, 10 a.m.

Pick up fresh, organically grown seasonal fruits and vegetables at Olivewood’s donation-based produce stand. Pay what you can, take what you need and remember to bring your own bag. The stand remains open until the produce is gone.

OPEN GARDENS

Saturday, July 18,
10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Explore the historic property during this free monthly event. Guided tours begin at 10:15 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. and highlight the gardens, the property’s history and Olivewood’s community programs. No registration is required. Wear comfortable shoes.

DINNER AT DUSK

Saturday, Aug. 15

Enjoy an intimate farm-to-table dinner in the gardens as the sun sets. Celebrate local food, sustainability and community with a seasonal outdoor meal in one of National City’s most beautiful settings.

LEARN MORE

Olivewood Gardens
& Learning Center
2525 N Ave.

National City, CA 91950

619-434-4281

info@olivewoodgardens.org

olivewoodgardens.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](#).

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

Contributors

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.

