



Gary and Lisa Levine, Dr. Dan Coden and Liz Nederlander Coden (event co-chairs), Lauren Coden Avraham and Gabriel Avraham, Marie Raftery (JFS chair of development) and Dr. Bob Rubenstein, Michael Hopkins (JFS CEO)



Dr. Andy and Paige Pennock, Vicki and Dr. Art Perry, Mary and James Nierman



Jon and Mary Epsten, Barbara Bry (SD City Councilwoman) and Neil Senturia, Hanna and Mark Gleiberman



Howard Pearl and Erin Combs Pearl (he's chief executive of CARS division of JFS), Robert Baum, Barbara and Dr. Howard Milstein



Ben Coyle, Patrice Cannataro, Lorna and Ronnie Diamond, Debbie and Sol Kempinski

# Theater imitates life

STORY AND PHOTOS BY VINCENT ANDRUNAS • SPECIAL TO THE U-T

## JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE

**J**ewish Family Service (JFS), is a client-centered, impact-driven human services agency working to build a stronger, healthier, more resilient San Diego. From its 1918 origins as Federated Jewish Charities — an organization dedicated to aiding new immigrants to the U.S. after World War I — it shifted to family strengthening and counseling, and evolved to eventually become one of SD's largest, oldest, and most effective social service agencies. From families living in their cars, to asylum seekers, Holocaust survivors, and individuals living with Alzheimer's disease, JFS transforms lives, serving thousands of individuals annually, regardless of their faith or background. "We don't help people because they're Jewish — we help them because we are."

JFS' Behavioral Health Committee works to eliminate the stigma of mental illness and helps those in need through outreach. Each year, the committee sponsors a signature luncheon; the next (on May 28) will feature two compelling speakers: baseball stars Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden. Both have struggled with addiction their entire lives.

Two of that committee's members are Liz Nederlander Coden (of the famous theater and entertainment family) and husband Dr. Dan Coden, noted ophthalmologist. Twice they have produced events that used award-winning Broadway musical theater to raise funds for JFS, while having fun and examining somewhat provocative issues. Their 2018 fundraiser involved the play "Hamilton," and their JFS VIP

event earlier this month brought guests together for a deluxe premium package featuring dinner at the Westgate Hotel followed by best-in-house seats for Broadway San Diego's production of "Dear Evan Hansen" at the Civic Theatre.

After a reception (with fabulous hors d'oeuvres), the 200-plus guests moved into the Versailles Room where JFS CEO Michael Hopkins welcomed and thanked them for their generous support. And then, as a special and unique surprise, the Condons introduced four of the stars of "Dear Evan Hansen." Marrick Smith (who plays Connor Murphy), Alessandro Constantino (Jared Kleinman), Samantha Williams (Alana Beck), and Daniel Sullivan (understudy for Larry Murphy) all took seats for a panel discussion. They answered questions about the realities of an actor's life, giving a revealing and entertaining insight into the joys — and the travails — of a profession that most of us can only dream about.

Dinner featured poached pear salad, grilled salmon on saffron risotto (or vegan ravioli), and chocolate mousse with crème brûlée. And then, after Dan credited Liz with doing all the work and guests applauded heartily, everyone walked to the adjacent Civic where they had the most stellar premium seats in the whole theater. The play deals with the sort of issues many JFS clients face, and the tens of thousands of dollars raised by this event will help fund the programs that help them cope.

### TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, Feb. 2, the 33rd day of 2020. There are 333 days left in the year.

#### Today's highlight

On Feb. 2, 1653, New Amsterdam — now New York City — was incorporated.

#### On this date

In 1876, the National League of Professional Base Ball Clubs was formed in New York.

In 1887, Punxsutawney, Pa., held its first Groundhog Day festival.

In 1913, New York City's rebuilt Grand Central Terminal officially opened to the public at one minute past midnight.

In 1922, the James Joyce novel "Ulysses" was published in Paris on Joyce's 40th birthday.

In 1925, the legendary Alaska Serum Run ended as the last of a series of dog mushers brought a life-saving treatment to Nome, the scene of a diphtheria epidemic, six days after the drug left Nenana.

In 1942, a Los Angeles Times column by W.H. Anderson urged security measures against Japanese-Americans, arguing that a Japanese-

American "almost inevitably grows up to be a Japanese, not an American."

In 1943, the remainder of Nazi forces from the Battle of Stalingrad surrendered in a major victory for the Soviets in World War II.

In 1971, Idi Amin, having seized power in Uganda, proclaimed himself president.

In 1980, NBC News reported the FBI had conducted a sting operation targeting members of Congress using phony Arab businessmen in what became known as "Abscam," a code-name protested by Arab-Americans.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan pressed his case for additional aid to the Nicaraguan Contras a day ahead of a vote by the U.S. House of Representatives. (The three major broadcast TV networks declined to carry the speech, which was covered by CNN; a divided House voted to reject Reagan's request for \$36.2 million in new aid.)

In 1990, in a dramatic black mission to South Africa's black majority, President F.W. de Klerk lifted a ban on the African National Congress and promised to free Nelson Mandela.

#### Today's birthdays

Comedian Tom Smothers is 83. Rock singer-guitarist Graham Nash is 78. TV executive Barry Diller is 78. Actor Bo Hopkins is 76. Country singer Howard Bellamy (The Bellamy Brothers) is 74. Rock musician Ross Valory (Journey) is 71. Model Christie Brinkley is 66. Actress Kim Zimmer is 65. Actor-comedian Adam Ferrara is 54. Singer Shakira is 43.

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In this early 1943 photo, captured German soldiers make their way through the ruins of Stalingrad.

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## HIGH RISE Evacuated in January

FROM B1  
Michell told the City Council during an update last week.

"We're going to do our best. ... What I don't want to do is give you false timelines."

Starting in December, the city moved more than 800 workers into the high rise, even though county regulators had found asbestos-related violations in the building 16 times between August and December.

City officials insisted the property was safe for workers and the public, citing more than 230 air samples that came back within allowable state and federal air standards.

But after more asbestos was discovered in a conference room on Jan. 14, the city moved its employees out and closed the building to the public.

Since January 2017, the city has been paying \$535,000 a month to lease the building, formerly the Sempra Energy global headquarters. At the time, they expected to occupy the building within six months, but renovations and needed upgrades delayed the project.

At nearly \$18,000 a day, San Diego taxpayers so far have spent more than \$19 million to rent the property.

The lease-to-own agreement, in addition to assigning all liability for hazardous materials to the tenant, also

includes a provision that explicitly states that the city knew what shape the building was in before purchase.

"Tenant acknowledges that it is sufficiently familiar with and knowledgeable about the physical condition of the premises, including any elements of deferred maintenance or the presence of any hazardous materials," the document reads.

The 58-page contract called for a \$5 million offset for tenant improvements, paid by the seller. But after a series of delays unrelated to asbestos contaminations, city officials in 2018 sought and received council approval for \$30 million to pay for additional renovations.

#### 'Gift that keeps on giving'

City Council members have since criticized the Mayor's Office for its handling of the property, including during last week's update presentation.

"There were promises made that the city would be able to occupy the building very quickly," Councilwoman Monica Montgomery said. "It is a credibility issue. On this day, we have to trust what we are being told and what is in front of us."

Councilman Scott Sherman was more succinct: "It's become the gift that keeps on giving. Something just keeps happening with this building."

Michell accepted blame for the costly delays. She also issued a public apology to city employees who were moved into the high rise in December — 2½ years behind schedule — only to be moved out after more asbes-

tos was found.

"The buck stops with me," she told the council. "I am responsible. I will not delegate my responsibility. It is me. I want everyone to hear that loud and clear."

Councilwoman Jennifer Campbell, who is a retired family doctor, downplayed the health threat presented by the asbestos exposures.

"I'd like people to relax and take a deep breath, because if the asbestos is not airborne, you don't have to worry," she said. "There's been a big mountain made out of a molehill."

Michell and her deputy, Johnnie Perkins, said there was no telling how long the latest delay with the Ash street building will take or how much it might add to the cost of the property and its related improvements.

They said the Mayor's Office already has retained a special asbestos consultant to investigate what happened and to find a path forward. Specifically, Michell said, the review will seek to answer five questions: What happened? How can the problem be fixed? How long will it take to fix? How much will it cost? And how can the city ensure it won't happen again?

They also requested and received council approval to hire a law firm for up to \$150,000 to represent the city's interests related to the Ash Street asbestos violations.

The city is facing a \$25 million claim filed last month by a former contract engineer on the project, as well as a lawsuit filed in 2019 by employees exposed to as-

bestos in the Executive Complex, a separate office tower leased by the city.

The Hugo Parker law firm of San Francisco is representing the city in both complaints.

The Mayor's Office and the City Attorney's Office declined to answer specific questions from The San Diego Union-Tribune about why the city acquired the Ash Street premises "in their present condition without representation or warranty by landlord," as stated in the contract.

They also declined to explain what expertise they relied on to be "sufficiently familiar" with the physical condition of property, who are the vendors and consultants associated with the project, or why the city did not request an ADA-compliance review before signing the lease.

"All ADA improvements required as part of the City's tenant improvement are complete," city spokeswoman Christina Chadwick said in an email. "This includes things like bathroom stall installation, new concrete walkways on the exterior of the building, among other things. ADA compliance has not been a contributing factor to project delay."

A spokeswoman for City Attorney Mara Elliott said by email that her office needed more time to respond to the questions and noted that the lease agreement was negotiated under Elliott's predecessor.

#### A forensic assessment

City spokesman Scott Robinson said the city has

initiated a forensic assessment of "the events leading to the current situation" and will propose recommendations to address them.

"The consultant will have access to all contracts, city employees and records, and all parties will cooperate with those efforts," his statement said. "This analysis will provide answers to the questions you've asked and will be made public."

Experts say even the most thorough inspections do not always turn up every issue a building might present — such as asbestos, plumbing, electrical or other systems — because they are not always visible and can be difficult to nail down in older structures.

Stath Karras, who directs the Burnham-Moores Center for Real Estate at the University of San Diego, has been following developments related to the city's purchase of the Ash Street property.

He said he could not make a determination about whether the city acted reasonably without knowing more details about the transaction and what city officials knew when they signed the lease, including understanding why officials proceeded with the remodeling even though they knew the building contained asbestos.

"Did the city have a sense of the problems and did they have proper expertise to help them understand the magnitude of the issues?" Karras asked in an email. "If so, did the collective group underestimate the magnitude of the problems and

could they have mitigated this through more complete due diligence?"

The city proposed acquiring the 19-story office tower to consolidate much of its downtown workforce into a single location, two blocks north of City Hall, and to move Development Services out of an aging building west of City Hall.

In October 2016, when the Mayor's Office asked the City Council to approve the 20-year deal, they said the property needed little more than a \$10,000 power scrub before 800 workers could move in by July 2017.

But squabbles between city departments over which would be relocated pushed back the opening, and a later decision to move a total of 1,100 or more employees into the building created additional design and planning delays.

The renovations for those added workers led to some of the asbestos exposures. The city's handling of the initial asbestos violations in August has contributed to new violations, the county said.

The county Air Pollution Control District recently issued two additional notices of asbestos violations. On Jan. 17 county regulators issued a public-nuisance violation saying the city discharged asbestos-containing fireproofing into a 17th-floor conference room. A week later, a similar violation was issued when asbestos-containing fireproofing was discovered above some ceiling tiles, records show.

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