

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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NEW YORK

Trump lashes out from stand

Ex-president takes aim at judge, state attorney general during testimony at his civil fraud trial

By Jill Colvin, Michael R. Sisak, Jennifer Peltz and Eric Tucker The Associated Press

NEW YORK » Former President Donald Trump vigorously defended his wealth and business Monday, tangling from the wit-

ness stand with the judge overseeing his civil fraud trial and denouncing as a “political witch hunt” a lawsuit accusing him of dramatically inflating his net worth. Trump’s long-awaited testimony about property valuations and financial statements was

punctuated by personal jabs at a judge he said was biased against him and at the New York attorney general, whom he derided as a “political hack.” He proudly boasted of his real estate business — “I’m worth billions of dollars more than the financial statements” — and disputed claims that he had deceived banks and insurers. “This is the opposite of fraud,” TRUMP » PAGE 8



Former President Donald Trump waits to take the witness stand in New York Supreme Court on Monday.

EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COMMUNITY



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL KITADA

The ceremony gave 59 Jewish Holocaust survivors the faith-affirming coming-of-age rites that were denied them under Nazi rule.

IN OC, A HOLOCAUST WRONG IS RIGHTED

Irvine gathering makes up for bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs that survivors never had

By Lou Ponsi and Hanna Kang Southern California News Group

In the Jewish faith, when a bar mitzvah is held for a 13-year-old boy or a bat mitzvah for a 12-year-old girl, they are then considered religiously responsible adults within their faith.

For 59 Holocaust survivors from Orange and San Diego counties who came of age during war or in the years of tumult after, and who never had the opportunity to affirm their faith through the sacred rites of passage, a b’nai mitzvah (the term for a ceremony for multiple people) held Sunday at the Merage Jewish Community Center in Irvine was described as an “overdue celebration” of their RITUALS » PAGE 6



Ciner holds a Torah so some of the attendees can kiss it. The event, which drew the survivors and their loved ones from Orange and San Diego counties to the Merage Jewish Community Center, was sponsored by the Honig Family Foundation, a nonprofit started by a Newport Beach philanthropist.

MIDEAST WAR

North Gaza is isolated from south by Israel

Forces expected to enter largest city soon, engage Hamas fighters on ground

By Najib Jobain, Jack Jeffery and Lee Keath The Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, GAZA STRIP » The Israeli army severed northern Gaza from the rest of the besieged territory and pounded it with airstrikes Monday, preparing for expected ground battles with Hamas militants in Gaza’s largest city and an even bloodier phase of the month-old war.

Already, the Palestinian death toll surpassed 10,000, the Health Ministry of the Hamas-run Gaza Strip said Monday. The ministry does not distinguish between fighters and civilians. Some 1,400 Israelis have died, mostly civilians killed in the Oct. 7 incursion by Hamas that started the war.

The war has quickly become the deadliest Israeli-Palestinian violence since Israel’s establishment 75 years ago, with no end in sight as Israel vows to remove GAZA » PAGE 11

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Boat captain found guilty in blaze that left 34 dead

By Stefanie Dazio The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES » A scuba dive boat captain was convicted Monday of criminal negligence in the deaths of 34 people killed in a fire aboard the vessel in 2019, the deadliest maritime disaster in recent U.S. history.

The U.S. attorney’s office in Los Angeles confirmed Jerry Boylan was found guilty of one count of misconduct or neglect of ship officer, a pre-Civil War statute colloquially known as seaman’s manslaughter that was designed to FIRE » PAGE 6

NFL



Chargers keep a firm grip on Jets in 27-6 victory

Defense collects eight sacks, Austin Ekeler scores two TDs as L.A. evens record at 4-4. SPORTS

CALIFORNIA

Who’s the mystery man behind new sports betting measures?

Zach Young of New Haven, Conn., places a bet at one of the new sports wagering kiosks at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Conn., in 2021. SUSAN HAIGH THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



By John Woolfolk Bay Area News Group

California voters last year dealt a crushing bust to a pair of competing ballot initiatives to legalize sports wagering, but the Golden State is too big of a prize for gaming interests to just fold and walk away. Now, a mystery player has anted up for another round at the ballot box. Proponents have filed with

the state attorney general’s office to launch a pair of proposed measures for the November 2024 ballot that would allow on-site and online sports betting in California through the state’s recognized Indian tribes. But California’s gaming tribes aren’t on board, and it’s unclear who’s bankrolling the effort.

“That seems to be the million dollar question: Who are these GAMBLING » PAGE 8

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ELECTION

Judge to weigh effort to stop Santa Ana recall over district map

By Michael Slaten
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A court filing seeking an injunction to stop the recall election of Santa Ana Councilmember Jessie Lopez is expected to be heard by a judge today, after questions arose over which ward map should have been used to gather signatures.

Lawyers representing resident Guadalupe Ocampo filed the request Friday, arguing the election is invalid because it failed to collect enough valid signatures and ballots were sent to ineligible voters. More



JEFF GRITCHEN
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Santa Ana Councilmember Jessie Lopez speaks Jan. 30 about a recall campaign against her. Voting on the recall has begun.

than 350 voters received ballots who shouldn't have, according to the filing, and more than 1,100 peo-

ple who could vote in the election didn't get a ballot. Lopez was elected to Ward 3 in 2020, before the boundaries of that district were changed in 2022 based on the latest U.S. census. The 2022 version was used in calculating how many signatures needed to be collected to force the recall election and what voters would receive ballots. O.C. Registrar of Voters Bob Page contacted Santa Ana leaders about the map question on Oct. 26.

The filing requests the court issue a declaration that the city was re-

quired to certify the recall based on pre-redistricting boundaries. If the court doesn't stop the election, the request asks the judge to have ballots issued to all registered voters in the pre-redistricted boundaries of Ward 3 and not count ballots cast by voters not within that area.

Voting is already underway in the Nov. 14 special election.

Ocampo, a registered voter in the pre-redistricted boundaries of Ward 3, does not live in the ward after the new boundaries were drawn in 2022

and did not receive a ballot, according to the court filing. She says in the filing she voted in the 2020 election and is now being "deprived" of her right to vote on who should represent her community on the City Council.

Lopez could not be immediately reached for comment. The Santa Ana City Council deadlocked last week on whether to cancel the election, with at least one councilmember saying it should be up to a court to decide.

Tim Rush, chair of the recall campaign against Lopez, said the filing is

just another tactic to kill the recall. "That's unfortunate, especially at this late hour," Rush said. "It was interesting that nobody claimed that they felt their civil rights have been violated up until now." Rush said the recall supporters followed all the directions given by the city clerk and "if she had told us to turn around three times, and click our heels, and point north, well that's what we'd do. We did what she told us to do." A hearing is scheduled before Judge Craig Griffin at 8:45 a.m. today.

Rituals

FROM PAGE 1

"Jewish identity and heritage that was robbed from them during their youth."

When Walter Lachman, 95, was to have his bar mitzvah in 1941, the ceremony had to be held in a schoolhouse because all the synagogues in the community had been destroyed by Nazi violence. His mother died of leukemia when he was 7 and his father of tuberculosis just four years later.

"Mad at God" for all he had lost, Lachman, who had been born in Berlin, refused during the ceremony to read from the Torah. The next year he was put on a train with his grandmother and taken to the first of three concentration camps he survived before being liberated April 15, 1945.

The Laguna Niguel resident said he found closure properly commemorating the belated rite of passage with Sunday's celebration.

"I don't know what got into my head as a 13-year-old kid," Lachman said, having regretted his decision later in life. "I've been looking forward to this event."

The ceremony was sponsored by the Honig Family Foundation, a nonprofit started by Newport Beach philanthropist and entrepreneur Ken Honig, and featured survivors who immigrated to the U.S. from 14 countries, including Algeria, France, Germany and Ukraine.

"Their Holocaust-era



PHOTO BY MICHAEL KITADA

Jewish prayer shawls are held over the participants in a b'nai mitzvah ceremony involving 59 Holocaust survivors on Monday at Irvine's Merage Jewish Community Center. The survivors had been denied their traditional bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs under Nazi rule and during the tumult after World War II.

experiences vary tremendously, as does their country of origin, age and stage of life at the time of WWII," said Honig, a student of the Holocaust who helped build the Merage center and fund Chapman University's Holocaust studies program.

"Theirs is a tapestry, a big picture made up of many different individual stories threaded throughout that time in history," he said during Sunday's ceremony. "We have here those who were young adults and those who were infants or in utero and who may not have their per-

sonal memories, but whose lives were imprinted during the years following the war as they came to understand their collective losses."

The oldest survivor to be celebrated in Sunday's b'nai mitzvah was 102-year-old Helen Weil of Laguna Woods.

She was born in Germany in 1921, and her parents and older sister were deported to a concentration camp in 1938, where they died. With help, she managed to escape to England and stay with a family in the Yorkshire region be-

fore eventually obtaining a visa to come to the United States at age 20. She never had the chance for a traditional bat mitzvah.

"Now I'm here to still enjoy life," Weil said, describing the "wonderful" feeling of participating in a b'nai mitzvah. "It's a holiday we are celebrating today."

Laura Breitberg, 83, was just 8 months old when war broke out in Russia and her family fled to Siberia.

"And on the way we were bombed several times and some of my relatives were killed," said Breitberg, a San

Diego County resident.

"I think that today, it's a great thing," Breitberg said of the b'nai mitzvah held for the survivors. "And especially very symbolic for me personally because I'm getting bat mitzvah to celebrate, to be proud of being Jewish, to celebrate this thing and to show the younger generation how important it is to keep your Jewish identity."

Honig said he was inspired to organize the b'nai mitzvah during a trip to Jerusalem in January, when he made a pilgrimage to the

Fire

FROM PAGE 1

hold steamboat captains and crew responsible for maritime disasters. Boylan was the only person to face criminal charges connected to the fire.

He could get 10 years behind bars when he's sentenced Feb. 8.

Relatives of those killed hugged one another and wept outside the courtroom after the verdict was read. They thanked the FBI case agent who led the investigation.

Clark and Kathleen McIlvain, whose son Charles died at age 44, said they were relieved that there is finally accountability for their loss.

"We are very happy that the world knows that Jerry Boylan was responsible for this and has been found guilty," Clark McIlvain said.

Boylan can appeal. His

public defenders declined to comment as they left the courthouse.

The verdict comes more than four years after the Sept. 2, 2019, tragedy, which prompted changes to maritime regulations, congressional reform and civil lawsuits.

The Conception was anchored off Santa Cruz Island, 25 miles south of Santa Barbara, when it caught fire before dawn on the final day of a three-day excursion, sinking less than 100 feet from shore.

Thirty-three passengers and a crew member perished, trapped in a bunkroom below deck. Among the dead were the deckhand, who had landed her dream job; an environmental scientist who did research in Antarctica; a globe-trotting couple; a Singaporean data scientist; and a family of three sisters, their father and his wife.

Boylan was the first to

abandon ship and jump overboard. Four crew members who joined him also survived.

Although the exact cause of the blaze remains undetermined, the prosecutors and defense sought to assign blame throughout the trial.

The U.S. Attorney's Office said Boylan failed to post the required roving night watch and never properly trained his crew in firefighting. The lack of the roving watch meant the fire was able to spread undetected across the 75-foot boat.

Boylan's attorneys sought to pin blame on boat owner Glen Fritzler, who with his wife owns Truth Aquatics Inc., which operated the Conception and two other scuba dive boats, often around the Channel Islands.

They argued that Fritzler was responsible for failing to train the crew in firefighting and other safety measures, as well as creat-

ing a lax seafaring culture they called "the Fritzler way," in which no captain who worked for him posted a roving watch.

Three days after the inferno, Truth Aquatics and the Fritzlerts filed a lawsuit under a pre-Civil War provision of maritime law that allows it to limit its liability to the remains of the boat, which was a total loss. The time-tested legal maneuver has been successfully employed by the owners of the Titanic and other vessels, and requires the Fritzlerts show they were not at fault.

The couple's attorneys did not respond to requests for comment. U.S. Attorney Martin Estrada declined to comment when asked if the Fritzlerts would be charged now that prosecutors secured a guilty verdict against Boylan.

"The captain is responsible for everything that happens on the ship, including, most importantly, the

safety of everyone on board that ship," Estrada said outside the courthouse Monday. Boylan "failed, utterly failed" in those duties, Estrada told reporters.

Two to three dozen family members of the victims attended each day of the trial in downtown Los Angeles. U.S. District Court Judge George Wu warned them against displaying emotion in the courtroom as they watched a 24-second cellphone video showing some of their loved ones' last moments.

Kendra Chan, 26, was killed on the Conception, along with her father, Raymond "Scott" Chan, 59. Kendra's mother, Vicki Moore, said Monday that justice was served.

"A strong message came through that if you are captain of a boat, you are truly responsible and there are consequences if you don't follow the law," Moore said outside the courtroom after the verdict.

While the criminal trial is over, several civil lawsuits remain ongoing.

Three days after the blaze, Truth Aquatics filed suit in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles under a pre-Civil War provision of maritime law that allows it to limit its liability to the value of the remains of the boat, which was a total loss. The time-tested legal maneuver has been successfully employed by the owners of the Titanic and other vessels and requires the Fritzlerts to show they were not at fault.

That case is pending, as well as others filed by victims' families against the Coast Guard for alleged lax enforcement of the roving watch requirement.

The Channel Islands draw boaters, divers and hikers. Five of the eight Channel Islands comprise the national park and Santa Cruz is the largest within the park at about 96 square miles.

Coyotes

FROM PAGE 3

ronment."

The 1,300-acre coastal estuary is an important open space and coastal wetland with an estimated 800 species living there, including coyotes — they play an important role in helping keep the rodent population under control.

Coyotes are "opportunistic feeders," feeding on anything from rodents to fruit, garbage and pet food.

"Historically, we had found meats out in the areas and we immediately did outreach," Borde said. In an area off Graham and Bolsa Chica streets, there was evidence of someone who had put leftover meat in the lot. In a neighborhood near the wetlands, someone left be-

hind steak.

"The one thing that I want to highlight is that the coyotes can be unpredictable and in some cases cause human injury," she said.

Many attacks are directly related to food sourcing or human feeding.

"We don't want that, we want visitors to feel safe when they're here. We also want to protect the wildlife. So prevention is key. Even though humans sometimes think they're doing good for wildlife, they are actually causing more harm," Borde said about trying to provide food for the animals. "They become habituated and it can be more dangerous for pets and humans."

She also warns people to not leave pet food or water outside at home.

"If they're able to access these things, or if we're

feeding them, it changes their natural behavior," she said, adding that a "problematic coyote that has become habituated to humans cannot be trapped and released somewhere else because you're not fixing the problem. You're just moving it to another neighborhood."

In some cases, a coyote may have to be killed if it becomes a safety risk to humans.

It is illegal to feed the wildlife, and is considered harassment of animals, Borde said.

"You're basically altering or disrupting their natural behavior. Naturally, they should be out hunting, foraging — they are part of our ecosystem they need to be eating natural rodents, whatever it be, not human food, not pet food," she said. "And then it can also cause



COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Officials suspect that coyotes near the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve are being fed and are warning people about the dangers. Officials say feeding them upsets their natural habitat.

them to eventually be a human safety risk."

Last week, there was a human interaction where the coyote wasn't aggres-

sive, but it wasn't fearful, either, Borde said.

"That is a sign that they are being fed and it's near the urban area. It's right

near the neighborhood at the edge of the property where we're seeing them on the east side of the ecological reserve," she said.

A month ago, there were seven reports in three days about coyotes approaching humans.

The coyotes recently encountering humans are standing nearby, within 5-to-10 feet, just staring at the people, likely waiting for food, according to reports.

"Hazing is absolutely critical in that situation," Borde said. "You want to make yourself big, make sounds, clap your hands. Whatever you need to do for human safety that makes that coyote very uncomfortable."

It's also important, Borde added, to report encounters so officials can track interactions or acts of aggression.