

La Mesa to provide rental subsidies to seniors

Jewish Family Service officials hope to launch program in more cities

By Gary Warth
UNION-TRIBUNE

LA MESA — Up to 40 La Mesa seniors will begin receiving \$500 monthly rental subsidies this year as part of a pilot program the city is launching to help prevent older residents from becoming homeless.

The La Mesa City Council approved \$300,000 for the program in February 2024, with the money coming from the \$10.8 million the city received in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding.

Last month, the council approved a \$70,000 contract with Jewish Family Service of San Diego to run the program.

“The La Mesa City Council recognizes that housing affordability is a critical issue for seniors, many of whom live on fixed incomes and face increasing rental costs,” La Mesa Mayor Mark Arapostathis said in an email.

Arapostathis also noted that 25% of individuals engaged by the city’s Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement team in 2023 were older than 55, and the number of seniors entering homelessness continues to rise.

JFS Chief Operating Officer Dana Toppel said La Mesa is the first city they have contracted with for the rental assistance program, and she hopes other cities will also sign on.

The program is called a shallow senior subsidy rental assistance because it provides just a portion of a person’s rent, which Toppel said is often enough to prevent someone from becoming homeless.

“It’s a lot more cost-effective in the long run than having older adults with major medical issues living on our streets or in their cars,” she said. “So not only is it more dignified, but it’s also financially very prudent.”

Toppel said a University of San Francisco study in 2023 found that monthly subsidies of \$300 to \$500 or one-time subsidies of \$5,000 to

See RENTAL on Page B4

Dogs using school fields creates issues

Officials seek to curb off-leash activity at S.D.’s joint-use sites

By David Garrick
UNION-TRIBUNE

San Diego officials are scrambling to crack down on people letting their dogs run free on school playing fields, which have become hot spots for illegal off-leash activity because the security fencing for kids also keeps dogs enclosed.

City and school officials have intermittently closed joint-use parks at five elementary schools since last year to send a message they’ll no longer tolerate off-leash dogs damaging turf, biting students or leaving poop for them to step in.

But because those closures risk depriving law-abiding residents of recreational opportunities without stopping illegal off-leash activity, officials are launching a new campaign using color-coded warning signs.

When school officials get reports of bites or find lots of dog poop and damaged turf on a school field, they will shift the sign there from green to yellow. If things get worse, the sign will turn red and the park will be closed.

The city will design, pay for and install the new signs.

The new campaign is another attempt to encourage dog owners to be responsible and thoughtful, without resorting to a crackdown where San Diego Humane Society enforcement officers start writing expensive citations.

“It is unfortunate that the

actions of a few people violating the rules have resulted in the joint-use park areas being closed to protect public safety,” said Nicole Darling, a city spokesperson. “We ask pet owners to take responsibility for their animals and help ensure that shared spaces, like joint-use park facilities, can remain open for the community.”

The off-leash problem — which San Diego Unified School District officials say keeps getting worse — could jeopardize a highly touted partnership that has created 94 joint-use parks at school sites across the city.

When schools are out of session, school playing fields become public parks that often provide the only recreational open space in a dense urban neighborhood.

But there’s a problem: The

special fencing at school fields that aims to keep students safe from kidnappers and drug dealers also happens to create an ideal space where dog owners can run their pets off-leash without fear they will escape.

“The perimeter security fencing is for student and staff protection and safety during the school day and provides site security after hours, but a large grass field with a full perimeter fence appeals to pet owners that wish to allow their dogs off-leash, since they are contained by the park perimeter fence,” said Samer Naji, a school district spokesperson.

The negatives of off-leash activity include dogs digging holes that lead to twisted ankles, urine destroying turf and liability for injuries from dog bites, Naji

See SCHOOLS on Page B4

HONORING PURIM



Dan Pritsker writes the names of visitors in Hebrew and explains the language to them during the Purim celebration held on Sunday at the House of Israel in Balboa Park. He is dressed as Haman, the villain of the story that inspires Purim. BRITTANY CRUZ-FEJERAN / FOR THE U-T

SOMEONE SAN DIEGO SHOULD KNOW

Hayden family prioritizes helping, housing for East County homeless

Couple run program to provide treatment, job skills training, more

By Jan Goldsmith
FOR THE UNION-TRIBUNE

“If we could duplicate what we’re doing here, I believe it would help solve homelessness,” said Julie Hayden, CEO of East County Transitional Living Center.

“We have the model that works,” added her husband, Ray Hayden, who helps run the center.

The Haydens, who reside in Lakeside with their three children, met in 1995 when Julie was 15 and Ray was 17. They were married in 2000, sharing a common career goal of helping people.

“I grew up in a traumatic childhood,” Ray said. “I turned my life around when I met Julie. We volunteered through our church and became a team and wanted to work in the ministry helping people.”

Both earned bachelor’s degrees in Bible studies and doctorates in psychology.

After completing their education, Julie helped clients with addiction and mental health issues, rising to become a clinical director. Ray worked in the business side of psychology, running clinics and training programs.

Since becoming the nonprofit’s CEO in 2023, Julie has focused on inspiring homeless clients to help themselves rather than just provide housing.

“We stabilize them at first, then



Julie and Ray Hayden’s East County Transitional Living Center has more than 500 beds across multiple locations. JAN GOLDSMITH

we prepare them with life skills and when they’re finished with the program and are on solid ground, they leave us and enjoy their lives,” Ray explained.

Ray conducts training that includes inspirational goal-setting; relationship, job and management skills; resume-writing and job-interviewing.

Participants get job training and work through East County Transitional Living Center’s outside contracts and contribute to their housing costs. “Their sense of self-worth is improved quickly and they learn how to keep a job and apartment,” Julie said.

“We have 540 beds, includ-

ing family and single units. We’re always full and there is a waiting list of 500. Lots of agencies refer clients to us.”

“I love we have so many we’re helping, but it’s heartbreaking there are 500 families who want to be here but can’t be. When they’re here, I see their lives transform. We want to give everyone a chance at a better life.”

The center runs a 28- to 60-day emergency shelter program and a one-year program. Although the one-year program is faith-based in that Bible study is part of the curriculum, the emergency shelter

See KNOW on Page B2

Town hall crowd wants to know how to resist Trump

Rep. Mike Levin says people need to speak out against policies

By Blake Nelson
UNION-TRIBUNE

Versions of the same question were asked over and over.

How can the average person keep the federal workforce from being slashed? What’s the best way to resist Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency? How should citizens oppose President Donald Trump?

Rep. Mike Levin, a member of San Diego’s congressional delegation, returned repeatedly to the same answer: People around the country needed to speak up. “You all remember the Women’s March, the March for Our Lives, the Science March,” Levin told a packed theater in San Juan Capistrano on Sunday afternoon, referring to protests from Trump’s first term. “All of that happened not because anybody in Washington told them to march, it happened organically, it happened from the bottom up — and that’s what needs to happen again.”

Levin, a 46-year-old Democrat from San Juan Capistrano, represents the relatively purple 49th Congressional District that stretches from Del Mar in San Diego County to Ladera Ranch in Orange County. Much of that

coastal area had been in Republican hands until Levin first won in 2018 — he was re-elected to a fourth term in November — but the crowd that showed up to San Juan Hills High School for his latest in-person town hall was overwhelmingly opposed to the current presidential administration.

The few times attendees became frustrated were when Levin didn’t appear angry enough about what’s happening in the nation’s capital. After a woman asked about Trump ignoring judicial rulings, Levin noted that many lawsuits challenging the White House’s sweeping executive orders were headed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“That’s when we will really see whether we are in a near constitutional crisis or a full-blown constitutional crisis,” Levin said, adding that he was relatively confident that a majority of justices would vote to rein in the president.

The crowd grew restless. “I don’t think so,” one person murmured.

Another time, a woman who appeared to be in her 30s interrupted the event to point out that nobody from younger generations had so far been able to ask a question. (Much of the crowd appeared to be older and attendees had to submit questions in advance.) The woman was soon

See LEVIN on Page B2

