

SUMMER 2021

# SDSU

MAGAZINE

Director **Destin Daniel Cretton** ('11)  
on the importance of Marvel's first  
Asian American superhero

## BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

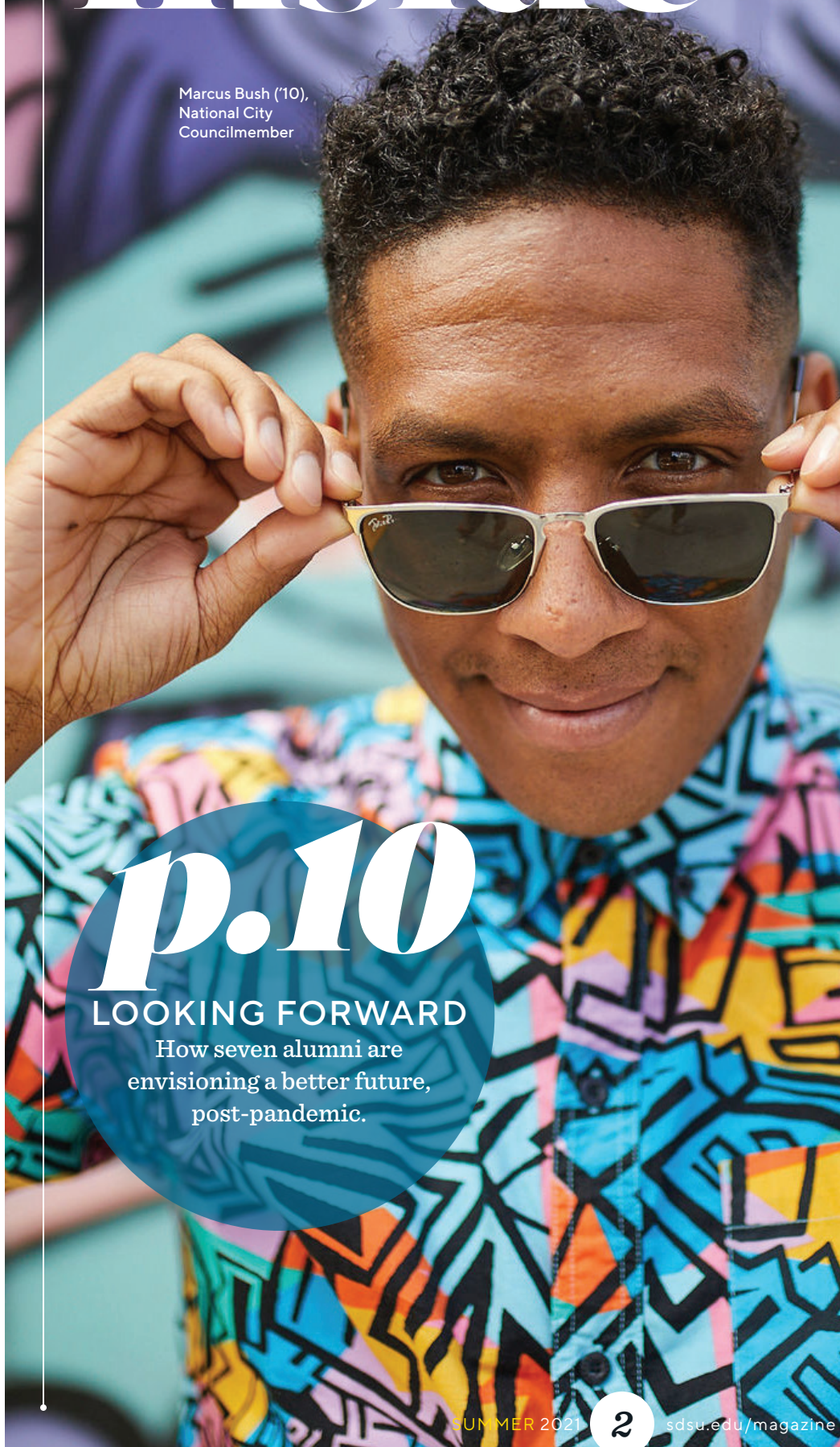
WHAT'S NEXT  
POST-PANDEMIC

MISSION VALLEY:  
STEEL'S UP!

REIMAGINING  
THE ARTS

# inside

Marcus Bush ('10),  
National City  
Councilmember



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# SDSU

MAGAZINE

SDSU Strategic Communications and Public Affairs publishes SDSU Magazine and distributes it to members of the SDSU alumni, faculty, staff and friends.

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Photograph: Matt Furman

Photographs: Sandy Huffaker

FROM THE



PRESIDENT

## SUMMER '21 IS A TIME OF GREAT ANTICIPATION AT SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY.

First and foremost: We are delighted — overjoyed, really — to prepare for a return to mostly in-person instruction this fall. It has been a long 16 months, and I can hardly wait to see a full population of students once again traversing Aztec Walk, heading to classes in the Old Quad and watching our athletes compete.

Campus life will look and feel a little different, to be sure. But our returning students have already shown the resilience and perseverance to thrive under extraordinary conditions, and the vaccines that have made the return to our in-person activities and traditions possible are an amazing display of the research and science we highly value.

Also awaiting our students is an expanded Aztec Recreation Center (p. 4), a \$77.6 million project to bring this facility up to date. And we're now just barely a year from the opening of a new Aztec Stadium, the very first feature of SDSU Mission Valley (p. 8), which I visited for a construction tour last month (see photo on right). I could see the outline of the bowl for the eventual football field, and a whole section of seating that was beginning to take shape.

With ARC and Aztec Stadium, SDSU is building a better future. That's the theme, both literal and figurative, of this issue. Our centerpiece looks at the future through the eyes of seven alumni who are particularly suited to forecast our post-pandemic lives in public health, entertainment, the arts and public affairs. In another feature, you'll learn how philanthropy is advancing a new Performing Arts District.

And our cover story on writer/director Destin Daniel Cretton ('11) kicks off a section on SDSU's singular contributions to an important part of our culture: comics.

Enjoy the reading that awaits you. ●



ADELA DE LA TORRE, PH.D.

# state lately

## ARC EXPANSION SET TO OPEN IN FALL

THERE'S A NEW VIEW FROM AZTEC WALK. An expansion of the Aztec Recreation Center (ARC), which got underway in March 2020 just after the campus emptied in response to COVID-19, is on pace to finish up this fall. Construction will then turn to a renovation of the original features, built in 1997.

The \$77.6 million update is bringing some of the latest fitness trends and sustainability features to one of SDSU's most popular but undersized facilities. The Associated Students-managed

center will grow to 138,000 from 78,000 square feet to meet user demand. The new two-story structure will include synthetic turf in an open-space area for functional training, an indoor rock-climbing wall and bouldering area, and a hot yoga studio. An indoor track, about an eighth of a mile to a lap, will have views of campus in every direction. The facility also will have five fitness studios (up from two), seven court and gym spaces, areas for SDSU's growing Adaptive Athletics program and a Shake Smart. It aims to be LEED Double Platinum-certified, with recycled water to irrigate landscaping and flush toilets.

ARC director Mark Zakrzewski expects the new space to become a counterpart to the Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union across the mesa — with a similar “living room” vibe, where friends socialize between classes. He says, “We know that sense of community, sense of belonging, is really important.” —*Jeff Ristine*



Photograph: Sandy Huffaker

## NEW DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAMS

BUSY WORKING PROFESSIONALS IN THE IMPERIAL VALLEY who are looking to finish up and receive a bachelor's degree with a flexible schedule will now have a way to do so. Through a brand new partnership between SDSU Imperial Valley and SDSU Global Campus beginning this fall, faculty will be offering two new online programs: a bachelor's in business administration and a bachelor's in child development. Fowler College of Business faculty will be teaching key business concepts, entrepreneurship, strategy and more. Through SDSU's Department of Child and Family Development, the bachelor's in child development students will gain 120 hours of community outreach experience in the region working directly with child and family services providers.

# 109:

Graduates who walked the stage at SDSU Georgia's commencement in Tbilisi on June 8. All are new STEM professionals, including the first-ever cohort of civil and construction engineers.

Photograph: Alex Zazueta



## GO AZTECS! 4 CONFERENCE CHAMPS THIS SPRING

**1.** Outdoor Track and Field Mountain West Conference (MWC) champs — plus nine track and five field All-MWC athletes, with Head Coach Shelia Burrell picking up her fifth MWC Coach of the Year honors.

**2.** Water Polo Golden Coast Conference regular season co-champs, with All-Americans Emily Bennett and Karli Canale.

**3.** Men's Basketball MWC regular season champs, with Matt Mitchell as MWC Player of the Year and Head Coach Brian Dutcher as MWC Coach of the Year.

**4.** Men's Basketball MWC tournament champions.

## HOW FANS CHEERED THEM ON VIRTUALLY:

Bought more than 700 tickets for the Aztec Virtual Sellout of the MWC tournament and more than 600 fan cutouts for the stands at Viejas Arena. The Show must go on!



## A FRESH NEW LOOK AT SDSU IMPERIAL VALLEY

BY THE END OF SUMMER, all 12 buildings on the Calexico and Brawley sites will be painted the same distinctive white with turquoise trim — Balsa and Blue Spruce, from Sherwin-Williams — used on the San Diego campus. “The consistent color scheme between the campuses is a visual reminder that ‘We are One SDSU,’” says Dean Gregorio Ponce. The makeover began in December and also involved giving the buildings “a bit of love” such as repairing wall cracks and re-patching stucco, says Maribel Madero, the project lead and director of business and financial services. “We’ve received positive comments from students, staff and faculty,” she says. “The light color helps the landscape around the buildings pop and gives a different vibe when you walk into the campus.”

**Welcome to the Family, San Diego City College!** The latest SDSU Microsite Degree Completion Program location joins Southwestern College and San Diego Mesa College.



## COUPLE CREATES ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIP

**DENNIS SZETO ('75) AND HIS WIFE, ELAINE SZETO,**

donated \$500,000 to the San Diego State University Fowler College of Business in June.

The gift was matched in full from Ron and Alexis Fowler's \$25 million 2016 endowment and will provide \$1 million to create the Dennis and Elaine Szeto Endowed Professorship in Finance.

Endowed professorships recognize teaching excellence and are reserved for the most outstanding instructors. They help attract and retain top, talented faculty members.

Dennis, a private equity investor and business advisor, and Elaine, whose career is in health care social work and medical communications, met at a Castro Valley church. "We are both Christian believers and we both believe in giving back," Elaine says.

Other recent endowed professorships to Fowler College include the Robert and Amy Abramson Endowed Professorship in Finance and the Terry L. Atkinson Endowed Professorship in Finance. —Tobin Vaughn



On Earth Day, the U.S. committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030. What are the most impactful actions we can take as individuals to help fight climate change?

**A** WE NEED REAL CHANGE IN FOSSIL FUEL ENERGY CONSUMPTION, USES AND EMISSIONS. I'm thrilled that the U.S. is committed to making that happen because that level of substantive change is only going to happen through policy changes.

As individuals we play a critical role in demanding systemic change from our government leaders. There are also meaningful everyday actions each of us can take. A part of this is just being aware and informed about climate change. It's similar to how more people are aware of the importance of a healthy diet than they were five or 10 years ago. We need that same awareness about a healthy climate and a greater understanding of the impact our actions have on the environment: emissions from our cars, how much plastic we use, the trips we go on, all this equals our carbon footprints.

Reducing meat consumption is one great example of how micro-decisions at the individual level can change the status quo. I'm a vegetarian but my family eats meat so this is something we talk about at home and something I talk about with my students in my classes. A high level of meat consumption in the U.S., particularly beef, is tied to deforestation and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions. By reducing, not even eliminating, how much beef each person consumes, the actions of millions of individuals can make a real difference in lowering carbon emissions and decoupling consumption from environmental degradation.

Climate change is already part of our everyday lives. We need to adapt and mitigate that now. In Southern California, we're witnessing sea levels rising, cliff erosion in places like Del Mar or inundation in Imperial Beach, and a now almost year-round wildfire season.

Climate solutions are about using less and being smarter with how we use resources: conserve water and energy, improve efficiency of cars and appliances, switch to desert landscaping instead of thirsty lawns, avoid the use-and-throw away culture of plastic forks, spoons, straws and cups, recognizing that by protecting the environment we are protecting our communities. Personally, I'm big on reduce, reuse, recycle. For me that means bringing my own mug to a coffee shop (when it's safe to do so) and avoiding 'use and dispose' products and those with excess plastic packaging. —as told to Padma Nagappan

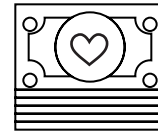
### ASK A RESEARCHER



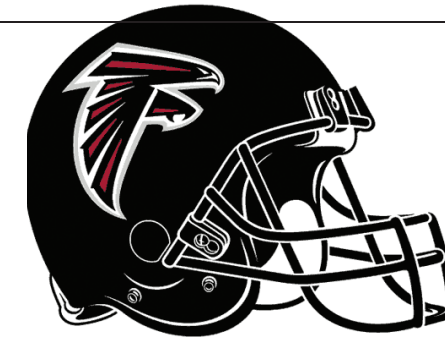
**REBECCA LEWISON, CONSERVATION ECOLOGIST AND PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY**

# statelately

/By the Numbers

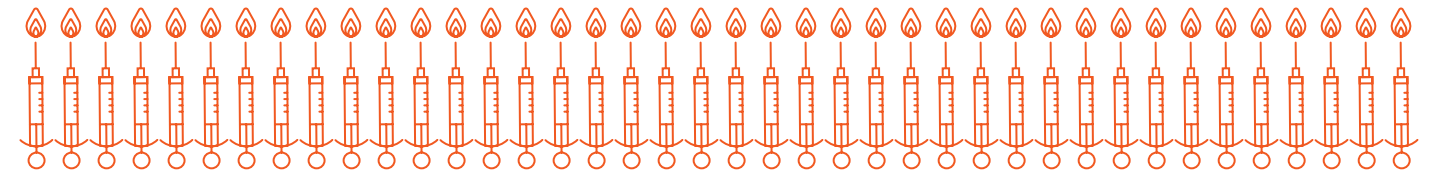


**1,950/ DONORS WHO TOGETHER CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN \$301,000 TO SDSU'S DAY OF GIVING ON MARCH 9.**



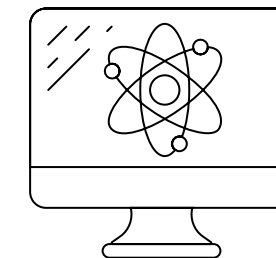
**No. 23/** Aztec star cornerback **Darren Hall** went to the Atlanta Falcons in the fourth round of the NFL Draft. He is the eighth SDSU football player selected in the last five drafts.

**100/** Artifacts currently displayed at the "Nathan Harrison: Born Enslaved, Died a San Diego Legend" exhibit at the San Diego History Center, curated by anthropologist Seth Mallios. He and students recovered 50,000 items in a decade of excavation at Palomar Mountain.



Happy 40th anniversary to the School of Public Health!  
About 75% of the County of San Diego's public health workforce are its alumni.

**3/** College of Engineering faculty members who received National Science Foundation CAREER awards this spring for research on drones, human/robot interactions and rooftop solar energy.



**296/** Student researchers who presented their award-winning findings at the 2021 Student Research Symposium.



**380/** NURSING STUDENTS WHO HELPED VACCINATE THE PUBLIC AT COUNTY SITES.

**9,041/** SDSU graduates who walked the stage during seven historic ceremonies over three days at Petco Park in May.

Photographs: Sandy Huffaker

## STEEL'S GOING UP!

**AZTEC STADIUM IS STARTING TO TAKE SHAPE AT THE SDSU MISSION VALLEY SITE** — with construction on track for the Aztecs' Sept. 3, 2022 home opener against the Arizona Wildcats.

The first structural steel columns for the 35,000-capacity venue went up in May, starting with the south side, and will continue through mid-September. Concrete blocks for future concession stands also went up in May. This work is mirrored by final demolition on San Diego Stadium, including the removal of its 1,450 supporting steel piles from 70 to 100 feet underground.

The remains of concrete poured in 1966 — 125,000 cubic yards — is being recycled along with parking-lot asphalt and kept for use as fill and hardscape. That's a key point, says Director of Construction James Cleaton, in achieving LEED Neighborhood Development for SDSU Mission Valley. (The Aztec Stadium project is also on track for LEED Gold certification.) The mammoth pile of rubble, known affectionately on-site as Mount Aztec, will be used to help lift the development site above the San Diego River and Murphy Canyon Creek floodplains, then later as a base for future streets and other hardscape.

The stadium is the focal point for 2021-22 construction, the first component of a redevelopment boom that will include space for research and collaboration, a river park, housing, shops and a hotel. Preparation for those future phases of SDSU Mission Valley is also underway. "We're putting in the initial infrastructure to allow for up to 4,600 residential units and an Innovation District," Cleaton says. "All of those need sewer, water and electrical, and fiber optic cable." —Jeff Ristine



**90%**  
Amount of the old San Diego Stadium that's being recycled.

**NEARLY 70:**  
Varieties of California and San Diego native plants, trees, shrubs and grass that will be planted on site.

**2 MILLION:**  
Square feet of asphalt that has been removed and crushed to be reused on site.

**428,458:**  
Square feet of available roof space located throughout SDSU Mission Valley that will incorporate solar panels.

**80+:**  
Acres of total park and open space at the site.

**\$750,000:**  
Gift from Ben Clay ('69) and Nikki Clay ('67, '72, '21 LHD), in support of the river park.

Photograph: Sandy Huffaker

A close-up portrait of Dr. Wilma Wooten, a Black woman with short, curly grey hair, wearing glasses and a dark blue blazer. She is looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting.

# LOOKING FORWARD

SEVEN ALUMNI ON HOW COVID-19 IMPACTED THEIR FIELDS — AND WHAT THEY PREDICT AS WE MOVE CLOSER TO A POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE.

Photograph: Sandy Hufaker

## PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER DR. WILMA WOOTEN: THE COVID-19 OUTLOOK IS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

County of San Diego Public Health Officer Wilma Wooten, M.D. ('90) leads the COVID-19 pandemic response and protects the health of more than 3 million residents — a job she takes very seriously.

When California reopened on June 15, COVID-19 vaccination rates were up and hospitalizations and ICU admissions down in San Diego County. But Dr. Wooten wouldn't be an effective public health officer if she threw caution to the wind. So she's sticking with her "Failure is not an option" pandemic mantra for now.

As a result, the county is laser-focused on working with community partners and health care workers to conduct outreach and education to get as many people as possible vaccinated.

The state goal is to administer at least one dose to 75% of the eligible population. At the time of this writing in late June, the county was already there with 77% having received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and 65% of all residents, age 12 and older, fully vaccinated — the highest vaccination rate in Southern California.

"We are still cautiously optimistic," Dr. Wooten says. "But we do see a light at the end of the tunnel."

Dr. Wooten has provided steady leadership since the pandemic began, even as other public health officers in California and nationwide resigned after harassment and resistance to public health orders. The San Diego Union-Tribune named her San Diegan of the Year in 2020, noting she "stood firm in

advocating for best practices," such as wearing masks, social distancing, limiting travel and avoiding indoor gatherings.

If there's an upside to the ordeal, Dr. Wooten says it may be the spotlight it cast on disparities in health services. "This pandemic really shed light on ills of our society that played an important part in who was getting sick and who was getting tested and who's getting vaccinated — and so we had to pay closer attention to that," she says.

Attention is also being focused on strengthening public health infrastructure — including the workforce, she says. That's why the longstanding relationship between the county and SDSU's School of Public Health has been so important.

**"SDSU was one of the first contractors we partnered with to push health workers into the community to engage those individuals that could not be reached by our case investigators or contact tracers," Dr. Wooten says.** The effort continues around testing and encouraging vaccination.

The county also relies on a pipeline of students to fill their ranks: An estimated 75% of their public health workforce are SDSU alumni. And Dr. Wooten only sees more interest in public health work from students called to action by the "once in a lifetime" nature of the pandemic.

"I'm certain that we will have more outbreaks and epidemics," she says, "but a pandemic of this magnitude — I hope that is not experienced again in our lifetime." —*Lisa Haney*

**ARCHITECT  
MATHILDA  
BIALK:  
EVERYONE  
NEEDS SAFE  
LIVING SPACES**



**P**ublic health threats throughout the centuries have inspired design and architecture styles.

Following tuberculosis outbreaks in the 1800s and the 1918 flu pandemic, architects incorporated sunshine and fresh air, believed curatives, into homes in the form of sleeping porches and loggias (rooms with one or more open sides) for napping and sunbathing. You can still see examples in many Craftsman bungalows in Southern California, though many have since been glazed in, according to Studio E Architects in San Diego.

Principal at the firm Mathilda Bialk ('04) says whether the COVID-19 pandemic inspires similar design changes remains to be seen. But one lasting effect the architect hopes it will have is addressing equity issues in housing.

For example, if you were fortunate enough to have a single family home with windows on both sides for fresh air and ventilation and a yard to hang out outside and not be around people, it was a luxury, she points out. "Whereas if you live in a more urban context or traditional lower income housing where there's minimal outdoor space and minimal ventilation, minimal windows, what a glaring inequality issue that is," she says. "Even to leave your unit to walk down the corridor is so different from someone who has a single family home and doesn't have that experience." We might start to see more open-ended corridors to address that, she says.

A lot of these livability issues have always been around. "It's just now, once you go through something, you realize how critical it is," she says. Bialk's firm primarily designs affording housing apartments with

an emphasis on addressing such needs.

She's currently hearing developers ask for more compartmentalization and workspaces both within living units and common spaces to accommodate those who are working from home and need to be able to close a door.

**"We're also changing how we think about outdoor space even," Bialk says.** "So rather than one huge outdoor communal space, trying to create some variety and ways that that can be broken up, so that people can have privacy and space between

them and their neighbors."

One change from the pandemic she sees as a positive is parklets creating more outdoor space. "I really hope that one of the outcomes of this is — specifically in San Diego — that really we start to realize maybe we don't need so many cars," Bialk says. "Maybe we need more outdoor spaces. Maybe grabbing a cup of coffee on the sidewalk is a really nice thing to do. And hopefully we can kind of harness that and keep that going." —L.H.

**SOCIAL  
ENTREPRENEUR  
MARIO SCADE:  
OUTDOOR AND  
MOBILE IS HERE  
TO STAY**



**M**ario Scade's Aire Fitness company turns old shipping containers into mobile outdoor fitness centers. In 2020 during the pandemic, he devised a way to convert the containers into QuikLAB mobile COVID-19 testing units for TPT Med Tech. Now, with vaccines quelling the outbreak in the U.S., the entrepreneur is looking to outfit the labs for service as health care centers in underserved communities.

"It's about access," Scade ('02) says. "This could be a solution for those neighborhoods."

The pandemic opened his eyes to other opportunities as well. With YMCAs, recreation centers and gyms forced to shut down or move their equipment outdoors, he saw a way to promote his mobile fitness centers as an affordable alternative to building and maintaining expensive fixed facilities. Additionally, his semi-permanent modular units can be moved anywhere, eliminating construction costs.

Scade has also observed that in the COVID-19 era, many people prefer fitness routines performed entirely outdoors. He is moving quickly to globalize his business

as world economies rebound from the pandemic. In addition to an original location in Chula Vista, he has secured a second manufacturing facility in his native Spain, to serve the demand he foresees emerging across Europe and the Middle East.

Despite plans for rapid expansion, Scade stays true to the sustainability values his parents instilled in him. Recycling shipping containers remains at the core of his plans.

**"Sustainability is the key — it's my favorite word and what I have always worked for," Scade says.** "It's about making the right choice: the right choice for the environment, the right choice for social impact, and the right choice economically for a company to be financially sustainable."

Currently, he is negotiating deals he says will increase his business tenfold over last year. Up next? Aire Home, mobile fitness units for homeowners.

"Right now it's a gym, but tomorrow you could transform it into an office or a granny flat," Scade says. "That's the opportunity I'm seeing now. I see opportunities everywhere." —Tobin Vaughn

**MAINLY  
MOZART  
CO-FOUNDER  
NANCY  
LATURNO:  
SAN DIEGO  
KEPT LIVE  
MUSIC ALIVE**



**E**arly in July 2020, hundreds of San Diegans pulled into the Del Mar Fairgrounds parking lot, rolled down their car windows and listened as eight San Diego Symphony and Los Angeles Philharmonic musicians played Mozart and Mendelssohn from a small stage.

Mainly Mozart had secured the spot for the free concert just a week before. The dirt parking lot off I-5 was a stark contrast to the organization's usual highly anticipated event: the All-Star Orchestra Festival of top musicians from the nation's leading orchestras that the organization had put on every June for more than 30 years, most recently at Balboa Theatre.

Yet the small drive-in show was a success. The audience beeped its appreciation. Musicians, overjoyed to perform for a crowd again, cried.

Mainly Mozart later learned it had pulled off the nation's first classical music performance for a live audience since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Newsweek recognized the feat, and The New Yorker and

Musical America both included it in lists of the year's key moments.

The organization wanted little more than to find a way to stay true to their mission, and felt Zoom Happy Hours with musicians, while popular, weren't enough. **"We started doing everything we were doing under the banner of keeping live music alive," says Nancy Laturno ('79), co-founder and chief executive officer of Mainly Mozart.** It was a leap of faith — and one they were unsure would work. "Whether it was an audience of five or an audience of 5,000 was really not at all the relevant point," she says.

Turns out it was an audience of 70 cars, the most Laturno's team determined could fit close enough to the stage to get good sound. After a few more free concerts, they moved to a larger parking area at the Fairgrounds where they could fit 350 cars and a larger stage. Most shows sold out.

About 60% of the attendees had never attended a Mainly Mozart concert before. It was a time when people were starved for entertainment and socially distanced activ-

ities, sure. But Laturno thinks it was more than that: The drive-in venue was attracting families with young children who might have traditionally been turned off by the serious concert hall setting. "This isn't an audience we can turn our backs on as we go forward," she says.

The Fairgrounds drive-in shows wrapped in April and the nine-day All-Star Orchestra Festival took place in June at Del Mar Surf Cup Sports Park. A return to a concert hall is likely for summer 2022, but Laturno hopes to maintain an element of outdoor performance in the festival, as well as the occasional free drive-in community concert. "Sentimentally, I don't think that we can move completely away from drive-ins," she says.

The constantly changing dynamics of the pandemic were challenging, with every day feeling like a plan B with no contingency, but they forced Mainly Mozart to be creative.

"We never could have afforded to take this risk," Laturno says. "This risk was forced upon us. And for us, it's been a rebirth." —L.H.

Photographs: Matt Furman (top left and right), J. Kat Woronowicz, Johnson/J. Kat Photo, Inc. (bottom).

**WHAM-O  
PRESIDENT  
TODD  
RICHARDS:  
LOW-TECH  
FUN IS  
BACK**



**S**tay-at-home during the pandemic led to more play-at-home.

At the end of July 2020 it was impossible to buy a Hula Hoop — Wham-O, the company that makes them, was sold out. The company’s Slip ‘N Slides were sliding off store shelves faster than they could replace them and two years-worth of Boogie Boards inventory was wiped out. Frisbee sales were soaring, up more than 45% from the previous year.

**“People were buying up everything they could find on the shelves to keep themselves and their kids entertained,” says Todd Richards (’87), president of Wham-O.**

The demand was due to the double whammy of people being stuck at home during the pandemic and, Richards thinks, needing something to help them disconnect from electronic screens after days full of Zoom meetings and classes. “And certainly our products do that,” he says of the zero-tech beloved brands for backyard and outdoor fun. “What is so unique about our products is they don’t come with instructions,” he says. “Kids are making up their own rules.”

During his SDSU days, Richards was a star linebacker for the Aztecs with his sights set on the NFL — and he did sign on briefly as a free agent for the San Francisco 49ers after graduation. But it’s probably not surprising to those who knew him then that he would end up in his current position. When he wasn’t in class or at football practice, he was surfing or playing Hacky Sack (another Wham-O bestseller) on the steps in front of the library. And his affinity for the brand goes back even farther. As a 10-year-old he would visit a friend whose family had a bicycle shop

in San Gabriel, a few miles from the original Wham-O location. “We’d always sneak off and go to the Wham-O factory and dig through the dumpsters,” he says. “We would find prototypes and samples and go back to the bike shop and say, ‘Let’s see what we can build out of this stuff.’”

The joy the toys gave him then — and others, for more than 70 years — is the same joy he noticed being rediscovered during the pandemic.

“We saw an amazing resurgence in our brand awareness,” he says. “People who had a Slip ‘N Slide as a kid went, ‘Oh my gosh,

my kids will have so much fun on this. I had so much fun on this.’”

Further evidence of that toy’s iconic status and renewed relevance: The classic backyard game is now turning into a competition game show on NBC, with Richards serving as an executive producer. “Ultimate Slip ‘N Slide,” featuring teams of friends, family members, couples and co-workers navigating a 65-foot-tall slippery yellow slide and other challenges, began filming in spring 2021.

Good thing the Slip ‘N Slide inventory is replenished. —L.H.

**TV EXECUTIVE  
MORT MARCUS:  
WE’RE BINGEING  
MORE, TUNING  
IN LESS**



**T**he broadcast television networks unveiled their fall schedules in May with all the usual hoopla: an all “Law & Order” night; reboots of “The Wonder Years” and the original “CSI.”

What remains to be seen, however, is whether television itself rebounds as the medium recovers from a stunning upheaval in viewing habits during the pandemic.

Mort Marcus (’77), a syndication executive says some of the changes may be here to stay. “The biggest thing that happened to TV viewing is ratings are down,” says Marcus. “You would think ratings would be up — people are home. But ABC, NBC, CBS, the networks (are) all down 20 to 30%.”

Marcus, who was music director at SDSU’s KCR radio station while earning a B.A. in telecommunications, is the “Mar” in Debmar-Mercury, a Santa Monica-based syndication company whose properties include the Steve Harvey-hosted “Family Feud” game show and repeats of “Schitt’s Creek.”

He thinks one reason for the dropoff may have been the need for peace and quiet in the work-from-home and virtual classroom settings that took over households under COVID-19. (“Can you turn that off? I’m on

Zoom.”) Wendy Williams, another Debmar-Mercury show, lost about a quarter of her pre-COVID audience. Professional sports and awards shows all dropped precipitously.

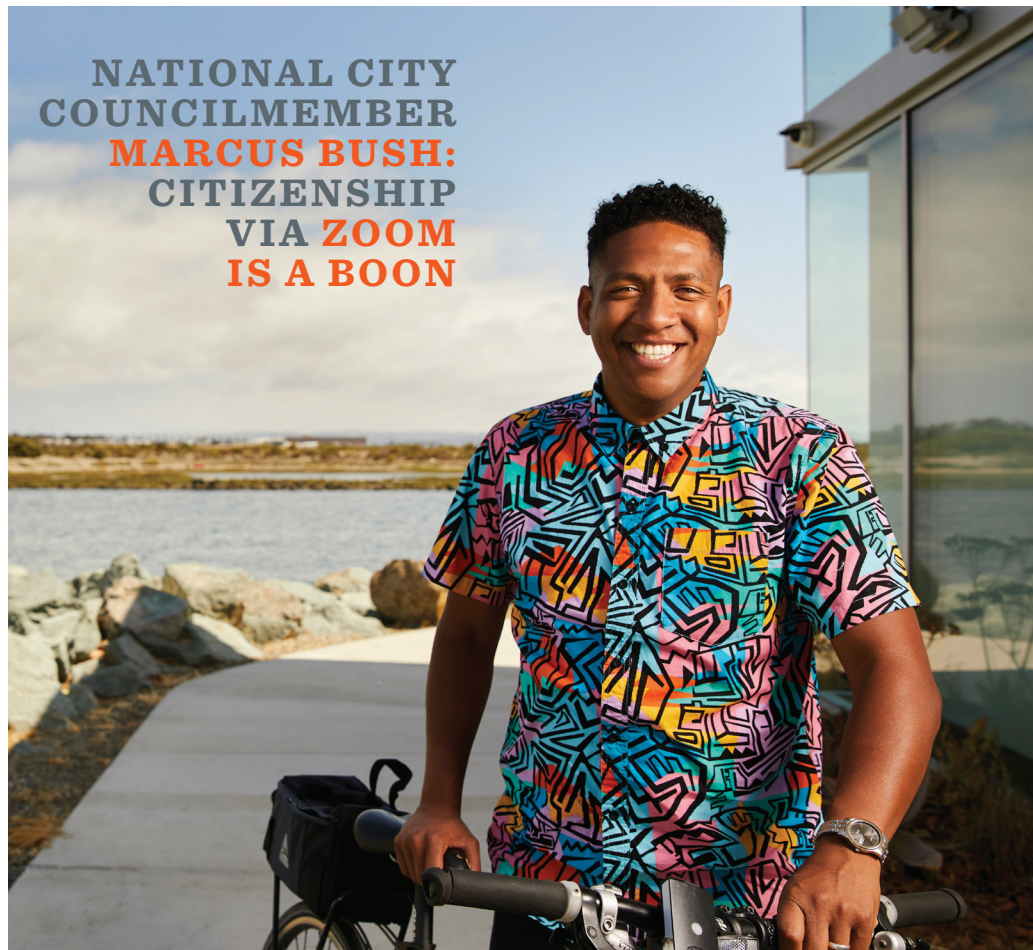
**“TV got moved around quite a bit,” Marcus says, “and I guess the big question is, is it going to come back to whatever normal is.”**

What’s up — and another source of change — are TV subscriptions. Netflix and other streaming services have diminished some viewers’ patience for the classic one-episode-per-week experience by releasing an entire season at once. Streaming series also tend to be highly serialized, Marcus notes, meaning viewers now watch episodes in order and then never want to see them again, a huge shift from the “Seinfeld” era.

In the long term, Marcus sees no cause for panic. Radio was going to kill theater. TV was going to kill radio. Cable was going to kill the legacy networks, but now ABC, CBS and NBC are all part of corporations with streaming platforms to balance any loss of viewers.

“They’re still generating billions of dollars, so I don’t see them going away so soon, even as the audience continues to shrink,” he says. —Jeff Ristine

**NATIONAL CITY  
COUNCILMEMBER  
MARCUS BUSH:  
CITIZENSHIP  
VIA ZOOM  
IS A BOON**



**A**s a city councilmember in the South Bay community of National City, Marcus Bush (’10) attends a number of additional public meetings: including committee sessions and public workshops — often biking between them. It comes with the territory.

Over the years, elected officials across the country have struggled to get the public actively engaged with the meetings, where critical decisions that shape the future of their respective communities are discussed and debated — with only a fraction of the population in attendance.

It’s through this lens that Bush, who was elected to public office in November 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, sees a potential positive emerging from the months of online and Zoom-based public meetings: increased public engagement.

“The pandemic shutdowns necessitated the need for online meetings, including City Council hearings and community

workshops,” says Bush. “Although in-person meetings tend to be the most effective at getting input from community members, it was challenging to get attendance, particularly in working class communities like National City.”

In many communities, public meetings and workshops occur during the workday or at its end, making it tough for people to attend. To Bush, virtual meetings have been a boon for the community, giving people the option of attending in the comfort of their own homes or on their mobile devices.

**“Having virtual meetings allows more flexibility for community members to attend and provides another way to engage for those who are uncomfortable attending in-person meetings,” he says.** At one point, the city’s representative to the Port of San Diego, Commissioner Sandy Naranjo, took the lead on organizing an online workshop to get feedback and ideas on design for a new park expansion.

“It was by far the largest-attended workshop for National City that I had seen,” Bush says: over 100 attendees instead of the usual five to 10.

In addition to being more convenient, taking advantage of online platforms gives officials a chance to be more interactive with meeting attendees.

“The organizers made sure the (port) workshop actively engaged community members by having online polls and breakout rooms where people could brainstorm ideas with each other,” Bush says. “Moving forward as we begin opening up, virtual meetings and hybrid in-person and online workshops can provide an opportunity for increased participation.”

The next step to ensuring this model becomes viable?

“We as leaders need to make sure that we are also addressing the digital divide and making sure residents can access these online platforms,” he says. —Aaron Burgin ●

Photographs: Jenny Siegwart (top left and right), Matt Furman (bottom).



COMICS

FANS,

ASSEMBLE!

COMIC-CON put San Diego at the epicenter of the comics world and now **SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY** is putting scholarship around comics on the map.

With one of the largest library comics collections in the nation and faculty, students and alumni doing interesting comics-related work, the university is becoming a leader in the comic arts.



Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

## FROM SDSU TO THE MCU:

### DESTIN DANIEL CRETTON

on the Marvel Cinematic Universe's first Asian American superhero and the power of movies to change stereotypes. *By Lisa Haney*

**AS A FILM STUDENT AT SDSU**, Destin Daniel Cretton ('11) won the top prize for short film at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. After earning his master's in television, film and new media production, he was back at the festival in 2012 debuting a feature.

"Destin Daniel Cretton is kind of a big deal," SDSU's magazine declared at the time — presciently, it turns out.

Cretton went on to write and direct a feature adaptation of "Short Term 12" (his 2009 short), starring Brie Larson. It won a slew of awards in 2013 and launched both Cretton's and Larson's careers. The pair collaborated again on the film adaptations of the memoirs "The Glass Castle" and "Just Mercy." The latter, starring Michael B. Jordan and Jamie Foxx, is a legal drama based on civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson who worked to exonerate death row prisoners. The film was named Outstanding Motion Picture at the NAACP Image Awards in early 2020 and its themes of unequal treatment under the law took on greater poignancy later that year after the killing of George Floyd.

Now "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," which Cretton directed and co-wrote, will open in theaters on Sept. 3 and feature Marvel's first Asian American lead superhero. Cretton, who is of Japanese-American descent and grew up on Maui, thinks deeply about the impact it might have on Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans. He says, "I definitely feel the weight of hoping that we are putting something into the world that is good and beneficial to our community." Here's what else he had to say during a Zoom in May.

#### Were you into comics growing up?

I honestly never got into comics growing up, but like any kid I was into all the superhero movies and shows. At the time when I was growing up, we were still watching the "Batman" TV show, the one where they would walk up the side of buildings by turning the camera sideways. And "Superman," and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." So when I first started making little short films with my grandma's VHS camera, making movies that were about fantastical superhero type people and also martial arts was probably our go-to thing when we were young.

### Why were you first interested in pursuing this project?

I saw the announcement that Marvel made — that they're doing their first Asian American superhero — and I had an unexpected emotional reaction. It honestly wasn't something that I had really processed much until that point: That there was a vacuum in my brain and in my childhood that I never really thought about — that I never had a reflection of myself on screen in the form of a superhero.

### There are a lot of stereotypes in some of the early "Shang-Chi" comics. Was it important for you to tell the story in a new way and correct that?

One hundred percent. The first meeting that I had with Marvel was just a general meeting to hear what they were doing. And I wasn't even expecting to pitch on this job, but I was hoping I'd just be able to express some of the things that I would hope that they would do or not do in this movie. And it was a very big relief to hear that they knew and understood that there were a lot of things to avoid from the comics. But the comics at their core revolve around relationships within a broken family. So we were able to zero in on some of the things that we really loved about the comics and breathe new life into it, and also breathe new life into it in the context of really the Asian American experience.

And that was something that I don't think we've really ever seen on film before. We have Jackie Chan and Jet Li and Bruce Lee, and as awesome as they all are, they don't feel like my friends that I grew up with — they don't talk like me, they don't dress like me or listen to the same types of music as me. So this was a really special experience to create a character that feels very much like someone I would hang out with — and watch him grow, and turn into a superhero by the end of the movie.



Actor Simu Liu plays Shang-Chi in Marvel Studios' upcoming superhero movie, directed by SDSU alumnus Destin Daniel Cretton. Photo courtesy of Disney.

### Is that representation of Marvel's first Asian American superhero more important than ever after this year of escalating anti-Asian racism and violence nationwide?

I do think that right now more than ever, the world needs to be re-reminded about a lot of things. In particular, we need to be reminded that we are all so much more similar than we think. And the idea of somebody who is an "other," who is easy to throw stereotypes on ... or to believe ridiculous things about like they're responsible for a pandemic because they look a certain way — all those things, I truly do think can be broken through either getting to know somebody who looks like that, or through cinema. When you see a movie like this that shows so many different Asian faces — with so drastically different personalities, acting in very different ways — hopefully it not only entertains you, but reminds you that we're all human.

### Announcing the film at Comic-Con in 2019 you talked about growing up amongst so many various cultures in Maui — Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Caucasian. Was it a bit jarring when you first came to San Diego for college?

It was a pretty major culture shock that I was not really prepared for, because the cultural differences between Hawaii and the mainland are much wider than I think I expected. So much so that when I first came over here, it was like every other sentence, people would say, "What?" And I didn't realize, Oh, I have an accent that people don't understand. I didn't talk like I talk now; it's been gradual. It also was the first time in my life really that I started to see the manifestations of different forms of subtle racism, and I didn't know what it was at the time. It was the first time somebody in a bar came up to me and jokingly called me Bruce Lee, and put up karate chop hands. And at the time I was like OK, that doesn't seem that funny, but I wasn't offended. No one's ever seen how I look and just associated it with the only famous Asian person they know.

### Are there lessons you learned at SDSU that are still really important to your work today?

Before I was accepted into SDSU, I was planning to make a short film in San Diego, with friends of mine. We were looking to rent equipment and I just called up Greg Durbin [professor of film at SDSU], the only other independent filmmaker that we knew in San Diego. He invited us over to his house and he had a 35 mm camera package that he was going to rent to us for dirt cheap. And he went out of his way showing us how to film — taking way too much time with two strangers, teaching them how to do things in his garage. But that mentality is really the heart of filmmaking: It's this giving, sharing, familial mentality that was really shown to me by Greg. So that support I think is really necessary — and not being afraid to ask for it and then also remembering to



Destin Daniel Cretton announced his forthcoming Marvel Studios film "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" at San Diego Comic-Con International in 2019. Photo by Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP.

give it to people when they need it.

A little while later I applied to SDSU and got in. The other thing that I learned from my experience in general at SDSU, through a lot of short films and documentaries, was the power of exploration. And it's a difficult one to hold on to in the industry once money is involved, because the exploration is connected to taking big risks, to trying things you haven't tried before. Trying to look at a subject or using the camera in ways that might be a little more unexpected. It's a mentality that I tried to remind myself that I have to keep going back to, as I'm making movies.

### As an SDSU film student, did you ever imagine one day you'd be directing — and co-writing a screenplay for — a Marvel movie?

At the time, no. That wasn't a life goal by any means. I grew up on big Spielberg blockbusters — really the only type of movies that made it into the theaters on Maui. I was introduced to independent cinema when I went off to college in San Diego, and that's where I thought I would always stay in terms of the types of movies I'd be exploring. But this has been a big change and it's been really fun.

### What advice would you give to SDSU film students?

Don't spend a lot of money on your films. Rather than putting all this money into one big \$50,000 short film, I would break that up and try to do as many as you can, and explore as many things as you can. You just get better with every movie. I got rejected from Sundance with every short film that I did, but it was my eighth one that did get in.

The other, probably more important, piece of advice is to just practice being unapologetically yourself regardless of what people's opinions are of that self. That's your secret weapon in an industry that is based on creativity. Everything that you've experienced up until this point — your unique personality, your cultural background, your taste in film and cinema — that is the thing that makes whatever you make unique. Hold on to that.

*Interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

## THE COMIC-CON CONNECTION

The university's link to the city's famed annual convention goes way back. *By Jeff Ristine*

**THEY'RE BOTH BOOKISH PEOPLE**, so let's look at Greg Bear and Pamela Jackson as SDSU bookends for San Diego Comic-Con International.

Greg Bear ('73), a Nebula Award-winning science-fiction writer, was there for the very first con in 1970 as a member of its original founding committee.

Jackson, popular culture librarian at the SDSU Library and curator of its comic arts collection, served on the judging panel for this year's Eisner Awards. They're the Oscars of the field and one of the most anticipated traditions of the con, even when forced to go virtual for a second straight summer due to continuing restrictions on in-person gatherings.

Bear was working on his English major at San Diego State College when he met up with a small group led by comics enthusiast Shel Dorf that became founders of the event, a three-day affair at Downtown San Diego's U.S. Grant Hotel. "We wanted to have a convention that celebrated all the things we loved," he says. "A lot of us love science fiction, a lot of us love comic books, a lot of us love movies, and we tried to get all of those things in the mix and to this day that's what Comic-Con is."

Over the years Hollywood came to grab more and more of the Comic-Con buzz. Jackson's role as an Eisner judge, however, shows how true the event remains to its four-color origins.

"I'm really excited and looking forward to making our choices," Jackson said while the panel's work was getting underway. It's no simple task. The panel reviews entries in around 32 award categories and thousands of titles are submitted every year.

Bear maintained his connection with Comic-Con after that first year, still remembered for drawing such high-profile guests as writer Ray Bradbury and Marvel artist Jack "King" Kirby. He was part of an effort to find a new venue for Comic-Con after a one-time move to the University of California San Diego campus, and says SDSU was brought up as a possible option. The College Area didn't have the kind of hotels needed and the event returned downtown to the El Cortez Hotel, where Bear snagged a sketch from Warner Bros. animator Chuck Jones of Wile E. Coyote reading an Acme catalog.

Bear contributed more than 40 minutes of Comic-Con memories to "The Comic-Con Kids," a set of oral histories by the con founders and early attendees, recorded by the SDSU Library through a grant from the California Council for the Humanities. Jackson headed up the project, which began in 2011.

It was about then the library also acquired a sizable collection of comic books turned down by another Cal State university, and the archives of a Comic-Con founder, Richard Alf. Memorabilia from that first con includes an admission ticket, and no badge or microchip to be seen. "It's just this little piece of paper," Jackson says, "run off on a photocopy machine."

# 100,000 COMICS, ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

**COMICS@SDSU** is cultivating innovative teaching and research around the library's vast collection.

A NEW COMICS CORNER AT THE SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY provides a cozy sitting area to take a study break and pick up a recent comic book. The space, made possible by a gift from Jack Sword ('70) and his wife Laura Sword, showcases the importance of comics on campus.

But the true wealth of the comics collection at SDSU is a bit more stealth. Through the doors of the library's Special Collection you can explore more than 100,000 floppy comics (including many the Swords donated) — one of the largest

rebranded in 2021 as Comics@SDSU. The group now has about 25 faculty members and aims to boost the comics curriculum at SDSU (and eventually create a certificate in comic studies).

That's already happening in a less formalized way across the university, with comics or graphic media being used in a range of courses across the colleges, including graphic medicine and engineering textbooks. "In the College of Arts and Letters, pretty much every department has someone who is integrating comics into their courses, whether it's one reading of many or the focus of the readings," Pollard says.

The Comics@SDSU-developed Comics and History course, introduced in fall 2020, attracted 438 students across the history and English departments. "One of the great things about this course is everyone showed up having done the reading and wanting to talk about it — that was thrilling as a teacher," says Pollard. Graphic novels and sequential art comics force the reader to engage with not just the words in the speech bubbles but with the art in the panels too. "It encourages a participation in visualization that brings you, the reader, into the process of making meaning," she says. "That's why they work so well and why people like them so much."

The Comics@SDSU group is thinking beyond campus. They aim to create a summer institute for college and K-12 teachers to teach ways to integrate comics into their curriculum. The group is also expanding their reach to the full California State University system. In April, Jackson and Pollard hosted a Zoom gathering with faculty members from 11 CSU locations to talk about how they can collaborate and



From left: Pop Culture Librarian Pamela Jackson; the Comics Corner, made possible by a gift from Laura and Jack Sword, at SDSU Library; History Professor Elizabeth Pollard. Photos by Jenny Siegart.

university collections in the nation.

"Everyone who hears about it is incredibly excited and wants to be here working in our collection," says Elizabeth Pollard, a history professor.

In 2019, Pollard and Pop Culture Librarian Pamela Jackson teamed up to co-found the Comics Working Group,

share individual expertise across the different institutions, as well as dream up new projects. Ideas include a lecture series, workshops and a possible podcast.

The takeaway: A lot of excitement across the system. Pollard says, "For us, it's about spreading the word that the collection is here." —L.H.

## CREATING AGAINST ALL ODDS

**Neil Kendrick's**  
"Comics are Everywhere!"  
documentary is more than  
a decade in the making.

Photograph: Matt Furman

**COMICS ARE A MAJOR INFLUENCE FOR EDUCATOR AND ARTIST NEIL KENDRICKS ('06).** As a member of the Comics@SDSU collaborative, the lecturer brings comics into the classroom at SDSU through his Comics and Sequential Media class, Drawing course and a proposed new course for 2022, Comics and the Visual Odyssey.

Comics have also played a role in the personal work of the multitalented artist, photographer, writer and filmmaker who earned a master's in television, film and new media from SDSU. He taught himself to draw at a young age by looking at comics. He started attending Comic-Con when he was in high school. Then he began writing about comics and interviewing famous comics artists while he was in college.

And for the last 11 years he's been working on a feature-length documentary in progress, "Comics are Everywhere!" The documentary follows emerging artists JJ Villard and Danni Shinya Lou, and includes interviews with established comic creators Daniel Clowes and Jaime Hernandez, and other cartoonists and comics scholars.

"One of the things I think that separates my documentary from maybe some other comic book-related documentaries that have emerged in the past is mine isn't really about superheroes," Kendrick says. "I'm really more interested in alternative comics and underground comics."

As the film has progressed, his subjects' careers have evolved as they've gone through life transitions like marriage and having children.

"One of the questions that's sort of a primary line in inquiry in the documentary is: 'What does it take to create?'" Kendrick says. Especially when the responsibilities — and financial pressures — of life interfere. "How do you persevere when those things could eclipse your dream?" he asks.

The question resonates for his own creative work on the film too. Kendrick didn't expect the documentary to take quite so long. The COVID-19 pandemic and cancellation of in-person Comic-Con for two years has limited his access to the artists he's filming. Another challenge: Funding. Except for a couple of grants, Kendrick has been paying for the project out of his own pocket from his teaching gigs (he's also an instructor at San Diego Miramar College and NewSchool of Architecture & Design). Right now he's applying for grants to help him buy a new camera to complete the project; the equipment he started it with is outdated.

A short sample of the documentary in progress debuted, along with some of Kendrick's drawings and other film work, at his exhibition "Mirror, Mirror: Lights, Camera, Dreams," in May at the Bread & Salt gallery near San Diego's Chicano Park. His dreams — a passion for filmmaking and art and storytelling — were on full display.

"There are lots of other independent filmmakers — truly independent — making films on their own and flying on a wing and a prayer and in talent, in perseverance," Kendrick says. "And I guess I'm part of that tradition to a certain extent." —L.H. ●



## THE SDSU DUO AT THE TOP OF THE PGA TOUR *Caddie Austin Kaiser and golfer Xander Schauffele, former Aztec teammates, are best friends on and off the course.*

By Ryan Schuler

**IT WAS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFE OPPORTUNITY.** After graduating from San Diego State University in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in public administration, former Aztecs golfer Austin Kaiser was preparing to become a police recruit when he received an email from his friend and former teammate Xander Schauffele ('15): "Hey, I need a caddie."

Schauffele was preparing to embark on his professional golf career on the Korn Ferry Tour, a stepping stone to the PGA Tour.

"I know you're doing this police thing and I know it's something you want to do — but if you're interested, let's try it out," Kaiser recalls the email saying. A career as a caddie was not something Kaiser had ever thought about, but he was intrigued by the idea of being out on the course

as a partner to one of his closest friends. He said yes.

Four PGA Tour wins, nine top-10 finishes in major championships (including a tie for seventh at the U.S. Open last month), and a top-10 world ranking later, the duo is rolling like a downhill putt. And it all started at SDSU.

### THE DRIVE

Schauffele and Kaiser both took the long way to Aztecs golf. Kaiser was league MVP and an all-conference pick as a senior at Atascadero High School in Atascadero, California, before spending two years at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, California. There he logged top-five finishes at the community college state tournament in consecutive years.

Schauffele, a decorated golfer from Scripps Ranch High School, spent his freshman year at Long Beach State University before transferring back home to SDSU. At Long Beach, he was named Big West Conference Freshman of the Year and earned First Team All-Big West honors in 2012.

The pair met at the first team meeting of the 2012-13 season and bonded through practice rounds, tournaments and attending SDSU men's basketball games. "We became really close really fast," Kaiser says. "We like to joke around, but we want to work hard and get the job done. We have the same goals, so I think that aligns really well with our personalities."

After transferring to SDSU, Schauffele picked up right where he left off at Long Beach State. Over his three seasons with the Aztecs, he won two tournaments, while posting 22 top-10 finishes and 16 top-5 efforts, garnering All-Mountain West honors each year. Schauffele capped off his collegiate career by earning third-team All-America honors from both Golfweek and PING his senior year.

"He knew he would be on tour," SDSU men's golf head coach Ryan Donovan says. "He's one of the hardest working guys I've ever had in 18 years of coaching, and I think that says a lot. He's playing to win every week ... and that's something hard to teach."

During his two years at SDSU, Kaiser was also a significant contributor to the Aztecs, earning starts in 12 of 13 tournaments and posting four top-20 finishes during his junior year.

### THE APPROACH

Schauffele and Kaiser introduced themselves to the pro golf world at the Greenbrier Classic in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, in July 2017.

Tied for the lead heading into the final hole, Schauffele pulled out a pitching wedge on the par-3, 161-yard hole surrounded by bunkers and took a powerful swing. When the ball came to rest three feet from the hole, Schauffele calmly tapped in for birdie, securing the duo's first win on the PGA Tour.

"When we did get that win, it was even more special being best friends," said Kaiser. "There's not many caddie-player relationships like ours."

From there, Schauffele would go on to win the Tour Championship and claim Rookie of the Year honors.

"Our rookie season was crazy," said Kaiser. "After Greenbrier, he just went on a tear, and I remember everything so vividly from that point: Winning the Tour Championship later that year, having rookie stats that no one's had since Tiger Woods. I knew it was going to be special from that point."

## "THERE'S NOT MANY CADDIE-PLAYER RELATIONSHIPS LIKE OURS."

—Austin Kaiser

Donovan credits Kaiser as an integral part of the duo's meteoric rise. "He's got a calmness about him that's very soothing," Donovan says. "He's learned the game, and he definitely puts in the work to do his best and create the best gameplan for Xander to execute."

Kaiser does whatever it takes to make Schauffele comfortable. "My mantra is 'Be more than a caddie,'" he says. In the early days that meant waking up early to make breakfast with a hotplate in a hotel room and driving between tournaments in his 1999 Honda Accord.

"I wouldn't caddie for anyone but him," says Kaiser.

To Kaiser and Schauffele, they are not caddie and golfer; they are teammates, continuing the strong bond they built at SDSU.

"He keeps it easy on me and I keep it easy on him," Schauffele told SDSU's magazine in 2017. "We just have a lot of fun out there."

### CLOSE TO THE PIN

Like the Farmers Insurance Open each January, this year's U.S. Open returned the pair to familiar ground: Schauffele's hometown, now adopted as such by Kaiser. "I live 20 minutes from the course," says Kaiser. "It's my favorite week when we play the Farmers because you have that hometown feel, everyone is rooting for you."

Known for its breathtaking views on the coastal cliffs of La Jolla, Torrey Pines Golf Course is anything but a vacation. When asked about his thoughts on the course, Kaiser responds with two words initially.

"It's hard," Kaiser says, laughing. "You have to do everything correct to score well. You have to drive it really well, you have to putt it really well. But Xander is the kind of well-rounded player who can do well there."

Earlier this year, Schauffele and Kaiser tied for second at the Farmers, their highest finish at the tournament. "That was huge for us and our confidence going forward for the U.S. Open," says Kaiser.

Another booster: The fanfare from the SDSU contingent they receive every time at Torrey Pines.

"The fans are amazing," Kaiser says. "We hear 'Go Aztecs' quite a bit and we try to give the thumbs up and try to acknowledge everyone who roots for us." ●

# why we give

...to celebrate the healing power of the arts



## THE ARTS DIDN'T STOP DURING THE PANDEMIC.

Artists found new ways to create — and even to perform. SDSU students rehearsed in parking lots and put on virtual concerts and theater productions, including “Pippin,” in the spring. But the full magic that happens when performers and their audience are in the same space for a live show, gathering in community, was lost. Now, the next time we’re able to assemble safely together for a show, we’ll appreciate it more, predicts Peggy Shannon, dean of the College of Professional Studies and Fine Arts. “We won’t take for granted the joy that live performance can bring,” she says. While science has been so key to getting us through the pandemic, the arts can help us heal. “The arts allow human expression ... to tell our stories that lift people up,” Shannon says. “More than ever, we need the ability to speak proof to what we go through as a world.” And soon, SDSU students will have a beautiful new space to do that.



Renderings of the forthcoming Performing Arts District, from top: exterior of The Prebys Stage; its interior; the promenade surrounding the new amenities building, which will be located between The Prebys Stage and the Don Powell Theatre.

**THE GIFT: \$6 million** grant to PSFA’s “On to a New Stage” fundraising campaign

**THE DONOR: The Conrad Prebys Foundation,** which carries out the vision of its namesake, a San Diego real estate entrepreneur and philanthropist who passed away in 2016.

**THE PURPOSE:** Funds a second stage theater, The Prebys Stage, for student productions. The new stage will be part of a renovated Performing Arts District at SDSU and will include the latest lighting and sound technology. Construction began in June.

**ABOUT THE PERFORMING ARTS DISTRICT:** What began in 2019 as a plan to renovate the Don Powell Theatre to make it compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, has grown into an entire reimagining of the performing arts at SDSU.

In addition to upgrading the main stage, a \$37 million California State University contribution will create a full-fledged Performing Arts District. Among the plans: The Don Powell will go down to 350 seats (from 500) to make room for ramps, roomier areas for wheelchairs and better sight lines. The new Prebys Stage, to the west of the Music Building, will provide a more intimate performance space with 150 seats. On the east side of the Prebys Stage will be an outdoor third stage for music, film and theater with the sloping lawn forming an amphitheater. A separate amenities building between the theaters will house the box office and concessions for all of the performance spaces. On its promenade, a small fourth stage will spotlight acts like solo musicians.

“Suddenly, it’s a district that will have just this very cool vibe of performance and art and artistic expression, indoors and outdoors,” says Peggy Shannon, PSFA dean.

The second stage was just a shell of a concept until the Prebys gift came along and funded state-of-the-art technology for lighting and sound, as well as dressing rooms and seating. “Their gift really transformed a beautiful idea into a complete reality,” she says. “It’s just a game changer and we’re so thrilled.”

The cutting-edge theater and district as a whole will make the university highly competitive in attracting new students and preparing them to be industry ready, says Niyi Coker, professor and director of the School of Theatre, Television, and Film. “That’s very critical because our mission of education is paramount and we should be educating with up-to-date facilities,” he says.

Construction over the next two years will force inventive staging of ongoing productions — including a reconfiguration of the main stage theater while the auditorium is being refurbished. Coker sees the opportunity for experimentation as a good challenge to have until the full vision of the district is realized.

“We still have some ways to go,” Coker says, “but in a time of a pandemic and when we were worried about cuts, this is definitely an endorsement of the performing arts.” —Lisa Haney and Jeff Ristine



### OTHER RECENT CONRAD PREBYS GIFTS THAT LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY AT SDSU:

**\$20 MILLION** in 2014 toward student scholarships in seven areas, recognized on campus with the renaming of the Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union.

**\$8 MILLION** in 2021, over five years, toward a new building for KPBS radio, a public service of SDSU. His previous gifts to KPBS and Masterpiece have also helped support programming devoted to local news, arts and San Diego culture.

**“CONRAD WAS ADAMANT THAT HIS HIGHER EDUCATION WAS A CATALYST FOR MANY OF THE SUCCESSES IN HIS LIFE. HE HAD A DEEP LOVE OF THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS, SO WE FELT THAT THIS PROJECT, IN PARTICULAR, WOULD HAVE MADE CONRAD VERY PROUD.”**

—DAN YATES ('83), president of the Conrad Prebys Foundation

Left: Renderings by Rudolph and Sletten. Right: Photo courtesy of The Salk Institute.

# RE: BORDER

# classnotes



## HELLO, LIL' SDSU FANS!

*These children of alumni are already showing serious school spirit.*

1. Malachi (name inspired by former SDSU basketball player Malachi Flynn!), 8 months. Alumni parents: Melissa Tom ('11) and Wesley Tom ('12). /2. Matthew, 7, and Duke, 4. Alumni parents: Amy Tappen ('19) and Matt Tappen ('13). /3. Isabella, 7 months. Alumni parent: Stephanie (Moreno) Bohan ('16). /4. Roman, 15 months. Alumni parent: Angela (Vega) Vasquez ('14). /5. Max, 10 months. Alumni parents: Ashley Carvalho ('11) and Michael Carvalho ('14). /6. Nikolai, 18 months. Alumni parent: Jenna Bobarykin ('09, '12). /7. Nash, 2 months. Alumni parents: Spencer Kerrigan ('12) and Holly Kerrigan ('13). /8. Lynnette, 16 months. Alumni parent: Luis Dario Salas ('20). /9. Roman, 7, Ramsey, 4, and Rio, 2. Alumni parents: Deniece Hasson\* ('05, '11) and James Hasson\* ('06). /10. Eva Noelle, 4 months. Alumni parent: Kristin Tappen ('12 and '21 teaching certificate in SPED candidate). /11. Ariel Azul, 5. Alumni parent: Ashley Tate ('20). /12. Adrian, 3. Alumni parents: April Hernandez ('11) and Myles Mendoza ('18). /13. Alex, 7 months (2017). Alumni parent: Natasha Bliss\* ('14). /14 and 15. Christopher, 2 (2018). Zoey, 4 (2018). Alumni parent: Michelle Aignay Zamora ('01).

\*If you've welcomed a baby within the past year, email GoAztecsMarketing@sdsu.edu and SDSU Athletics will email you an official Aztec Newborn Club certificate, plus a 20% off coupon for the SDSU Bookstore/ShopAztecs.com to put your baby in Aztec gear. Include your baby's name and birthday, along with your own name and email address.

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2021



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



The night before the Perseverance rover touched down on Mars on Feb. 18, **Anachristina Morino\*** ('17, B.S., aerospace engineering) was on console for the avionics subsystem. The systems engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab (where more than one dozen SDSU alumni work) was monitoring the "brains" of the rover and preparing to hand over a healthy spacecraft to the landing team. "It was the most intense few hours of my life," Morino says. While she aimed to work at NASA one day, and ultimately on a Mars rover mission, she didn't expect it to happen so early in her career. "Working the last few years on the Mars 2020 Mission has truly been a dream come true," she says. In May, Morino celebrated another special life moment when she married **John McGrory** ('17 B.S., kinesiology), whom she met at SDSU. —*Lisa Haney*



With children stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, **Fontana Unified School District counselor Eduardo Valencia** ('98, M.S., school counseling) went door-to-door to check in on his elementary school students. Los Angeles CBS, NBC and Telemundo affiliates spotlighted Valencia — an alumnus of SDSU's Community-Based Block multicultural community counseling program — as he delivered care packages. He ensured all 600 students at his school received a teddy bear, letters from teachers, and reading access codes to unlimited books. In addition, he helped several other schools raise funds so their students (more than 600) could also get a teddy bear. "We can see that through difficult times this is something that helps them kind of get through," Valencia told NBC. —*Michael Klitzing*



Just over a year ago, **Juan Perez** ('20, B.S., civil engineering) was completing his construction engineering degree with a class schedule that took him into Hepner Hall and Hardy Tower, two of the '30s-era buildings on campus. Now he's in Mission Valley as part of the Clark Construction crew building Aztec Stadium. A project engineer with a hand in managing some of the subcontractors, Perez is among about a dozen alumni who are part of the Clark team in the former parking lot for the now-demolished San Diego Stadium. For them, the move from Montezuma Mesa to the future SDSU Mission Valley represents a time jump of more than 90 years. "It's really exciting," Perez says. "It feels great to know that I'm contributing to a project that's going to be able to help other students and future alumni." —*Jeff Ristine*



The Women's Museum of California inducted historian **Rosalie Schwartz** ('72, '74, B.A., M.A., history) into the San Diego County Women's Hall of Fame in March. Starting college at age 30 after getting married and having two daughters, Schwartz also earned a Ph.D. in Latin American history at the University of California San Diego. She went on to do Fulbright and National Endowment for the Humanities-supported research in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, and Spain and worked as an advisor on Latin American issues on Capitol Hill. She also lectured on topics of U.S. and Latin American history at SDSU from 1977-1997 and wrote a historical novel set in the Prohibition era, "A Twist of Lemon," among other publications. "History opened the world for me," she says. —*Leslie L.J. Reilly*

Schwartz photograph: Leslie L.J. Reilly



### SDSU President Emeritus Thomas B. Day, 1932-2021

Thomas B. Day, the sixth president of San Diego State University and the driving force behind its transition from a primarily teaching institution to one equally devoted to research, died June 15. He was 89.

An experimental physicist who taught at the University of Maryland in College Park, Day began 18 years as president of SDSU in July 1978. He became a tenacious fighter for the university, working through the state Legislature to create a School of Public Health and to vastly expand joint doctoral programs. Day cemented the teacher-scholar model at SDSU, a method then far more familiar to University of California schools.

Two presidents — Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush — appointed Day to the National Science Board, a point of pride for him that was hard to miss. His last visit to campus was in 2018 for a dedication of the Engineering and Interdisciplinary Sciences Complex, held in the Thomas B. and Anne K. Day Quad. —*Jeff Ristine*

### 1970s

'72 **ROBERT D. GAINES** (B.A., political science) published his fifth book, "The Brave Historian," set in Escondido and North San Diego County.

'76 **ART BERNSTEIN\*** (B.A., public administration), chief operating officer of Tucker Ellis LLP law firm in Cleveland and a lifelong numismatist (coin enthusiast), was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury to a four-year term on the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC) of the U.S. Mint. The CCAC advises the Secretary of the Treasury on theme or design proposals relating to circulating coinage, commemorative coins and medals.

### 1980s

'83, '87 **STEVE GOBLE\*** (B.S., marketing; MBA) was re-elected to a second four-year term on the El Cajon City Council. He is a member of the MTS board and chairs the East County Advanced Water Purification board of directors.

'87 **LALO ALCARAZ** (B.A., art) was a finalist for the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.

### 1990s

'93 **JOE PARANTEAU** (B.A., speech communication), a sales leader for Microsoft, published "Billion Dollar Sales Secrets," a book of sales tips.

'94 **TRAVIS PEARSON\*** (B.S., marketing) is the founding principal and current president of CMR Risk & Insurance Services, Inc., and a Heritage Society member of The Campanile Foundation.

'99 **REGINA TORQUEZA COOK** (B.S., finance) was appointed to senior vice president of finance for Arbor Lodging, a Chicago-based hotel investment and management company.

### 2000s

'03 **ROBERT SALEM\*** (B.A., public administration), a broker, was recently named the non-profit group leader at CMR Risk & Insurance Services, Inc.

'03 **ERIK WENSTONE** (B.S., finance) was re-

cently named the real estate practice group leader at CMR Risk & Insurance Services, Inc. He is a principal and vice president at the agency.

'04 **KRISTINA CHEREVAS** (B.A., political science), an attorney, was promoted to member at Cozen O'Connor law firm. She serves as vice chair, office managing partner in the San Diego office.

'06 **SARAH HIBBARD\*** (B.S., management) recently joined Snell & Wilmer's new San Diego office as an associate in their corporate and securities practice group and will be working with their life sciences and medical technology industry group.

'08 **MIRELA SABANOVIC LEWIS** (B.A., international business) along with sister '18 **ALDISA SABANOVIC** (B.S., accounting) co-founded Fandory Factory, a San Diego coworking space with private offices, meeting space and an indoor playground for kids.

'09 **MICHAEL MATTEO ROSSI** (B.S., theatre arts), a filmmaker, released his feature film "Chase" in 2019 and has two features in post production releasing later this year.

### 2010s

'12 **TOM VENDAFREDDO** (MFA, theatre arts) was the music director of the virtual installment of "New Faces Sing Broadway 1961" this spring at Chicago's award-winning Porchlight Music Theatre.

'14 **SINAI COTA** (B.A., religious studies) published "Pink Poems Tan Thoughts." All book profits help fund college scholarships via the non-profit Urban Life.

'15 **PEYTON PIERCE\*** (B.A., theatre arts) was named to The Daily Transcript's "Top 40 Under 40" list for San Diego County in 2020. She was also recently promoted to corporate relations manager in the corporate office of Pierce Education Properties, L.P.

### 2020s

'20 **ABHIVYAKTI GAUTAM** (M.S., bioengineering) is a process engineer at Neuralink, an Elon Musk startup company that is developing implantable brain-machine interfaces.

\*=SDSU Alumni Lifetime Member Email Class Notes to [magazine@sdsu.edu](mailto:magazine@sdsu.edu).

### SDSU ALUMNI 2021 - 22 Alumni Board of Advisors

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: **Charlotte Ochiqui** ('00)  
President-Elect: **Risa Baron** ('91)  
The Campanile Foundation Alumni Representative: **Charlotte Ochiqui** ('00)  
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Vice President of Innovation:  
**Marisa Compton** ('06)  
Vice President of Marketing:  
**Deserae Ryan** ('07)  
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Administrator: **Andres Olivas**

#### OTHER ELECTED ADVISORS:

**Brad Adams** ('99), **Mina Azim** ('12), **Cody Barbo**, **Kelly Batten** ('99), **Brianna Bennett** ('10), **Greg Block** ('95), **Martin J. Bridges** ('87), **Greg Chew** ('04), **Christian Deleon** ('09), **Dan Denham** ('99, '02), **Mark Emch** ('84), **Dirk Epperson** ('06), **Carey Fernandes** ('98), **Richard Gonzalez**, **Keith Harris** ('91), **Tom Karlo** ('75), **Kelli Kedis Ogborn** ('07), **Todd Kennedy** ('16), **Todd Lane** ('86), **Martin Lang** ('97), **Yolanda G. Apalategui Lugo** ('05, '15), **Kristin A. O'Neal** ('07), **Cesar Padilla** ('95), **Monica Pelaez** ('01), **Denise Zellmann-Price** ('89, '03), **Scott Robert** ('99), **Marlene S. Ruiz** ('75), **Kim Spinardi** ('10), **Gregory "J.R." Tolver** ('02)

#### PAST PRESIDENTS:

First President: 1931  
**Vesta Muehleisen** ('907)

Visit [sdsualumni.org/pastpresidents](http://sdsualumni.org/pastpresidents) for a full list.

#### NON-ELECTED ADVISORS:

President: **Adela de la Torre**  
Vice President, University Relations and Development: **Adrienne Vargas**  
University Senate Chair: **Wil Weston**  
2021-22 Associated Students President: **Ashley Tejada**

#### SDSU ALUMNI STAFF

Assistant Vice President: **Jim Herrick**  
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Associate Director, Communications and Fundraising: **Zackary Albrecht** ('17)  
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Assistant Director, Marketing and Communications: **Adam Armolea** ('17)  
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# throwback



American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell (right) prepares to return a blow to a student (second from his left) who had hit him with a devastating right hook moments before this photo was taken in 1962.

## THE FAMED ROCKWELL RUCKUS

*A retrospective look at the event that gripped campus and made international headlines.*

*By Seth Mallios*

As the world grapples with the disturbing rise of white supremacy, it is worth recalling that nearly 60 years ago, a San Diego State student stood up to similar fascists in one of the most memorable moments in university history.

On March 8, 1962, American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell, who regularly claimed that the Holocaust never happened and sought to revoke African American citizenship, spoke on campus at the Open Air Theatre (OAT) in a Committee for Student Action-sponsored event.

During his address to the crowd of nearly 3,000, Rockwell called Jewish people the “cause of the world’s troubles,” and also vilified “Negros,” “queers” and women, according to reports in *The Daily Aztec* (DA). One particular person in attendance, a 22-year-old senior physical education major and football player, was moved to counteract the venomous views. “When some guy like Rockwell gets up there and starts knocking your religion and your beliefs, you feel you have to do something about him,” the young Jewish man

from Brooklyn, NY, who now chooses to remain anonymous, recalled to the DA soon after the event. Accordingly, he left his seat to confront the hater.

Since Rockwell had brashly invited anyone on stage to debate his points, OAT security let the student through with hardly a second glance. DA reporters noted that the young man initially went for the microphone to offer an opposing opinion, but when Rockwell shoved him away, the student punched him in the jaw with such force that the American Nazi’s sunglasses flew across the stage. Mayhem ensued as friends ushered the student away from the OAT, and Rockwell took refuge in a nearby building.

As Rockwell exited campus, other students pelted him with raw eggs and smashed the windows on his car. Undaunted by this treatment, he later mocked the response to his speech in a post-event press conference covered nationwide as a “pansy picnic.”

A week later, President Malcolm A. Love and the college Judiciary Board let the student off with a warning, merely placing him on disciplinary probation

because his punch was not premeditated. The DA declared it “a slap on the fist that slugged George Lincoln Rockwell.” And the incident led to extended campus debates about free speech and how to deal with toxic ideologies that persist well into the 21st century.

Looking back, the man who threw the famous punch — now 81 but still fit with a youthful appearance — isn’t proud of the “10 second” moment. But he insists that he stood up for not only the Jewish people but for African Americans, women and everyone else Rockwell was attacking. “That’s the way I’ve tried to live my life,” he says. “It wasn’t a one time thing.” He strives to see both the good and bad in everyone and to understand all points of view. “I don’t hate anyone,” he says. “There is too much hate in the world as it is.” ●

*Professor of Anthropology Seth Mallios is the university history curator and director of the South Coastal Information Center at SDSU. He curated the exhibition “Nathan Harrison: Born Enslaved, Died a San Diego Legend,” currently at the San Diego History Center.*

University Archives Photograph Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, San Diego State University Library.



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