

# Sandpiper

DEL MAR'S COMMUNITY JOURNAL

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## THREE FOR TWO

### Three Candidates for November's City Council Race

by Bud Emerson | Klish Way

**I**t looks like Del Mar will have a lively City Council campaign this fall with three candidates (so far) running for two seats. With an early August filing deadline, the field could become bigger.

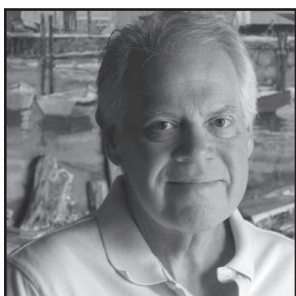
The campaign season began unusually early this year, when Meghan Spieker filed a Candidate Intention Statement with the City Clerk on February 22, followed by a filing indicating she had raised more than \$2000 as of April 17. Jeff Sturgis jumped in next with an April 22 Candidate Intention Statement, followed by an April 23 filing by incumbent Terry Gaasterland.



Terry Gaasterland

**Terry Gaasterland** was first elected to the Council in 2018. Her performance on the SANDAG Board and frequent appearances on local TV have brought her both praise and opposition in the community and regionally. Particularly in the last year, she has often garnered the support of Councilmember Dan

Quirk, clashing at times with current Mayor Tracy Martinez, formerly a close ally, and Deputy Mayor John Spelich.



Jeff Sturgis

Long-time Finance Committee member and Woodpecker founder **Jeff Sturgis** is generally held in high regard for his work on the Finance Committee, but the Woodpecker is perceived by many as a source of community division, based on its negativity and anonymity.

Sturgis's role with the Woodpecker was hidden from the public until October 2024, when he responded to questions from Councilmember Druker during a public Council session considering whether to appoint him to fill the

Council vacancy created by Dwight Worden's resignation. That appointment failed by a 2-2 vote, with Gaasterland and Quirk voting yes, and Martinez and Druker voting no.



Meghan Spieker

Planning Commissioner and former business litigator **Meghan Spieker** is a relative newcomer to politics, though she is a 25-year resident of Del Mar. Her stated intention is to be a bridge builder on a Council that she describes as having become more factionalized; her goal is

“to enable our leadership to be more collaborative, respectful and effective.” It remains unclear, however, whether this year's election will result in a more collaborative Council, or will determine which of the Councilmembers will be positioned to form a working majority.

In the 2022 election, Gaasterland ran with the endorsements of Congressman Mike Levin and the San Diego County Democratic Party. As the Sandpiper reported earlier ([delmarsandpiper.org/2026-01-19-001/](http://delmarsandpiper.org/2026-01-19-001/)), she lost her bid for the Democratic endorsement this year, and lost Levin's endorsement as well, while Spieker has gained them both. Congressman Levin says that Spieker “will be a strong advocate both locally and regionally for Del Mar.” Though Levin has a strong record of bipartisanship in Congress, partisan feelings are playing a big role across almost all elections this year. It is yet to be seen whether it will be a stronger current than usual in this year's Council elections, even though the Council is a non-partisan office, and party designation is not on the ballot.

The Sandpiper will be publishing candidate statements and responses to a questionnaire after the filing deadline, and will be covering the campaigns of the declared candidates as newsworthy developments occur. ▣

EDITORIAL: E-BIKES EEK!

Del Mar's E-bike situation is out of control. Replace Del Mar with any other city, and you realize we have a California-wide challenge.

Sales of electric-powered bicycles (E-bikes) and motorcycles (E-motos) have exploded in recent years. The number sold last year in the US exceeded the number of electric cars sold. Regulations governing their use have not kept pace, but recent deadly incidents involving teen riders have made it even more apparent that we need to take E-bike safety seriously.

An 81-year-old Orange County Vietnam veteran died after being struck by a 14-year-old riding an E-moto that was not street-legal, and that required the rider to be at least 16 years old. His mother, who had previously been warned that this E-moto was illegal, has been indicted for manslaughter. She purchased the E-moto when her son was just 13 years old. She apparently did not know (or care) that state laws limit those under 16 to the use of class 1 (pedal-assist, no throttle) or class 2 (throttle, pedal-assist optional) E-bikes with 20 mph top speed and 750 watts maximum power. E-motos are for off-road use only, unless they are registered and licensed for on-road use, and their rider is 16 or over. Every parent of a teen E-bike rider should know and abide by these rules. The E-moto involved in the Orange County accident had a top speed of 56 mph and an electric motor power of 21 kilowatts (28X the legal limit!).

Those of us who walk the Del Mar streets know that teens riding E-bikes are speeding around with little regard for pedestrians. We don't know how many of these E-bikes are legal, though it is safe to assume many exceed 20 mph. There are several state bills under consideration that would increase the regulation of E-bikes, including AB 1557, which would lower the maximum speed of class 1 and 2 E-bikes to 16 mph, and SB 1167 by our Senator Blakespear, which would require E-bike manufacturers to properly label their products with class and maximum speed. It is already illegal to sell applications that modify E-bikes to exceed speed limits. Amazon has agreed in the last few days to stop selling E-bikes with performance that exceeds state regulations.

Del Mar has passed some E-bike regulations. One prohibits riding E-bikes on sidewalks. That seems to have had little impact on where you might have to dodge an E-bike. Enforcing regulations on teen riders may be challenging, but adults who ignore traffic regulations while riding regular bicycles (STOP sign; what STOP sign) have ceded any moral authority to comment on teen behavior. Nonetheless, holding parents responsible for the safe use of the E-bike they purchased for their teenager, as in the Orange County accident, is an important precedent to follow. ■

See graphic on page 3



Sandpiper

DEL MAR'S COMMUNITY JOURNAL

The Sandpiper is published by the Del Mar Community Alliance, a 501(c)(4) non-profit. Its purpose is to advocate the Del Mar Community Plan, to foster informed public and government decision-making regarding issues affecting the community of the City of Del Mar, and to encourage a social and political climate favorable to the protection of the community character of the City of Del Mar and its environs.

**Editorial Board:** Jeff Barnouw, Bud Emerson, Hylton Lonstein, Julie Maxey-Allison, Don Mosier, Betty Wheeler. *All editors, writers, and photographers are volunteers.* Email: editor@delmarsandpiper.org

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Over the years, hundreds of Del Mar citizens have donated generously to the Del Mar Community Alliance (DMCA) in support of the Sandpiper. Since 2018, more than \$296,000 has been contributed by Del Mar citizens, making it possible to bring the Sandpiper to every Del Mar family at no cost, via their mailboxes and online. The list below represents the community's cumulative leadership giving to DMCA between 2018 and February 13, 2026. Thank you!

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\*In Memoriam

IN BRIEF

BECKY'S BACK

Rebecca "Becky" Bartling has been appointed interim CEO of the Del Mar Fairgrounds, replacing fired CEO Carlene Moore. Bartling has a long history with the fairgrounds, where she served as Chief Operating Officer from 2006 to 2015. More recently, she was CEO of the Sonoma County Fairgrounds until her retirement in December 2024. She has agreed to serve as interim CEO until at least September 2027 while a nationwide search for a permanent CEO is conducted.



Honor Bar (Hillstone restaurant) progress. Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison



Queenstown Public House, opening late May (as of press time) . Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison



Lilli - new coffee shop coming soon. Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison

See Editorial on previous page

Source: PeopleForBikes

	VEHICLE			USER			BIKWAY ACCESS			
	PEDAL OPERATED	MAXIMUM MOTOR-ASSISTED SPEED (MPH)	MINIMUM AGE (YEARS)	DRIVER'S LICENSE	LICENSE PLATE	HELMET	CLASS I BIKE PATH	CLASS II BIKE LANE	CLASS III BIKE ROUTE	CLASS IV PROTECTED LANE
BICYCLE	YES	N/A	N/A	NO	NO	17 AND UNDER	YES	YES	YES	YES
CLASS 1 ELECTRIC BICYCLE	YES	20	N/A	NO	NO	17 AND UNDER	YES	YES	YES	YES
CLASS 2 ELECTRIC BICYCLE	NO	20	N/A	NO	NO	17 AND UNDER	YES	YES	YES	YES
CLASS 3 ELECTRIC BICYCLE	YES	28	16	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
MOPED	NO	N/A	16	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO

## NEW COVID PILL

by Don Mosier | Rimini Road

The May 13th issue of the journal Nature reported that a new pill containing the antiviral compound ensitrelvir was effective in preventing transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, followed 2,000 subjects in households with one person who had confirmed COVID. Transmission of infection occurred in 3% of individuals taking a 5-day course of ensitrelvir versus 9% in the placebo group, and infections were milder in the treatment group. Side effects were similar to Paxlovid, an established antiviral used to treat COVID infection. Paxlovid, however, failed to lower transmission rates in an earlier clinical trial.

The new pill will provide an option for vulnerable individuals with a high risk of COVID exposure, such as nursing home residents. ▣



“No Kings” Protest. May 1<sup>st</sup>, Camino Del Mar.  
Photos: Julie Maxey-Allison

## MICROPLASTICS, PLASTICIZERS, AND YOUR HEALTH

by Kristin Hampshire MD | Del Mar Resident

“One word ... plastics,” a famous quote from the 1967 film, “The Graduate,” was a prophetic statement about the role plastics would play in our modern world. As a highly functional material, plastics are integral to modern life. What was not predicted in the 1960s was how sick they would make us. As with many modern conveniences, there are unintended consequences.

Microplastics, the tiny products of degradation of plastics, are inhaled, ingested, and absorbed. They are found universally in our blood and travel through our bodies to wherever blood goes, which is everywhere. They are found in our brains and reproductive organs and can even alter our DNA, allowing harm to be transmitted. They are found in breast milk and travel through the placenta into a developing fetus, eventually found in a newborn’s first poop.

Why does this matter? While science is evolving, there is reliable evidence that when plastics degrade, they expose us to the many harmful chemicals used to make plastics, known as “plasticizers,” such as BPA and phthalates. The evidence surrounding the health effects of plasticizers is alarming. They are endocrine (hormone) disrupting chemicals (EDCs). EDCs are linked to reproductive harm, cancers, infertility, cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, and adverse pregnancy/fetal outcomes. While all are affected, our most vulnerable are our most precious: pregnant moms, babies, and young children. Medical societies we rely on for guidance have advised the medical community to discuss these risks with patients. While the evolving science is acknowledged, their policy statements on microplastics/EDCs summarize that waiting for further proof of harm is a risk to human health.

What can we do? While policy solutions are ideal, they are challenging to enact. Individual actions are within our sphere of control. There are many ways to reduce exposure to microplastics. Some big ones: avoid packaged and processed foods and drink/cook with filtered water. Other suggestions: use glass or stainless steel water bottles, store and reheat food in glass, minimize canned food (BPA lining), avoid daily coffee in “paper cup” (also chemical lined)—bring your own mug instead, wear cotton/linen/wool instead of lycra/polyester/fleece, use an air purifier with a HEPA filter in your home, avoid heavy fragrances in cosmetics/lotions/detergents...

Want to know more? Check out these trusted sites. [endocrinesociety.org](http://endocrinesociety.org), [ewg.org](http://ewg.org), [consumerreports.org](http://consumerreports.org)

The more you learn, the more you can do to protect our planet, yourself and those you love.

Healthy Planet <-> Healthy People ▣

## SUMMER TWILIGHT CONCERTS

by Tom Neuman MD | DMF President

Well, the sun is out, school classes are finishing, and plans are being made for summer! Del Mar Foundation's Summer Twilight Concert Series will again grace the stage and lawn of Powerhouse Park for four dates this summer.

Started in 1983, the free concerts bring the community together for a fun evening of music, dancing, camaraderie, and sunsets. Opening acts will begin at 6pm, followed by the main act at 7pm. The lineup this summer looks great.

**June 23:** Opening act – *Wish*. Main act – *The Mighty Untouchables*: A favorite cover band with a huge repertoire that is guaranteed to get you up singing & dancing.

**July 14:** Opening act – *Fat Paw*: San Diego-based rock band who previously played with Ratdog (Bob Weir Grateful Dead). Main act – *Back to the Garden*: Playing sounds of Laurel Canyon, Crosby/ Stills/Nash & Young, Carole King, and more.

**July 28:** Opening act – *Anthony Cullins Band*: Blues, funk, R&B, soul, 2026 San Diego Music Awards winner of "Album of the Year." Main act – *Steely Damned 2*: 14-piece tribute band with powerful renditions of the original Steely Dan.

**August 11:** Opening act – *Salty Papa*: Serving up soul, R&B, jazz, and rock'n'roll. Main act: - *The Walrus, A New Orleans Beatles Experience*: Beatles tribute band that had everyone singing & dancing for their entire 2 sets when last playing Powerhouse in 2023.

Arrive early, bring a blanket and picnic, and enjoy the relaxed vibes of these concert productions. Come up and say hello to the Del Mar Foundation volunteers under the tent by the stage. Can't wait to see you this summer! More information: [delmarfoundation.org/twilight](http://delmarfoundation.org/twilight)



*The Walrus playing at one of the 2023 Summer Twilight Concerts*

by Ashley Simpkins | Executive Director

At DMCC's Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event on May 1, Larry Brooks was recognized by the Board for his dedication to his neighbors and his go-getter spirit as they presented him with the 2026 Volunteer of the Year Award. In addition to the DMCC award presented, Larry was presented with a County of San Diego Proclamation from Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer's office and a Cheers for Volunteers recognition from California State Senator Catherine Blakespear's office. On May 5, the City of Del Mar presented a proclamation in Larry's honor at the City Council meeting that further acknowledged Larry's numerous contributions to the Del Mar community.



*From left: Del Mar Deputy Mayor John Spelich, DMCC President Katie Militello, Larry Brooks, Diana Kutlow (Blakespear's office), Omar Teran Sosa (Lawson-Remer's office). Photo: Kara Adams*

Larry is one of those rare people who seems to draw from a bottomless well of empathy and energy and makes himself invaluable in a variety of ways. He does it all! Last fall he helped DMCC make the 25th Anniversary Fall Benefit special by creating a video yearbook of the attendees' photos from the year 2000... and he was a key member of a Connect Team of volunteers in a pilot of in-neighborhood DMCC services... and he is a frequent contributor to the relatively new Public Relations committee. All of this is in addition to Larry's longtime role as the presenter of DMCC's Remarkable Del Mar History. DMCC President Katie Militello nominated Larry for volunteer of the month last October because he "is one of DMCC's longest contributing volunteers. He always looks out for his neighbors and shares whatever resources and skills he has with others in the community. He's always willing to help out in promoting DMCC to those who can use our help. We are so grateful to have his dedication and support."

Congratulations Larry! To learn more about Larry or the many ways you can contribute to DMCC as a volunteer, visit [www.dmcc.cc/volunteerofthemoth](http://www.dmcc.cc/volunteerofthemoth). To see an extensive library of Larry's many Remarkable Del Mar History lessons, visit [www.dmcc.cc/remarkabledelmarhistory](http://www.dmcc.cc/remarkabledelmarhistory).

For more information, visit our website at [dmcc.cc](http://dmcc.cc) or contact us at (858) 792-7565 or [dmcc@dmcc.cc](mailto:dmcc@dmcc.cc).

# AI, SAY YOU'RE SORRY

by Payson R. Stevens | Del Mar Resident

Artificial intelligence now writes apology texts, performance reviews, and love notes in seconds. It even acts as a “confidante,” holding hands and comforting seniors with a tone that sounds remarkably real. But as these tools slip into our most personal spaces, we are beginning to outsource not just language, but ownership.

The output is often eloquent, but there are dangerous downsides. When we treat AI as a moral or emotional authority, the “asymmetry” of risk becomes life-threatening. We have already seen tragic real-world consequences where individuals, seeking guidance from AI “confidantes,” were nudged toward self-harm, suicide, or even violence.

The core of the problem is that AI can model empathy, but it cannot feel remorse. It can suggest a course of action, but it cannot bear the weight of a wrong decision. While AI can outperform humans in narrow analytic tasks, responsibility cannot be delegated to probability scores—especially when a life is at stake.

In my recent book, *Before AI Decides: Nine Ways to Stay Human*, I argue that human judgment must remain the final filter. AI removes “friction,” which is its genius—and its greatest risk. Friction is where moral clarity is built. Without it, we enter a “confidence economy” where fluent answers erase the visible struggle required for true accountability.

To navigate this era, we must practice three disciplines:

- **Name the Decision:** Before acting on an AI suggestion, identify the human stakes involved.
- **Reinsert Ownership:** Rewrite AI drafts in your own language to ensure you can stand behind the words.
- **Declare Responsibility:** Be transparent about AI use and clear about where your judgment overrides the machine.

AI is restructuring society in countless, often unimaginable ways, that scream from daily headlines: some for good, others for the worse. The most dangerous moment in any AI interaction is when we stop questioning the tool. AI can draft an apology or a script, but it cannot sit with a grieving family or accept the cost of a tragedy. Those burdens remain human. We safeguard our dignity not through automation, but through intentional, presence-based judgment. □

*This essay was written using AI as an editing tool to iterate the issues explored.*

Payson Stevens’ recent book, *Before AI Decides: Nine Ways to stay Human*, examines how individuals can retain judgment and responsibility as AI becomes embedded in everyday decisions.

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## SNAP Up, Please

by Shirley King | Aveinda Primavera

### June 6<sup>th</sup>, 11 A.M. to Noon 11<sup>th</sup> Street at Camino del Mar

Del Mar residents are stepping up as food insecurity surges across our region, driven by the rollback of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This year alone, 13,000 San Diego residents - including legal immigrants and asylum seekers - have lost access to this essential support.

To meet this growing need, community food collection boxes will be available at the corners of 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Camino del Mar on the first Saturday of every month from 11 A.M. to 12 Noon. The next collection day takes place Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup>. All donations will go directly to the San Diego Food Bank’s distribution center in Vista, helping get food to those in North County who need it most.

At the same time, access to federal food assistance is becoming increasingly difficult. Nearly 200,000 eligible San Diego residents are not enrolled in SNAP, often due to fear and mistrust. It is a \$550 million local economic loss. Threats like the Department of Homeland Security’s proposed rollback of the 2022 Public Charge protections create real anxiety for immigrant families. If enacted, it would grant the DHS the power to deny green cards based on factors like the use of federal or social services programs.

We can all ease the strain that families, individuals, college students, and older adults are experiencing. Please donate shelf-stable food (no glass containers). Baby and toddler diapers are in great demand. Volunteers will be available to assist with unloading. □

## SHOREBIRD SHORTAGE

by Julie Maxey-Allison | 10<sup>th</sup> Street

On a gray morning, a low-tide beach walk, the sand was sans shore birds, any birds. Within the hour, one sandpiper searched the wet sand for a snack, a single seagull settled down into a dry sand seat, joined later by two new arrivals who flew in. It could have been an off time of day or year, or their time to mate offshore, or whatever, but the bigger supposition: climate change. Like many of earth's animals, our shore creatures face differing habitat disruptions. A mix of local and global warming is shifting and shrinking our sandy beach space, where the very basic food chain supplies grow. Marine heat waves in warming ocean waters and sea-level rise are disrupting the cycles of available plankton and larval food sources, the Pacific Sand Crabs, Gould's Wedge Clams, and some fish eat. The crabs, clams, and fish are, in turn, the food source for bigger fish and local and migrating birds.

We humans add to the problem. Coastal development, sea walls, armored bluffs are also linked to dwindling beaches. In an effort to boost back beaches, replenishment projects import sand. A good idea. But replacement sand is too often too coarse for clams, which cannot survive.

While seagulls may flock back, hungry osprey and cormorants, and migrating birds—whimbrels, godwits, surf scoters, black-bellied plovers, and curlews—may not now find enough food on our beaches as fish swim out to cooler waters. Some simply starve to death. Others, underweight due to lack of food, produce fewer chicks in their breeding grounds. In addition, the omnipresent microplastics found in almost all of the digestive systems of sand crabs tested from California beaches does not bode well for a healthy, productive future, a downward cycle that starts right here on our sand. ▣

### IN BRIEF

#### SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

Both the Del Mar Union School District and San Dieguito Union High School District hold regular elections every November of even-numbered years. Elections are staggered so that two or three seats are on the ballot every election year. In both DMUSD and San Dieguito, three of the five seats will be up in the general election this November.

The filing deadline for this election is August 7, 2026.

## ROVING TEEN REPORTER: IS COLLEGE WORTH IT?

by Lana Weber | Torrey Pines High School Junior

For generations, students have assumed that attending a university and receiving a bachelor's degree would guarantee entry into the job market. In recent years, that assumption has begun to look faulty.

According to National Public Radio, over the last 30 years, the "average tuition to both public and private four-year colleges has essentially doubled after adjusting for inflation." This, combined with the decrease in entry-level and white-collar jobs due to a rise in Artificial Intelligence, means that students are often left with substantial debt and a limited ability to pay it off.

Iniya Sivakumar, a rising senior at Torrey Pines High, has noticed that decisions regarding how to pursue education are often financially driven.

"If you go to an institution ... it's definitely pricey and then sometimes you might not find a job as quickly depending on what field you're going into," Sivakumar said. "[Trade schools] are definitely good options for people who want to pursue them ... it's definitely a lot cheaper, but sometimes long-term financial accessibility is unpredictable."

She can see a "lot of students going to a community college for the first two years and then transferring over to another university to save money, "because every school is so expensive."

Sivakumar wants to pursue doctoral studies in the future and plans to attend a four-year college. "I want to study medicine and be a doctor so I can help people, and there's no way for me to go to trade school and do that [because of the degree] ... and [there is] parental pressure," Sivakumar said. "Your parents have a lot of influence on you because a lot of the time you go with what makes them proud and what impresses them."

Sivakumar has also noticed how the two paths are viewed differently by society. "If you go to a four-year university, people think you are more prestigious."

Despite these factors, Sivakumar does not find a degree to necessarily be the recipe for financial success. "A lot of people are successful without going to college and getting a degree," Sivakumar said. "They start their own business and just learn along the way ... [a degree] is just more favored by society."

When a degree no longer guarantees financial success, students must decide whether to pursue a costly university experience or pursue a more vocational educational path. ▣

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DATED MATERIAL



[www.delmarsandpiper.org](http://www.delmarsandpiper.org)

## COMMUNITY GARDENS CELEBRATED

by Jill Gartman | President, Del Mar Garden Club

On a sunny Saturday morning, Del Mar came alive with the sights, scents, and stories of its public gardens as the Del Mar Garden Club hosted its first-ever Community Gardens Day on May 9th — a date Mayor Tracy Martinez officially proclaimed Del Mar Garden Club Community Gardens Day.

A crowd of residents and visitors joined the free, self-guided walking tour, which wound through five public gardens across the city from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The day drew gardening enthusiasts and curious newcomers eager to discover what's blooming in their own backyard.

The tour began at Del Mar Civic Center, where attendees picked up maps and fresh succulent cuttings from the Girl Scout Succulent Library, and saw the caterpillars at the Monarch Butterfly Pollinator Garden.



Club Member Piper Underwood with tour participants at the Civic Center Succulent Library. Photo: Alison Winters

From there, participants strolled to the Del Mar Community Building Succulent Garden on 9th Street, where they learned the simple art of propagating succulents and received ladybugs to release in their own home gardens. The Del Mar Library's Drought Tolerant Garden drew attendees for a presentation by Dr. Michael Simpson, SDSU Professor Emeritus and club member. The Library also presented the Del Mar Garden Club with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of its years of support of the Del Mar Library and its mission in the community.

At the Post Office Shade Garden on 15th Street, UC Master Gardener Mary Friestedt and fellow members fielded questions on plant care and identification — and sent visitors home with rose-scented geranium clippings. The final stop, Crest Rim Park's Native Garden along Crest Road, offered a peaceful close to the tour and a deeper look at the native plants that sustain Del Mar's coastal ecosystem.

Throughout the day, participants took part in a scavenger hunt and searched the gardens for unique plants and features — including Pincushion Protea and other distinctive specimens highlighted on the tour map. Those who completed all the gardens turned in their maps for a free scoop of ice cream at Saffron & Rose.

Founded in 1988, the Del Mar Garden Club is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that contributes to the beauty of Del Mar. To learn more or donate to support Del Mar's public gardens, visit [delmargardenclub.org](http://delmargardenclub.org). □