

Sandpiper

DEL MAR'S COMMUNITY JOURNAL

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THE SANDPIPER ENDORSES...

Del Mar voters will choose two of the four candidates on the ballot to serve on our City Council. Too often in the past, we've had uncontested elections, leaving voters with no choice. A contested election is good for democracy, giving us the best opportunity to collectively decide what leadership will best serve our city. And this year, there are real differences between the candidates. The Sandpiper editorial board endorses:



JAS GREWAL: The community has seen Jas Grewal work hard and effectively in service to our City for years: on the Finance Committee for eight years, and on the Planning Commission for the

past three years. In 2020, she was appointed by Council to the Ad-Hoc Citizen's Housing Task Force, where she worked on the Housing Production and Preservation Subcommittee (along with Tracy Martinez, who now serves as our Mayor). That Task Force was a "baptism by fire" in the complexities of our affordable housing obligations. While there is room for disagreement on some of her positions, her service demonstrates her deep commitment to Del Mar as well as her leadership qualities. She can be counted on to be well prepared, to respect the views of others, and to make thoughtful decisions. Her long executive experience in banking should serve us well in continuing Del Mar's long record of prudent financial management.



MEGHAN SPIEKER appears to be a candidate tailor-made to meet the moment we find ourselves in. With consequential decisions just ahead of us that will shape Del Mar for decades to come, we need leaders with the deep

experience and skills necessary to reach the best possible outcomes. Spieker's experiences in both nonprofit leadership and as an attorney handling complex business litigation means she can collaborate effectively to find the best solutions for Del Mar-- and can also fight hard and effectively for Del Mar when a hard fight is called for. At a time when our reputation regionally has been greatly diminished, for reasons noted in our Editorial, she has the skill set and commitment to repair our regional relationships, and restore Del Mar's reputation as a small City that punches above its weight. Her service on the Planning Commission will allow her to hit the ground running on Council.

Both of these candidates are endorsed by U.S. Congressman Mike Levin, which means a strong federal connection is already assured. They both have strong relationships with other elected officials regionally. Their Sierra Club endorsements signal their alignment with Del Mar's strong environmental values. In a time of transition for our Fire Department, they both are endorsed by the Del Mar Firefighters. Del Mar can best position ourselves for the future by electing these candidates to our Council.

The Sandpiper also endorses:

- Mike Levin, U.S. Congress (CA-49)
- Xavier Becerra, Governor
- Catherine Blakespear, State Senate
- Tasha Boerner, State Assembly
- Helen Doyle, SDUHS Trustee

CANDIDATE FORUM

City Council candidates will participate in a Town Hall candidate forum moderated by the League of Women Voters on Friday, October 2, 2026 from 1:00-2:30pm. Candidates have equal time to respond to questions submitted in writing by the audience, and for opening and closing statements.

EDITORIAL

CONSEQUENTIAL CHOICES

This year's Del Mar City Council election may be the most consequential in decades. The new Council will grapple with significant challenges likely to define and shape our community far into the future. Think rail relocation, bluff restoration, sea level rise, affordable housing—and those are just some of the “known knowns,” to use Donald Rumsfeld's famous framework.

We increasingly find ourselves in situations where other entities have more decision-making power than Del Mar does, even when the impacts are squarely on us. Those with significant leverage include the State, the courts, developers, the Fair Board, and SANDAG. This at a time when our reputation regionally has been greatly diminished. We need leaders who can repair our reputation, gain the trust of other leaders, and build alliances to help us defend our interests when decisions are beyond our control.

Voters should take a hard look to see which candidates have the skills and the credibility to navigate these turbulent waters.

Eight-year incumbent Terry Gaasterland has the clearest accountability line. Her grandstanding performances on TV and in SANDAG forums have alienated many regional leaders whose support we need on important issues. She has very low credibility with our state and federal representatives. She walked and likely crossed the line in shaping and voting on short term rental policies, by failing to timely disclose that she had engaged in short-term rentals. Her inept maneuvering on affordable housing has diminished our ability to protect Del Mar's interests. We deserve better.

Jeff Sturgis served well on the Finance Committee (as did candidate Jas Grewal). Less well known is the role he has played in injecting incivility and dubious claims into our political discourse, as the founder and principal of the entity responsible for an anonymous publication widely distributed in our community. An example of its sensationalist claims was this headline: “Mayor Worden Signed Over Control of \$1.5 Billion of Del Mar Homes to the California Coastal Commission.” Pure hogwash.

Jas Grewal and Meghan Spieker are far better choices for our votes (see our endorsements on page 1).

A final political note. Del Mar has been reliably blue for many elections. Most polls and analysts predict a blue wave nationally in this election. The right wing establishment in the county is betting on a red wave in Del Mar that will allow ethically-challenged incumbents Gaasterland and Dan Quirk to form a right-leaning majority with Jeff Sturgis. Del Mar has too much at stake to put the reins of our City in their hands. □



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

This publication depends upon the contributions of readers like you. Send contributions to: Sandpiper, 1155 Camino Del Mar #436, Del Mar, CA 92014. Make checks payable to Sandpiper, or pay online. Contributions are not tax-deductible.

The Sandpiper's Leadership Donors

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!

Joel Holliday Circle (\$5,000+)

Jeff Barnouw, remembering Dagmar Barnouw | Rosanne Rennie Holliday and Joel Holliday* | Lynn and Charlie Gaylord Rod Franklin | Bud and Mary Ann Emerson | Maryka and George Hoover* | Betty Wheeler and Dwight Worden | Mary and Jeff Friestedt | Judd and Susan Halenza | Louise Keeling and Ralph Keeling | Ann Feeney and Don Mosier | Suzi Resnick and Stan Marks | Patricia and Marc Brutton

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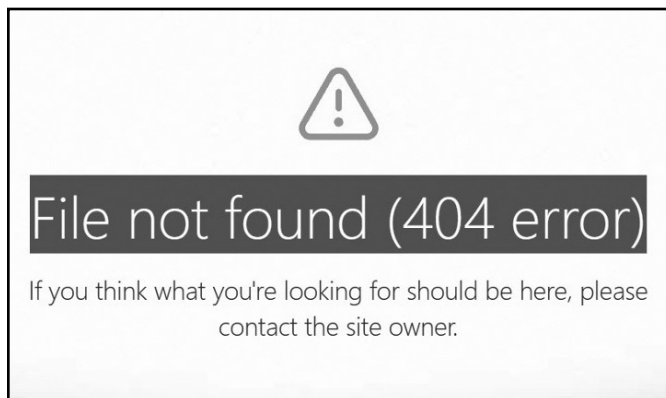
**In Memoriam*

CAMPAIGN FACT GAPS

by Bud Emerson | Klish Way

As of September 21, as we went to press, and just two weeks before ballots are mailed to voters, the Sandpiper encountered online dead ends for key candidates' websites.

Candidate Jeff Sturgis founded Del Mar Woodpecker and Moving Del Mar Forward (MDMF), publisher of Del Mar Woodpecker. He appears to have taken MDMF's website, forwarddelmar.com, off-line, making much of Sturgis's record over the past 9 years on key Del Mar issues harder to access and review. His campaign website - <https://jgsturgis.com/> - has a short statement about why he is running, and a donation button, but does not provide information on his positions on any substantive issues.



The 404 error message returned by TerryForDelMar.com on Sept. 21, 2026.

Terry Gaasterland's website, tgfordelmar.com, is a shell of its former self during her 2022 campaign, with all but the home page removed, now featuring a "COMING SOON" message along with a "Top Priorities" button that goes nowhere. A different website prominently featured on her 2026 yard signs, TerryForDelMar.com, goes to a "File not found (404 error)" message (see above). Her main communication vehicle appears to be Hershell Price's "Knowledge for the Vote" email platform.

By contrast, the other two candidates have websites that offer detailed information on a range of issues, along with candidate credentials and background: meghan4delmar.com, and jas4delmar.com. ■

SCHOOL BOARD CHOICES

by Neelum Arya | Zuni Drive

Three at-large seats are up on the five-person Del Mar Union School Board. Current trustees Katherine Fitzpatrick, Doug Rafner, and Alan Kholos are all running for re-election, along with challenger Stephen Cochrane, a special education attorney who seeks a return to the role.

Katherine Fitzpatrick is running for her third term, has children attending DMUSD schools, and has been steadfast in her quest to bring transitional kindergarten to the district. But what motivates Kholos, Rafner, or Cochrane to serve? Kholos is running for a new four-year term after his 2024 election to fulfill Steve Wooden's former slot. On his campaign website, Kholos touts his accomplishments related to special education in the District. Cochrane previously served on the Del Mar Union School District board from 2017 to 2019. He resigned in 2019 when he moved out of the district boundaries. Presumably he is also running to address special education needs, as he was quoted in a recent July 22nd Voice of San Diego article: "This isn't specific to Del Mar, but in many school districts I see a general lack of accountability in administrators running the district." Rafner's decision to run for a fifth term is perhaps the most perplexing. Compared to Fitzpatrick and Kholos, Rafner seems less interested in DMUSD activities other than his role chairing the North City West School Facilities Financing Authority.

Board of Trustees positions are not well paid, but they are also not volunteer positions. Trustees get a base pay just under \$3k along with medical, dental, and vision benefits valued at over \$13k, bringing their annual compensation to around \$16k each. As all the candidates have served, or are currently serving on the school board, the public should be able to evaluate their relative strengths and weaknesses but that is impossible with the information currently provided by DMUSD. Unlike other districts in our area, DMUSD does not maintain an archive of video or audio recordings of prior school board meetings. DMUSD also does not capture detailed information about specific Trustee performance in the meeting minutes, only noting "Staff responded to clarifying questions from the Board." ■

IN BRIEF

COMMUNITY PLAN CELEBRATES 50TH

A celebratory mood prevailed at the September 8 Council meeting when four former mayors joined the dais to lead the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the City's Community Plan. Tom Shepard was a (very young) Mayor in 1974-75 when some 300 residents collaborated with the Council and staff to craft the Plan. The former mayors joining Shepard on the dais to lead the celebration were Hervey "Sage" Sweetwood (Chair of the Planning Commission when the Plan was adopted), and Nancy Fletcher (formerly Hoover) and John Weare, who were both Councilmembers when the Community Plan was adopted. Shepard's 2022 Sandpiper article, "Community Plan Beginnings," is online here: delmarsandpiper.org/2022-06-014/



Resident Roger Reynolds speaks at the Council's celebration, with four former mayors seated at the dais. Photo: Dwight Worden

LOUISE KEELING, 1931–2026

A gracious "First Lady" to David Keeling of Keeling Curve fame who inspired warmth, happiness and community in all around her. She was a leader in creating the Community Plan and numerous other groups that contributed to the special character of Del Mar.



Photo courtesy of the Keeling family.

IN BRIEF

LIBRARY CELEBRATES 30TH

The Del Mar Library is celebrating 30 years in its current building, formerly home to St. James Catholic Church. Friends of Del Mar Library is offering special programming throughout the year. On October 10, two musical acts will perform: a Balinese gamelan chamber ensemble and a Zimbabwean mbira (10:30 am-1pm). An instrument "petting zoo" with instruments from around the world will be also be featured. The special 30th anniversary programs are supported by a Del Mar Foundation grant.



Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison

DMF GRANTS IN 2026

by Glenn Warren | DMF Grants Committee Chair

The Del Mar Foundation makes grants to local projects and organizations to benefit our community, including promoting civic pride and community cohesiveness. The first nine months of 2026 have proven to be an exceptional and productive year in this regard. Examples of grants made this year are:

Del Mar Hills Academy Garden: A DMF grant is bringing trees, an irrigation system, and other improvements to a garden at Del Mar Hills Academy.

Del Mar International Composer's Symposium (DMICS): DMF made a grant to support the 7th season of DMICS bringing world-class modern classical music to Del Mar.

Don Diego Plant*Grow*Eat: DMF, once again, provided funding to transport Title I students from schools across San Diego County to the Fairgrounds to learn about healthy eating habits and positive lifestyle choices.

Del Mar Fire Marshal Vehicle: DMF provided funding for the purchase of a vehicle to be used by the fire marshal of the newly formed Del Mar-Solana Beach shared fire management agreement.

Surf Del Mar Festival: DMF made a grant to support the Del Mar Historical Society's Surf Del Mar Festival taking place October 8-11 in Del Mar. See surfdelmarfestival.com for more information.

Del Mar Library 30th Anniversary Celebration: The Library is celebrating its 30th anniversary throughout the year. A DMF grant provided summer programming and will bring two musical acts to the Library on October 10th as part of the anniversary celebration. See the calendar at sdcl.org/locations/12 for more information.

Tuesday Lunch Connections: As we've done for several years, DMF provided the funding to fully support Del Mar Community Connection's Tuesday Lunch Connections program (TLC). This twice-monthly program brings together 85+ local seniors at highest risk of isolation for lunch, social engagement, and talks by special guest speakers.

Red Nose Run: A DMF grant will support this annual holiday beach run with proceeds of the event to be donated to Semper Fi America's Fund and San Dieguito River Park.

DMF's ability to make grants to support our community is made possible by the generosity of donors, and the many volunteers on various DMF committees who review the grant applications, as well as those who manage the DMF's endowment. Thank you to all.

by Ashley Simpkins | Executive Director

Care to Connect?

Sometimes a quick chat or a friendly face is all it takes to make a neighbor's day so much brighter. In Del Mar, some local older adults face a quiet crisis of social isolation. DMCC is addressing that by recruiting volunteers to join the Connect Team. These volunteers, called Connect Partners, are each matched with one person who could use more kindness in their life.

Joining the Connect Team is a wonderful way to offer caring companionship and help our older neighbors stay connected to valuable DMCC services and activities. Whether you prefer catching up by phone or dropping by for an in-person visit, all it takes is a reliable, warm presence and a heart for listening. With a simple commitment of 2-4 hours a month—tailored around your schedule—you can build a meaningful relationship grounded in trust, respect, and laughter.

Connect Partners complete a Live Scan background check, attend a 1.5-hour training, and receive ongoing guidance. You don't need to worry about home repairs or medical care—just bring your genuine care for older adults. If you're interested in this volunteer opportunity, please call the DMCC office at (858) 792-7565. Reach out today and help us brighten lives in our community!

Walk Safe – Walk Smart!

Love exploring Del Mar on foot? On October 22, 2026 at 4:30pm, DMCC and the City of Del Mar will host a one-hour seminar at Town Hall (1050 Camino Del Mar) that will help you navigate roadways with total confidence and safety. TREDWise is offered by UCSD's Transportation Research and Education for Driving Safety (TREDS) Center, which is committed to preventing crash-related morbidity and mortality by increasing safe behaviors on the roadways. At this free workshop, CHP Officer Jared Grieshaber will share practical pedestrian safety tips, clear up key traffic rules, and teach effective defensive walking strategies straight from law enforcement and researchers from TREDS. Learn how to stay aware of personal risk factors and make every walk a safer one. Learn more or register online at www.dmcc.cc/programregistration.

Volunteer of the Month – September

DMCC's Volunteer of the Month for September was Cat Kom. Cat is an Essential Transportation volunteer who has a heart for service and always brings the fun hosting the Grocery Van. Cat was nominated by DMCC Board Member and Transportation Committee volunteer Dan Maneval who said "Cat turns something as simple as going to the grocery store into something fun and exciting. DMCC is fortunate to have someone with so much energy and dedication as part of the team."

DMCC programs and services depend on our incredible volunteers! To learn more about Cat, or opportunities to contribute by volunteering, visit dmcc.cc/volunteerofthemonth.

CLIMATE REALITIES

by Julie Maxey-Allison | 10th Street

Plants—and people—have had a tough long hot summer 2026. And according to weather forecasters, there are more to come. We in Del Mar, lucky to have enjoyed mellow Mediterranean weather, are in for a climate change. Our future: more “extreme” weather with hotter summers. We are not alone. This year record breaking temperatures were reported around the globe.

Along with this new climate reality is the fact that water in the West, always a precious commodity, is drying up. California’s supply from the Colorado River was cut by 10-12% through 2028. While San Diego currently has an adequate supply of water through 2050, this vital resource’s cost will continually rise along with the temperature.

However, there will be water, a lot, soon. This is an El Niño year. El Niño translates to the sweet sounding “little boy,” a term first used by Peruvian fishermen in the 1600s to describe the warm stormy ocean waters. According to the city “a ‘super’ El Niño is gaining strength in the Pacific Ocean” and is “95% likely to develop between October and December” bringing high winds, heavy downpours of rain (hopefully some can be captured) and big waves. Sea levels could rise to the highest ever recorded on our California coast— predicted at 13” above our current norm. The impact: erosion of our bluffs, damage from flooding along the beachfront, train tracks and adjoining properties from mudslides resulting from saturated soil.

IN BRIEF

SURF’S UP

Surf Del Mar Festival (October 8-11 at various Del Mar venues) will bring together “surfers, storytellers, artists, musicians, authors and filmmakers” to celebrate surfing, its culture, and its history in Del Mar. The festival, organized by the Del Mar Historical Society, includes a film festival, a book fair, a multi-generational surfers’ reunion, a woodies display, a surfing and sustainability symposium, live music (The Mar Dels, Tower 7, Peter Sprague), and much more. All events free. surfdelmarfestival.com



Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison

Will this El Niño prove to be as “super” as predicted? Maybe. Maybe not. But after whatever comes with our winter weather, temperatures are on the rise and the drought may continue. Looking ahead, check out water savvy plants for landscaping. For now the city has an El Niño Webpage to help property owners to prepare for the near future: delmar.ca.us/964/El-Nino ■

SURFING & SUSTAINABILITY SYMPOSIUM

by Jennifer Anderson | Serpentine Drive

Mark your calendar for Thursday, October 8 (10am-2:30pm) for the Surfing and Sustainability Symposium. Bringing together the worlds of surfing and science to confront our most pressing coastal challenges, the symposium will be moderated by Jeff Lehmann and include a rich slate experts speaking on topics including:

- The Past, Present and Future of Sustainability in Surf Culture
- An Ocean of Plastic: Nurdles and the Global Plastics Crisis
- Plastic, Reimagined: A Molecular Solution to Microplastics
- Protecting Mexico’s Most Iconic Surfbreaks and Their Surrounding Habitats
- Scripps Coastal Mapping Program and Erosion Research

This symposium is part of the Surf Del Mar Festival (details in the In Brief at left). ■

FARMERS MARKET CELEBRATES 40TH

In the fall of 1986, a stalwart group of Del Mar residents established the nonprofit Del Mar Farmers Market: Sharon Fierabend, Alice Goodkind, Marti Kay, Joyce Malone, and Lorraine Rouse. It is the second-oldest certified farmers market in the County. Originally operating on the old city hall's parking lot, the design of the Del Mar Civic Center included an outdoor parking area west of the parking garage designed to serve double duty as the Farmers Market's new home, with adjacent enclosed spaces in the garage that support the market's operations. A share of the market's profits are donated to local nonprofits and fund scholarships. The Market operates every Saturday, noon-4:00pm.



Robert "Mac" McMillan's painting depicts the Del Mar Farmers Market in its early years.



THANKS MATT FOR 29

Mayor Tracy Martinez presented a proclamation to principal planner Matt Bator on September 8, the date of his retirement, recognizing his significant contributions to Del Mar during his 29 year tenure in the City's Planning and Community Development Department. Photo: Betty Wheeler

WATERMARK WORK

Construction of the 50-unit Watermark housing project was well underway on September 15, a month after the projected 21-month construction program began. Photo: Betty Wheeler



A NOD TO ITALY

Lilli al Mare, a cafe, with a nod to Italy, getting set for an October opening. The cafe, branching out from La Jolla, offers pastries and food, coffee and drinks. 1202 Camino Del Mar. Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison

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DATED MATERIAL



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WHAT'S NEXT FOR NORTH BLUFF?

by Betty Wheeler | Seaview Avenue

The termination of negotiations between Del Mar and the 22nd DAA (the fairgrounds' governing board) for an affordable housing site on Fairgrounds property brings the focus back to North Bluff, even as the City looks for new ways to secure a Fairgrounds site.

A February 26 Court Date: The case filed in Superior Court against the City by North Bluff property owner Carole Lazier over her proposed Seaside Ridge development has a trial date of February 26, 2027. The Seaside Ridge project proposes 259 housing units, with 85 designated as affordable, on Lazier property of approx. 6.9 acres.

The case claims that the City has improperly withheld approval of the project, and that Seaside Ridge is entitled to proceed under State law's "builder's remedy," which would substantially restrict the City's discretion over the project. A July 30, 2026 appellate court decision, *New Commune*, appears to favor the City's position in this case.

A Rezone of North Bluff Triggered?

In addition to the "builder's remedy" claim, another basis for North Bluff upzoning is now in play. The failure of fairgrounds housing negotiations triggers an obligation in the City's 6th Cycle Housing Element for the City to implement a rezone of vacant properties on North Bluff (and/or South Stratford). That rezone must apply a density of 20-25 dwelling units per net acre. Density bonus would also be available.

A letter from Lazier's attorney asserts that "with the inclusion of affordable units..., a project on the [Lazier] property could accommodate up to 271 dwelling units." The City asserts that it is "has proactively begun...the rezoning of 11.7 acres on the North Bluff which will yield significantly more affordable housing units than [the Lazier proposal]," but that the schedule for the rezoning "is driven by compliance with both CEQA [California environmental law] and the California Coastal Act." (Letter from Ralph Hicks, Assistant City Attorney dated Sept. 16, 2026)

Still unclear: How will the California Department of Housing and Community Development respond to Del Mar's failure to reach a timely deal for fairgrounds housing, and to Del Mar's proposed method and timetable for upzoning North Bluff? How will the Superior Court rule on the builder's remedy and other claims by Lazier and Seaside Ridge? How will the Coastal Commission, in the first instance, and then the courts, reconcile State housing law and the Coastal Act? These are the complex legal issues that are likely to shape the development of North Bluff, and the extent to which Del Mar retains control over that development.

A key takeaway, however, is that even with all of these complicated, unresolved legal issues, North Bluff is headed for a future with hundreds of housing units. ▣