Sandpiper

DEL MAR'S COMMUNITY JOURNAL

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LAGOON BIRDING

by John Weare | Ocean View Ave.

I arrived in San Diego in 1969, with Nancy and Chrissy, to begin a long teaching career in the Chemistry Department at UCSD, and luckily we found a home in Del Mar. Around 2015 I started to take pictures of these lovely creatures and realized that the pictures could reveal much more than casual views along the trail. So began my photographic efforts to broaden public understanding of bird life. I want to acknowledge that these efforts were supported by many friends (Nancy Weare, Ed Mirsky, Jeff Carmel, Al Tarkington, Dwight Worden, Maggie Brown) and the entire Bird Folk community.

I started to realize that birds have an intricate family life. They live in an uncontrollable, sometimes violent, environment and are skilled in providing protective nests and gathering food for their fragile young, protecting them from predators, and teaching these skills to the next generation.

A main objective of my photography is to try to make the bird's story more transparent: nest building, chick protection and maturation patterns. A wonderful example is the osprey in the lagoon. Bird photography is a matter of quickly identifying what the bird is up to, where it is going, and then trying to get a good image – and the chance of that is slim.

An example of my good luck is in an osprey fishing sequence I managed to capture. You have to spot an osprey looking for its fish prey high in the air. Then you have to be ready to follow the rapid dive, the splash, and the emergence with the kids' dinner in her/his talons. Spotting this can be a rare event.

To capture a sharp image of bird events in the Lagoon requires both patience and equipment. A fast camera is essential to just about any bird photography. And there is location: the birds are often not particularly close to the lagoon trails. Long focal length lenses are important -- but are heavy and cumbersome, and require adjustments for the light, and to shutter speed to account for the quick movement of the bird. My favorite camera now is a Nikon Z9, my favorite lens is a 800 mm Nikon Phase Fresnel lens. Most of the pictures shown at right were taken with that lens.□

John Weare can be seen almost daily around and about the San Dieguito Lagoon, his favorite place to photograph birds. His work includes extraordinary portraits and photographs that tell the stories of birds' everyday lives.

Weare's bird photos highlight their beauty, and their skills in fishing and raising their young.

PEOPLE-POWERED

We have all chosen to live here because Del Mar is a truly special community. We are well known for our commitment to environmental protection and our careful attention to our built environment. But what truly differentiates us from many other towns, our secret sauce, is an extremely high level of citizen involvement.

One of the first questions often asked of newcomers is "why did you choose Del Mar and how do you want to contribute to continuing to enrich our community?" Over the years the answers have resulted in citizens jumping into community building activities in a variety of ways.

The formal way of involvement in government comes by being appointed to our boards, commissions, advisory committees, and task forces. The creation of our Community Plan by an assemblage of citizen committees was a remarkable piece of our history. Political involvement is also at a high level, including campaigns at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

We would assert that the most critical ingredient in our secret sauce of involvement is the extensive network of non-profit organizations whose volunteers contribute so much to the culture and character of our town. Here as some examples.

The **Del Mar Foundation** (DMF) was founded in 1982, with Joel Holliday, Mayor Lou Terrell, and Bill Kerwin as the founding Directors. It is Del Mar's community foundation and its oldest 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Programs and community events the Foundation sponsors include the Summer Twilight Concerts, First Thursdays and Bluegrass and Beyond concerts, DMF Talks, as well as the July 4th Parade, Easter Egg Hunt, Community Picnic, and Halloween Dog Parade. DMF also manages over $10 million in endowment and other funds for the benefit of the community, the Lagoon, and other nonprofits.

Del Mar Community Connections (DMCC) was founded in 2000 by 16 concerned Del Mar residents to support and serve the senior population of Del Mar so they may age independently at home. DMCC helps older adults live active, vibrant lives by providing transportation, education, and social activities. Their activities are supported by many volunteers, 13 dedicated board members, two full-time staff members, and drivers for the two DMCC vans.

San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy (SDRVC) evolved from the earlier Del Mar Lagoon Committeee. Citizen efforts to restore the San Dieguito Lagoon had started in the 1970's under the leadership of Dr. Nancy Weare. After the City of Del Mar created the San Dieguito Lagoon Committee, they adopted the San Dieguito Lagoon Resource Enhancement Program in 1979. Their leadership helped preserve the lagoon until the $86 million restoration effort by Southern California Edison in mitigation for the impacts of the San Onofre Nuclear Power Station. More recently, SDRVC has supported the acquisition of the properties from Del Mar to Volcan Mountain near Julian for the 70-mile Coast to Crest Trail, and it has helped fund the Del Mar Riverpath trail along the San Dieguito River.

There are many other Del Mar non-profits that continue to help preserve and enhance our community character. Here is a short list with links to their websites:

- Del Mar Farmers Market (delmarfarmersmarket.org)
- Del Mar Garden Club (delmargardenclub.org)
- Del Mar Historical Society (delmarhistoricalsociety.org)
- Del Mar Rose Society (delmarrosesociety.com)
- Del Mar Village Association (visitdelmarvillage.com)
- Friends of Del Mar Library (friendsofdelmarlibrary.org)
- Friends of the Powerhouse (friendsofthepowerhouse.org)
- Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley (fsdrv.org)

We are deeply grateful for the commitment that each of these non-profits and the people who power them have made to make Del Mar so special. □

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.

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YES WE CAN

by Taarika Sethee | Sophomore at Canyon Crest Academy & San Diego 350 Youth4Climate Intern

Only a few years ago, I felt as if I were drowning under a wave of fear and confusion. A constant weight of fear lived in my chest – a fear of not having the guarantee of a future. And on top of that, the confusion. The feeling of disappointment in humanity that those older than me were not responsible enough to give me a chance to have a life, and the utter betrayal I felt from humanity. Underlying that deep sense of sadness, some anger lived within me; I was mad at the world.

Seventh-grade-me felt powerless. But when I got involved, it felt like someone changed the narrative of my life. I went from dreading the worst to hoping for the best, from drowning in the darkness to making the light. And it is action that has kept me hopeful and fighting.

Youth involvement is necessary because we are inheriting this planet, and the generation before us hasn't done enough to preserve this world for us – it's time to take matters into our own hands. It's accepting what our situation is and responsibly acting towards it – not only for ourselves but for the kids we might have one day, the infinite generations after us, and the millions of other species who suffer due to humans. Engagement in our communities is not optional.

Like every other youth, it is hard to remain involved. It's hard to make choices to preserve this planet – adopting a vegan lifestyle, steering clear of fast fashion, using reusable products – and there is pressure to be perfect. And although we should all strive for perfection, in reality, we all need to contribute and better our ways just a little bit. Perhaps the most interesting part of climate change is the non-partisan nature of it; despite the hundreds of divisions we see in each other as humans, the Earth can fail us all the same, and it would affect every one of us. And that is why my work is not only for myself, nor should it be considered a choice – the work done by this small, but vibrant community of environmental activists is also done for all of us, no matter who acknowledges whether it needs to be done or not, and it should be done by all of us. □

BIRD FLU IS BACK

by Don Mosier | Rimini Road

Bird flu is causing rising numbers of infections in chickens and cattle, and small numbers of mild infections in humans. California poultry flocks have once again been decimated by bird flu, with over 1.5 million chickens and turkeys culled this year.

The most prevalent bird flu strain in the US, H5N1, has killed 21 people worldwide since 2020. However, confirmed cases of person-to-person transmission are extremely rare, even though only 1 or 2 genetic mutations in the H5 influenza gene are needed to make the virus more infectious for humans.

A recent News article in Nature (Oct. 28, 2025) reported that another bird flu strain, H9N2, has acquired to ability to infect humans. This strain is common in China, but less common elsewhere. So far, detection of infection by H9N2 in humans has been rare, although asymptomatic infections may well have been missed. Also, screening for H5N1 infection is common, but screening for H9N2 is uncommon. H9N2 bird flu can infect human cells in tissue culture, but more mutations may be required for efficient human-to-human transmission.

Why mention bird flu risks for Del Mar residents? Two important reasons: 1) high incidence of H5N1 bird flu in wild birds, poultry flocks, and cattle in California; 2) reduced surveillance and slowing of the development of bird flu vaccines under the current administration's actions. If a bird flu pandemic emerges, we are woefully unprepared.

What can we do? Here are some tips from infectious disease experts (excerpted from Medscape Medical News, Nov. 11, 2025):

- Doctors should ask patients with flu-like symptoms about animal and dietary exposures.
- Those at risk for animal exposure should wear protective gear and practice good hygiene. This includes those with chickens in Del Mar.
- Consumption of unpasteurized milk or cheese and undercooked eggs and poultry should be avoided.
- Domestic cats are highly susceptible to bird flu, either from eating an infected bird or from exposure to raw dairy. Another potential exposure is handling bird feeders because wild birds shed the virus in their feces.
- Seasonal flu vaccination is highly recommended to reduce the risk for viral reassortment because of dual infection with seasonal and bird flu strains. □

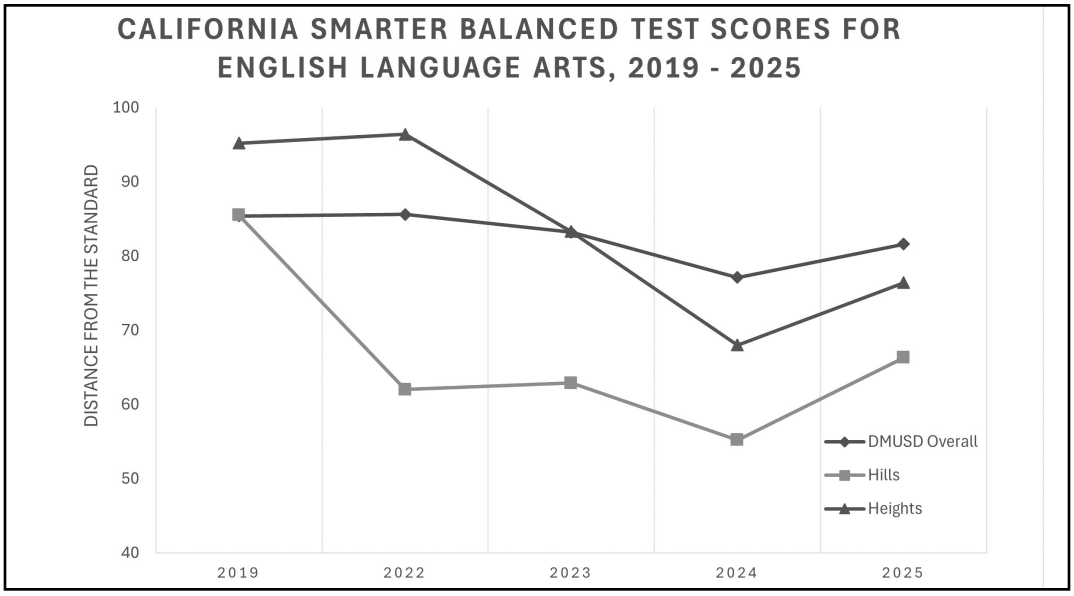
LOCAL LEARNING LOSS

by Neelum Arya | Zuni Drive

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, shows California students struggling with learning loss after the Covid pandemic. Data released by the California Department of Education on November 13th allows the extent of learning loss for Del Mar students in English Language Arts (ELA) to be quantified.

The California Smarter Balanced test is given annually to students in third through eighth grades and in 11th grade as part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). The CA test is not directly comparable to NAEP. Only 29% of CA fourth-graders meet the reading proficiency standard on the NAEP, whereas 46% of all CA fourth-graders statewide, and 77% of DMUSD fourth-graders, meet or exceed the California-specific ELA standards.

While DMUSD is doing very well relative to other CA districts, the average test scores have dropped relative to our pre-pandemic levels. Between 2015 and 2019, roughly 13% of DMUSD students in grades 3-6 were failing to meet the ELA standards each year. In 2025, that proportion is now 18%. The average scores for students at Del Mar Heights and Hills have dropped nearly 20 points compared to pre-pandemic levels, the highest drops in the district. Ocean Air's scores only dropped 2.5 points, Carmel Del Mar's scores increased by 1.7 points, and Sage Canyon's scores improved by 14.4 points between 2019 and 2025. Similar to math, there appears to be widening gaps between the highest and lowest-achieving students in ELA as well. □



L to R: High Marea restaurant, which is part Valley Farms Market, preparing for opening; Valley Farms Market adding finishing components; Queenstown Restaurant to bring tastes of New Zealand to Del Mar early next year. Photos: Julie Maxey-Allison

Del Mar FOUNDATION

VOLUNTEERING WITH DMF

by Steven Schuknecht, Stratford Court

My wife and I moved to Del Mar at the beginning of 2023 after being in greater San Diego for 8 years, and we fell in love. The friendliness on the streets, the lively local events, the fantastic restaurants, and—of course—that stunning beach won us over in no time.

I was eager to get more involved in the community and, truth be told, find something to fill my free time a bit. Our work schedules couldn't be more opposite: I spend my days as a financial advisor, while she teaches at—and owns—her kids' dance studio in the evenings and on weekends. So, like most folks, I turned to the internet, searching for groups or activities that sparked my interest. That's when I stumbled upon the Del Mar Foundation. What really caught my eye was the sheer variety of events and community projects they support—there's truly something for everyone, no matter your passions.

After a bit of back-and-forth, I signed up to volunteer at a "DMF Talk," and the rest, as they say, is history. My volunteering experience up to that point was pretty typical: I'd only stepped up when I was volun-told, usually with a nudge from family or friends.

At first, I worried it might be short-lived because of that background. But I was so wrong. What hooked me—and keeps me coming back to help with the organization—is the people. Cliché, I know, but it's true. It's not just the wonderful volunteers and board members I collaborate with on event setup and planning, but the entire Del Mar community as well.

I've grown to love pitching in at these events and meeting so many of you along the way. From watching families and little ones light up at the summer picnic or during trick-or-treating, to chatting with so many long-term residents over a couple of glasses of wine and listening to a fascinating lecture at a DMF Talk. If you haven't joined us at an event yet, I encourage you to give one a try and see for yourself. And if it inspires you, why not volunteer? I look forward to meeting you at the next one, and I know the rest of the Del Mar Foundation does too!

L to R: DMF volunteers Donna Shaw, Bill Michalsky, and Steven Schuknecht at the DMF Community Picnic.

DEL MAR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
www.dmcc.cc (858) 792-7565

by Ashley Simpkins, Executive Director

Holiday Gratitude, Looking Ahead to 2026

The volunteers and staff of DMCC are grateful for the incredible community partners that sustain us throughout the year, but that support is most evident during the holiday season. The **City of Del Mar** provides us with a venue to hold our Annual Benefit every October, and then again allows us to use City facilities to host the Cookies & Cocoa Holiday Party (this year we're planning a great event on 12/12 – join us!) The **Del Mar Foundation** provides DMCC with our longest-standing grant to run the Tuesday Lunch Connections (TLC) program twice monthly, and it's perhaps most appreciated when we serve turkey dinners with all the fixings at the Thanksgiving TLC. **The Del Mar Rose Society** annually creates Thanksgiving of Roses, in which volunteers deliver gorgeous rose bouquets to DMCCers who need a little extra holiday love due to injury, illness, or death of a spouse. The **Del Mar Garden Club** organizes Project JOY, delivering a beautiful gift to those same older adults shortly before Christmas. The **San Diego Seniors Community Foundation** provides us with grant funding to help make our holiday outreach activities as special and inclusive as possible.

We have some incredible things in the works for 2026! We'll be piloting a program in partnership with the Del Mar Foundation to connect older adults at a crossroads (and their caregivers) to a qualified Aging Resources Advocate. We'll be hosting a speaker from SDSU's Center for Excellence in Aging and Longevity to talk about the real effect ageism has on all of us – and how to fight it. We'll expand our recreational transportation opportunities so more people can enjoy the enriching and beautiful community in which we live. We are also planning new and innovative opportunities that will be facilitated by our ever-expanding roster of talented and dedicated volunteers.

Golden Watchdog Award!

We're proud to have recently been recognized with a Golden Watchdog Award from the San Diego County Taxpayers Association! Nominated by the City of Del Mar, DMCC's Essential Transportation was acknowledged for transparency, creativity, and fiscal responsibility in managing a program that provides a key social benefit while utilizing the enthusiasm of volunteers. DMCC Program Manager Kara Adams and Board Member Wayne Otchis attended a ceremony on November 12 alongside Mayor Terry Gaasterland to accept the award.

Volunteer of the Month – October 2025

DMCC's Volunteer of the Month for November 2025 was Monica Berlin. Monica is a driver and van host in our Essential Transportation program, and a Connect Team pilot volunteer. She was nominated by Tuesday Lunch Connections (TLC) team captain Phyllis Mirsky, because Monica always goes the extra mile by helping serve food when she drives a TLC shuttle that picks up the participants! Monica was also nominated by Essential Transportation client Fran, who said "Monica creates fun and laughter that is so much a part of her service."

DMCC programs depend on our incredible volunteers! To learn more about Monica, or our talented volunteers and their roles, visit dmcc.cc/volunteerofthemonth.

RAPTORS!

by Julie Maxey-Allison | 10th Street

We in Del Mar have our share of raptors, aka birds of prey, who are ready and able to hunt. They come equipped with quite sensational abilities: super sharp eyes, powerful wings for swift and silent flying, taloned feet to catch and carry their capture, plus hooked beaks better to tear and consume it. Their favorite foods include rodents, rabbits, fish, lizards, snakes, other birds and, as pet owners of little dogs and outdoor cats are aware, any small possibly edible animal within raptors' reach. Given that pet owners need to keep vigilant, these apex predators are essential to the balance of our ecosystems. Most raptors eat up all of what they kill. Any leftovers are finished off by the scavengers, vultures and condors, who clean up carrion scraps doing their part to prevent the possible spread of disease.

Thirty species of raptors call California home. Six are threatened and listed as endangered: California Condor, Bald Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, Northern Spotted Owl, Elf Owl,Great Grey Owl.The many others including Cooper's Hawk, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Great-horned Owl, Barn Owl, Screech Owl, Barred Owl, Turkey Vulture and all are protected under California State law.

Great Horned Owls. Photo: John Weare

Just last November a Barn Owl was a special guest at a talk about local raptors co-sponsored by the Del Mar Foundation and the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy. Bird handler Sharyl Massey spoke on raptors' unique characteristics and the diversity of species found in our San Dieguito Watershed. Photographs raptors by Del Mar resident John Weare's were shown on the city monitors and displayed along with art by Sue Britt. □

PETER'S BIG GIFT TO DEL MAR

by Betty Wheeler | Seaview Ave.

On December 24, Peter Sprague is on track to give Del Mar the same gift he's given us every year since 1978: a free concert that brings together musicians from Peter's deep bench of musical collaborators for a freewheeling, spirited celebration of music, community and the holiday season. Weather permitting, the 47th edition of this festive tradition will kick off on Dec. 24 at 1:00 pm. at the Jim Watkins Amphitheater at L'Auberge. The Del Mar Foundation is sponsoring this year's performance.

A two-page feature in the December 2011 Sandpiper celebrated the 33rd anniversary of this magnificent gift from Sprague. For a stroll down memory lane and a good dose of inspiration, read that feature here: delmarsandpiper.org/Sprague2011. □

Peter Sprague with Sean and Sara Watkins (of Nickel Creek). Photo courtesy of Peter Sprague.

Boats night fishing for squid off 11 Street and north. Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison

Clifftop maintenance continues. Photo: Julie Maxey-Allison

DOGS OF DEL MAR: SCOUT

by Glenn Warren | 27th Street

Written in 2014

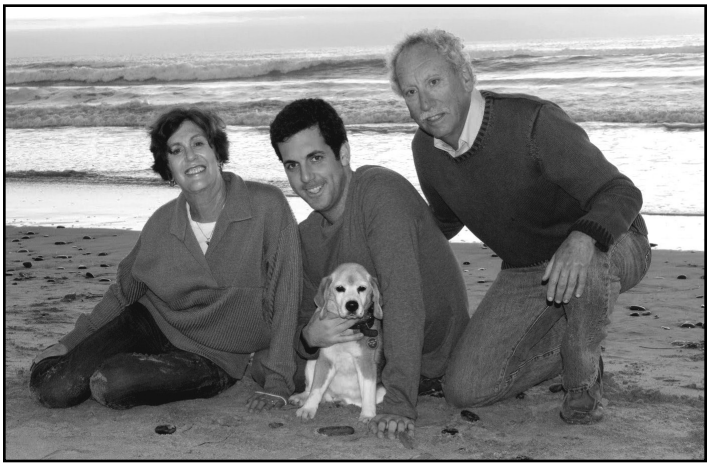
Our dog Scout Warren died this week. She was almost 16. Scout was friendly, sweet, curious, sometimes irritating, (mostly) disobedient, insistent (on getting what she wanted), independent, whimsical, and impossibly cute. Above all, she was a member of our family.

Our son Scott was 9 when I joined the Foreign Service in 1996.Part of the "deal" was that he could always have a dog. A couple of years later, in Buenos Aires, our Springer Spaniel, Mistral, died. Scott wanted a new dog and within a week he and Randee saw a litter of Beagle puppies at a pet shop near our apartment. The puppies were all male; Scott wanted a female and the next day the shop brought in the litter's one female. Scott was immediately smitten and Randee bought her. Scott named her after Atticus Finch's bright, plucky little girl. The name proved to be most appropriate. Randee refused to tell me what she had paid for Scout. Throughout the years, in moments of feigned pique after one of Scout's misdeeds, I would tell Randee that however much she had paid, it was too much. The truth is that Scout was priceless.

Scout quickly demonstrated her independence and curiosity. During a barbecue on the grounds of the ambassador's residence in Buenos Aires, she wandered off into the residence itself (under renovation) to give herself a tour. She interrupted a visit of VIPs who were inspecting the new construction; soon thereafter a regulation went into effect that all dogs in the residence garden had to be leashed and with their owners at all times.

Scout was an escape artist. As much as she liked us, she realized there was an exciting world (with possibly food and treats) outside the walls or fences of our houses. Shortly after we moved to Harare, she took advantage of an open gate and disappeared. Panicked, I quickly mobilized our housekeeper and neighbors to look for her. When I found her at a nearby shopping center, I called to her. She looked at me and started running the other way. Who was I to interrupt her few minutes of freedom? (As a native Argentine and as part of an American family, Scout understood—and mostly ignored commands in—two languages. If told to come, she would cock her head and look as if to say, "What's in it for me if I do come?")

On one occasion in Nairobi, Scout got out of our yard and made her way to a housing development about a mile away. Neither Randee nor I was home and I learned of her escape when I got a call from a woman who had found her. I called our gardener, Nathan, and asked him to retrieve her. He called back and told me the woman was demanding money. I told Nathan to negotiate the ransom and bring her home. He did and we scolded Scout. As usual, she was unrepentant.



The Warren family: Randee, Scott, Scout, Glenn.

No reminiscence of Scout would be complete without a reference to food. Like most Beagles, she inhaled her breakfast and dinner. She demanded treats throughout the day, and harassed us until we complied. But she could also hoard. Scott visited Harare with a friend from college who had about 20 energy bars in her duffel bag. When we returned one day from an outing, all the energy bars were gone. We searched the house and yard to no avail. The next morning two empty wrappers appeared in the garden. We again searched the yard to see where she might have buried the others. She warily watched us. We failed to discover any and the next morning there were two more wrappers. This went on for over a week. Scout never confessed.

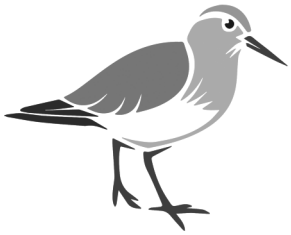
In 2012, our odyssey ended and we returned to the house we had left in 1996 in Del Mar. It needed refurbishing and there were workmen coming and going. A gate or door left open for 20 seconds was all the vigilant Scout needed to escape. And that's how we got to know our new neighbors. At one time or another, she wandered into every house on the block. We'd get a phone call: "We have your dog. No need to hurry. She's made herself at home—and she's so adorable." When we picked her up, she always had that look—"Why are you interrupting my afternoon out?"

Scout had a genuine charisma and we joked that she had become a rock star in Del Mar. Whether in an outdoor café or on the beach, she was the focus of attention. So many people, not observing the wrinkles in her neck or the white in her face, would remark: "OMG, what a cute puppy." Scout, once again responsible for a smile, would prance away, oblivious.

Scout lived her life fully to the end. The day before she died, she was running after me at the beach because she knew I had treats. She became ill suddenly the next day and died without prolonged suffering.

Scout stole our hearts. She made us laugh, brought us joy, and enriched our lives. We will miss her. □

VISIT THE SANDPIPER ONLINE!



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SANDPIPER DONATIONS REMINDER

Jeff Barnouw Challenge--he will match all donations up to $9,000.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A big shout out to the writers and editors who have been volunteering for almost three decades to produce the only paper in print that focuses exclusively on things Del Mar. I keep the Sandpiper on my desk all month to remind myself of all of the goings on that make this community special: its people, community-based organization projects, government processes, grass roots activities, cultural events, and especially our many efforts to protect our natural resources.

At a time when many of our institutions, liberties, facts, and the free press are under attack, it is very reassuring that the Sandpiper is honoring its mission to support our Community Plan with reliable information and reasoned opinion. I am very proud that our little community continues to be a kind of refuge where we can work, play, agree, and disagree constructively.

The Sandpiper plays a critical role in the fabric of Del Mar. That is why my family makes it a top priority to donate to help pay the costs of producing the Sandpiper. I hope that other families will be similarly motivated to donate generously.

Arlene Prater

SURF CUP 6; OPEN SPACE 2

by Don Mosier | Rimini Road

On October 28th, the San Diego City Council voted 6-2 to modify the lease terms for the Surf Club property to allow "commercial uses." This action violates the terms of the 1983 public vote to preserve the property for recreational uses and ban large assemblages of people or vehicles. Many local residents, representatives of the San Dieguito River Park JPA, the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy, and both Del Mar and Solana Beach opposed the vote, as did State Senator Catherine Blakespear. First District San Diego Councilmember Joe LaCava, whose district includes the Surf Club property, voted in favor of the lease modification. The lawsuit by local residents claiming many violations of the original lease terms by the Surf Club owners may be impacted by the change to lease terms, but the action itself may be challenged.

The only silver lining to this dark cloud was that the portion of the Coast-to-Crest trail crossing the Surf Club property will be completed after many years of delays. The trail will now pass through a once-pristine area that is being degraded by tree removal, intensive use, and the presence of hundreds, if not thousands, of vehicles. □