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Cruising into new year, new laws

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Best restaurants to open in 2024



**Fly into 2024**

Dressed as Aladdin, a doggy participant rides a wintry magic carpet into the new year at the Gaslamp Pup Parade. (Photo by Diana Cavagnaro)

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**Mental competency trial set for driver who killed homeless**

By NEAL PUTNAM

A mental competency trial of Jan. 19, 2024 was confirmed Dec. 14 for the driver suspected of killing unsheltered people during a rainstorm in 2021 near City College.

Craig Martin Voss, now 74, has congestive heart failure, and has not been able to attend any court hearing in a few years, according to his attorney, Kaitlyn McCarthy.

In addition to his physical problems, McCarthy says he doesn't have the mental ability to stand trial.

On Dec. 14, both she and Deputy District Attorney Cally Bright appeared virtually on camera in their offices before San Diego Superior Court Judge Michael Groch.

They confirmed the Jan. 19 date and the transfer of medical records from the defense to the prosecutor. Groch said there was a notation from the court clerk's office that records from Scripps Hospital were left. Bright said she would make copies and return them to the clerk's office.

Groch set a Jan. 4 status conference. Voss has never had a preliminary hearing because he was too ill to come to court. His illness of congestive heart failure was disclosed in court in February 2023.

SEE VOSS DRIVER, Page 15

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# Uptown // Downtown Briefs

## MID-CITIES COMMUNITIES PLAN UPDATE

To plan for the long-term growth of the Mid-City communities, the City of San Diego has begun the process of updating the Mid-City Communities Plan.

The Mid-City Communities Plan Update will comprehensively update the 1998 community plan, which includes City Heights, Eastern Area, Kensington-Talmage and Normal Heights. It will identify priorities and create opportunities for new homes, businesses and infrastructure for the next several decades, along with needed investments such as parks, public spaces and safe and enjoyable places to walk, roll and bike.

The Plan Update effort is expected to take up to three years, during which San Diegans will have opportunities to engage throughout the entirety of the process. It will ultimately go to the full City Council for consideration.



property into a combination of hotel, retail and residential units. The price was not disclosed. The project currently comprises office space and ground-floor retail. Completion is targeted for mid-2026.

The tower was originally built in 1963 as the United States National Bank Building, and the annex was added in 1973. The project has had multiple owners over the years, most recently having been purchased in June 2016. It subsequently underwent a full building facade and lobby renovation, a full mechanical systems upgrade, and the retail spaces in the annex building were leased.

## COMBO HOTEL, RESIDENTIAL, RETAIL TOWER PLANNED

J Street Space, a San Diego-based real estate investment and development firm, has acquired Tower 180, the 25-story tower of office building and 8-story midrise annex building in Downtown San Diego, and intends to convert the

## COUNTY AWARDS \$42 MILLION FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The County of San Diego has awarded \$42 million to nine affordable housing developments that will provide about 872 new homes.

Those selected developments came from a pool of 24 proposal

requests totaling more than \$89 million for affordable housing across the region. The distribution of the funds was previously approved by the County Board of Supervisors.

Of the nine developments, three will be on County excess land and two on publicly owned land belonging to the MTS.

One of the developments on county excess land is in Downtown San Diego on Sixth Ave. The county awarded \$4 million to BRIDGE Housing's Kindred, which will include 124 units, 63 of which are for extremely low income households.

more than double the legal limit on September 24, 2022, when he fatally struck the young girl as she crossed a residential street with her sisters and grandparents. A jury convicted Angeles Vargas on November 15, of second-degree murder, gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated, DUI causing injury, hit and run causing death, and driving on a suspended license. Judge Amador handed down the sentence in San Diego Superior Court.

On the day of the incident, the defendant was leaving a baby shower when he ran a stop sign and nearly struck a parked truck before barreling down the 3900 block of Redwood Street in City Heights. He struck the victim in broad daylight as her family was walking in an unmarked crosswalk.

Although residential surveillance captured the collision, none of the cameras clearly captured the driver's face or his license plate. A witness chased after the defendant and confronted him. Eventually, the license plate information and cell phone video taken by the witness helped police locate the defendant and arrest him.

Due to a precious DUI conviction after which he signed a Watson advisement, Angeles Vargas was able to be charged with second-degree murder because he signed a form stating he understood the consequences of drunk driving could injure or kill others.



energy or better sleep, among many more. But choosing to forego drinking in January doesn't mean people can't enjoy a deliciously crafted mocktail from these San Diego spots.

Karl Strauss, San Diego's longest-operating post-Prohibition brewing company, has released its first ever non-alcoholic beer on the brink of its 35th anniversary in February. Non-Acoholic Red Trolley is available in 12-oz cans exclusively at Karl Strauss' five San Diego County locations, including the new San Marcos Outpost beer garden concept. The alcoholic Red Trolley Ale (5.8% ABV) is one of the brewery's core beers, an Irish Style Red Ale that is an 11-time Gold Medal winner at various regional, national, and international brewing competitions. This new take on the beer is "non-alcoholic, still iconic."

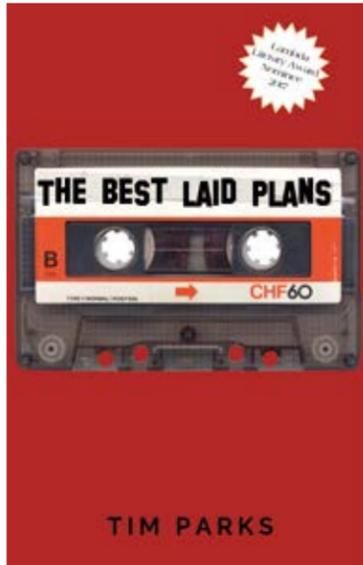
Coco Maya, Little Italy's rooftop taste of the Caribbean will celebrate Dry January with the refreshing, non-alcoholic You Can Get It in the Morning with Ritual Tequila (0% ABV), cucumber, ginger, lime, and Topo Chico.

Louisiana Purchase, in North Park, mixologists have hand-crafted several mocktails available for your sober enjoyment. The Fant-astic Fun includes Strawberry Fanta and lemonade garnished with a dehydrated lemon, the Blue Raspberry Bash features Blue Raspberry Koolaid with lemonade garnished with maraschino cherry and orange wheel, and the Grape Year mixes Grape Koolaid with lemonade topped with maraschino cherry and mums.



## MOCKTAIL COMPANY TO BE SOLD AT SPROUTS, WHOLE FOODS

IMPROV Booze-Free Cocktails, the brainchild of craft beverage veterans James Murray and Alex Brooks, is making a splash in the Adult Non-Alcoholic Beverage market as they launch at Sprouts locations nationwide and Whole



## NORTH PARK AUTHOR RELEASES SEQUEL

Following the resounding success of his Lambda Literary Award Nominated debut novel, "The Scheme of Things," Tim Parks has announced the release of its sequel, titled "The Best Laid Plans." Building upon the compelling storyline of Henry Dodge's coming-of-age journey, the sequel delves deeper into the challenges that occur after the traumatic events of the first book. In The Best Laid Plans, readers re-enter the world created for Henry Dodge, the protagonist whose life takes a pivotal turn when he claims his sexuality at the age of 16. The sequel picks up where the first book left off, offering a captivating continuation of Henry's survival story.

Parks has also partnered with The Trevor Project, a non-profit organization that helps LGBTQ youth who are in crisis, as this is a major plot point in "The Best Laid Plans," which is based on his own experiences as a teenager and attempting suicide. Five percent of proceeds from the sale of the new novel on fawkupress.com will be donated to The Trevor Project.

## HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER WHO KILLED TODDLER SENTENCED

A defendant who drove drunk, struck and killed a 1-year-old child has been sentenced to 15 years-to-life in prison plus an additional four years in prison for fleeing the scene. Margarito Angeles Vargas, 47, was driving with a blood-alcohol level of

## LOCAL AUTHOR TO RELEASE CHILDREN'S BOOK

In San Diego author and artist Pam Fong's new book, "Hedgehog and the Log" on sale Jan. 30, an adorable purple, flower-loving hedgehog is about to move into his new log – but before he can settle in, a falling tree crushes his new home. But obstacles are opportunities, as Hedgehog learns, and soon he discovers that perhaps with a different perspective, the fallen tree will make a lovely home after all.

This is the artist's fourth book. Find out more at [www.pam-fong.com](http://www.pam-fong.com).

## DRY JANUARY MOCKTAIL OFFERINGS

Some use Dry January as a time to reset from holiday celebrations, while others opt to avoid alcohol for health reasons – more

29TH ANNUAL

# WRITER'S SYMPOSIUM

BY THE SEA

FEBRUARY 19-23, 2024

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Among the hundreds of new bills passed in 2023, the ban on lowriders was repealed. (Photo by Drew Sitton)

# New state laws include wage increases, firearms, lowriders

By DAVE SCHWAB

Of the more than 2,600 bills introduced in 2023 in the state legislature – the most in a decade – Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed 156 and signed 890. In comparison, in 2022, Newsom vetoed 169 bills, about 14%, while signing 997.

These new laws change the rules in crime, healthcare, housing, schools, workplaces, and on the streets even addressing cultural issues, like lifting the previous ban on “lowriding.” Some of the new legislation hits taxpayers in their pocketbooks.

Here are some of the new state laws signed by Newsom, most of which took effect Jan. 1:

- California’s minimum wage increases to \$16 per hour for all employers.
- AB 1228: Starting April 1, fast-food workers earning minimum wage will get an hourly wage increase of \$4 from \$16 to \$20 an hour. The increase will impact about 500,000 fast-food workers statewide.
- SB 525: Raises the pay for hundreds of thousands of California healthcare workers to a \$25 minimum wage. It means medical technicians, nursing assistants, custodians, and other support staff will see a gradual wage hike.
- SB 14: The new law designates human trafficking of minors for commercial gain as a “serious felony,” resulting in harsher prison sentences and inclusion in California’s “Three Strikes” law.
- SB 848, reproductive loss leave, requires private employers with five or more employees to provide up to five days of reproductive loss leave for qualifying events. Those include failed adoption, failed surrogacy, miscarriage, stillbirth, or unsuccessful assisted reproduction. The five days don’t have to be consecutive.
- AB 1084, gender-neutral toys, requires some California retailers to offer a gender-neutral section for children regardless of whether they have been

traditionally marketed for either girls or boys.

- AB 2282, expands the definition of hate symbols to include any symbols or marks with “the intent to terrorize another person,” such as Nazi symbols and nooses. The bill also addresses the need to address hate crimes with symbols against certain minority groups.
- SB 700, off-duty cannabis use and drug test results, modifies existing law to make it unlawful for an employer to request information from an applicant relating to the applicant’s prior use of cannabis or to use prior criminal history of cannabis use.
- AB 587, social media transparency, requires social media companies to publicly post their content moderation policies and semiannually report data on their enforcement of the policies to the attorney general. The law will only apply to companies that generated more than \$100 million in gross revenues during the preceding calendar year.
- AB 701 will impose harsher penalties for people trafficking large amounts of fentanyl, which is classified along with controlled substances including cocaine and heroin. As of Jan. 1, those convicted of dealing a kilo or more of fentanyl will face stiffer penalties and sentencing enhancement for dealers.
- SB 616, extended paid sick leave, will allow California workers an additional two days of paid sick leave per year. The new law expands the definition of sick leave to include caring for a sick family member. The new law also offers paid time off for employees who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assaults, and stalking.
- SB 476, food handler cards, requires employers to pay their workers for all costs associated with obtaining a food handler cards. Previously, all training and testing for the state-mandated certification had been the employee’s responsibility.
- SB 2, concealed carry: This law strengthens the state’s

restrictions on who can carry a firearm in public. It restricts people under 21 from getting a concealed carry permit and also requires all permit holders to have more training, including on how to handle safely, store, and transport firearms.

- SB 43, conservatorship expansion: The new law expands the standards for deeming a person “gravely disabled” to include people whose mental illness or drug addiction inhibits their ability to keep themselves safe.
- AB 436, cruising ban: This bill lifts the restrictions on lowrider cruising statewide. It also rescinds the ability of cities and towns to impose their cruising bans, which many had in place until recently. The resolution encourages cities to repeal their bans and recognizes that cruising holds cultural significance for many communities.
- AB 28, gun tax: This law adds an 11% state tax on firearms and ammo sold in the state starting in July 2024, making California the only state in the U.S. to have such a tax. This tax is on top of existing federal taxes. Depending on the gun type, the federal tax is either 10% or 11%. Revenue from the tax, estimated by state officials to be about \$160 million a year, will help fund violence prevention programs.

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SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER GROUP

## News briefs

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Foods in Southern California, Nevada, and Arizona starting Jan. 1, 2024.

Murray and Brooks boast strong backgrounds in beverage with brands like Ballast Point Brewing Company, Coronado Brewing and Latitude 33 Brewing. Drawing on their expertise, they introduced IMPROV in July 2022 to cater to individuals seeking an alternative to alcohol at social gatherings, celebrations, or simply for relaxation.

For more information, visit <https://improvcocktails.com/>.



### THE ORIGINAL 40 BREWING COMPANY ANNOUNCES NEW RELEASES

The Original 40 Brewing Company has released Big Tings West Coast Double IPA and Baja Negra Mexican Dark Lager at its North Park brew pub. Both beers will be available on draft

SEE NEWS BRIEFS, Page 11

## RAIN, WIND, AND FIRE...

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# New restaurants

CONTINUED FROM Page 10

table his experience of operating **Deckman's en el Magor** restaurant in Mexico's Valle de Guadalupe wine region.

Watershed will feature three levels, plus two bars, a chef's counter for about 10 guests, a general seating capacity for about 90 people, and a rooftop patio. 3131 University Ave.

Adding to the portfolio of family-run Busalacchi restaurants is **Lala**, which is expected to open in spring next door to sister restaurant, **Barbusa**.

The menu will feature classic scratch-made Italian cuisine



Fancy cocktails with Italian influences are coming to Lala. (Courtesy photo)

matched by unconventional twists from Busalacchi's executive chef,

Nino Zizzo. In addition, Italian-influenced cocktails made with barrel-aged spirits will be in the offering. The bar program is headed by Antonio Gonzales, whose career spans notable fine-dining establishments such as **Juniper & Ivy** and **Stake Chophouse + Bar**.

Lala will flaunt an intimate vibe throughout its 1,000-square-foot space, which includes velvet and leather furnishings, wood paneling, and a covered garden patio. The restaurant marks a 40-year milestone in Busalacchi's illustrious presence in San Diego. The company's other restaurants that remain in operation are **Cafe Zucchero** and **Nonna**. Lala will be open nightly for dinner. 1919 India St., @BarLalaSD on Instagram.



Chef Drew Deckman is preparing to open Watershed in North Park. (deckmans.com)

# News briefs

CONTINUED FROM Page 9

and in four packs of 16-oz cans. Big Tings has a 9.0% ABV (alcohol-by-volume), and it was brewed with Mosaic, Citra, and Centennial hops. Baja Negra has a 5.2% ABV, and it was brewed with Mexican lager yeast and a touch of caramel malt.

## CITY OF SAN DIEGO HOURLY MINIMUM WAGE INCREASES TO \$16.85

Many San Diegans saw an increase in their pay when the City of San Diego's minimum wage went up in the new year. Effective Jan. 1, 2024, employees who perform at least two hours of work in one or more calendar weeks of the year, within the geographic boundaries of the City of San Diego, will receive a minimum wage increase from \$16.30 to \$16.85 an hour. The change is in accordance with the city's Earned Sick Leave and Minimum Wage Ordinance, approved in 2016.

## CLOAK & PETAL'S NEW OTSUMAMI MENU

Chef Rob Cassidy is celebrating his one-year anniversary at Little Italy's premier sushi and bar destination, Cloak & Petal with the launch of a new menu. The new hot menu Otsumami focuses on shared plates that are



simple, straightforward, and pay homage to classic Japanese culinary techniques. New offerings include grilled Spanish wild octopus, Kalbi short ribs, and another addition to Little Italy's pasta promenade with vegan spicy garlic noodles.

In addition, Cassidy, who has over two decades experience in sushi, revamped the Sashimi menu, introducing house-infused salts, oils, and refreshing citrus notes to elevate each bite.

## CALIF. HUNGER SOARING

According to USDA food insecurity data — a way of measuring food hardship analyzed by Hunger Free America — across California, 11.5% of residents, or 4.4 million people, lived in food insecure households from 2020-2022. This includes 15.3% of children in the state (1,325,451), 8.8% of employed adults (1,589,299), and 7.6% of older California residents (642,976).

Hunger Free America attributes the surge in food insecurity to the expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credit and

SEE NEWS BRIEFS, Page 12

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