

Close encounter with an African bird in Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



A LARC client pets Josephine Bonaparte – the silvery-cheeked hornbill presented by Molly Gleason-Kodama. Photo Sophie Braccini

The large silvery-cheeked hornbill was standing proudly, unrestrained, grasping a simple wooden perch with its powerful claws. Her demeanor was peaceful. Her eyes on her friend and owner, Molly Gleason-Kodama, she intermittently uttered little sounds that seemed to come out of her minuscule nostrils, not her powerful long bill. Across the room where she stood, a dozen adults in their 70s and 80s were following Gleason's presentation of the bird. Their gaze was intent, their smiles genuine and their questions pertinent, even if a bit repetitive at times. That was the only hint that these individuals were participating in a Lamorinda Adult Respite Center activity for adults with memory impairment.

Gleason is the marketing director at Aegis of Moraga during the day, but at night and on weekends she is the guardian and protector of more than 20 birds from all over the world. She has transformed her garden into a giant aviary where her friends lead their lives, unrestrained and intact as their wings are not clipped. Josephine Bonaparte, the hornbill, like the other birds, can also access the house and fly freely there. Josephine is extra special because she sleeps in Gleason's closet that was transformed into a nesting place, and even sometimes comes to nap with Gleason in bed.

The director came for a visit at LARC to pro-

vide an activity that would engage the group of challenged adults' interest. They listened to her many stories, how Gleason had acquired the now 24-year-old bird, born to a breeder, like all her other birds, 14 years ago, and marveled at its beauty and gentleness. They enjoyed seeing the bird being fed fruits, asking for it with a gentle movement. Some came to the perch and petted her without any fear.

Beth Montgomery, who is LARC's director, was also there, as she is almost every day that the nonprofit she leads is in operation. She explains that the center is privately funded and was created 20 years ago to provide a warm and caring environment to memory-impaired adults while providing some respite to their caregivers. She adds that the Orinda center is one of the last left in Contra Costa County because it is privately funded; all the other ones that were dependent on public money had to close when budgetary cuts squeezed them out of business.

Like with Gleason and her hornbill, LARC provides activities every day to its clients. The routine is predictable, there is music and singing, word games, exercise in the morning, and more games, crafts and activities in the afternoon. There are other animal activities organized, mostly with therapy dogs.

Montgomery says that the adults who come are not aware of their memory challenges and would deny having any problem. She says that LARC was renamed Lamorinda Adult Recreation Center by its clients. She notes, however, that there is now a growing number of early-onset Alzheimer patients in need of similar services who are well aware of their diagnoses.

Gleason brought several long feathers from her birds' regular molting, so the participants could take something home with them and share some of the experience with their caregivers. She redecorated her office at Aegis with pictures of all her birds when she took her job there and she often brings a bird along to stay with her while she works and for the residents to enjoy.

More information about LARC can be found at www.lamorindarespite.org. The program runs Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and costs \$70 a day.

Town Hall Theatre announces donor thank you event: 'Gone Missing'

Submitted by Susan Evans



Town Hall Theatre's annual donor thank you event – a one-night only performance of the original and inventive documentary musical "Gone Missing," created by The Civilians – will be held at 8 p.m. July 14 at Town Hall Theatre Company.

Per its website, "The Civilians is a company that creates new theater from creative investigations into the most vital questions of the present." The New-York based theater company conceived this documentary musical from interviews it conducted with real-life New Yorkers. Each of the interwoven eclectic songs and narratives are about loss, of both tangible objects and not, that have "gone missing" — including pets, keys, ID, a Gucci pump, and even a mind — and about the very nature of memory. According to the New York Times, "This delightful comic revue ... is fresh, breezy and very funny indeed, a perfect summer entertainment."

Directed by Town Hall Director of Education Madison Gerringer, with music direction by Lindsey Schmeltzer, a frequent teaching artist with the THT Education Program, "Gone Missing" features talented members of the Town Hall family, each of whom have donated their time and talents to this donor event, including the president of Town Hall's board of directors, Lauren

Rosi, and Suzie Shepard, THT's community engagement specialist.

Gerringer received her degree in Theatre Education with emphases in acting and directing from Emerson College. Some previous directing and choreography credits include "Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls," "Surprising Simon" and "Smokey Joe's Cafe." Schmeltzer's previous musical directing credits include: "As You Like It" (Livermore Shakespeare Festival), "Alone World" (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), "Man of La Mancha," "Hair-spray," and "Little Shop of Horrors" (Garland Civic Theatre).

"Gone Missing" was created by The Civilians, written by Steven Cosson from interviews by the company (Damian Baldet, Trey Lyford, Jennifer Morris, Brian Sgambati, Alison Weller and Colleen Werthmann), with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman. Following its world premiere in 2003 at The Belt in New York City, "Gone Missing" went on to premiere Off-Broadway at the Barrow Theatre in 2007.

This one-night event is free to all Town Hall donors, with a suggested donation of \$20 for the general public. Seats can be reserved now through the Box Office at (925) 283-1557 or online at www.TownHallTheatre.com

Tell Me More about UC Irvine

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

Welcome to the third in a series of articles about the University of California system. For the sake of fairness, going alphabetically, the first article was all about the top-ranked UC Berkeley <http://www.doingcollege.com/tell-me-more-about-uc-berkeley/> and the second was devoted to our state's land grant university, UC Davis <http://www.doingcollege.com/college-profile-tell-university-california-davis/>. Next in line is the University of California-Irvine, so read on!

Founded in 1965, UCI is among the newest of UC campuses, yet in this relatively short time span, it has emerged to become one of America's best public universities. While it does not have the longer histories and higher profiles of UC Berkeley and UCLA, UCI offers a combination of academic rigor, sun drenched beaches, and ski slopes just an hour away.

UCI is seriously premed, and the School of Biological Sciences is considered one of the best and most competitive of their academic divisions. The already intense 'premed mentality' is further fueled by rigorous coursework, selective research positions and very large class sizes. Juxtaposed to the intense biological sciences majors are nationally ranked programs in dance, drama, music, studio art, and musical theatre housed in the School of Arts. The popular interdisciplinary School of Social Ecology offers innovative academic pairings such as environmental and legal studies, and psychology and social behavior, with an emphasis on professor/student relationships—a treasure to find in the often-impersonal feel to our monolithic UC system.

Located in the heart of suburban Orange County, UCI is just 50 miles from L.A. Some students describe UCI's clean, contemporary 1,500-acre campus as a bit slow and it is true that about 22 percent of the freshmen live off campus; this fact may give a slight commuter feel to the university. However, lovely Aldrich Park, with over 11,000 trees, modeled after New York's Central Park, is at the center of a campus that many students say has a thriving social life. With more than 500 student organizations, including 50 fraternities and sororities offered to UCI's 27,000 undergraduates, it is not much of a stretch to say that if you are willing to expend a bit of effort, any student can find a place to have fun and make friends at UCI.

This past fall UCI welcomed more than 6,500 freshmen, selected from a pool of about 85,000 applicants, which amounts to a 37 percent admit rate. UCI also offered admission to 3,000 transfer students, chosen from a pool of 20,000 applicants from California's community colleges. UCI retains freshmen and graduates a class as well as a number

of other great state universities, and 72 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2010 graduated within four years.

UCI offers 87 undergraduate degree programs within 10 schools. The School of Biological Sciences houses some of the most coveted majors, with public health, business and political science also being super popular. Languages are quite strong at UCI and its fiction writing/creative writing program is rapidly gaining national recognition. UCI also offers an academic advantage that the higher ranked UC Berkeley and UCLA do not: a A campus-wide honors program that includes honors housing. In fact, campus honors students may choose from three on-campus living options.

The attraction of the honors program is easy to understand when you take into account what a tough fight it is to get into science and other popular majors' classes for sophomores and even juniors. Seniors say there are often 100 or more students in their major classes and TAs do much of the teaching; not surprisingly, getting some professor attention takes work. That said, for the student who is willing to buckle down and study for a few years, UCI offers top name professors, innovative academic programs, and cutting-edge research opportunities. Successful students leave with a world-class education and employers that recognize them as such with top job offers, especially in the sciences, engineering and business.

Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate, graduate and professional school admissions. For over two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. By attending professional conferences, visiting college campuses and making personal contacts with admissions networks, Elizabeth stays current on the latest trends and the evolving nature of admissions and passes that know-how on to her clients. Both college and graduate school advising is available and the number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write elizabeth@doingcollege.com or call (925) 385-0562.



Final Haley's Run for a Reason Color Run on Fourth of July

By Sora O'Doherty



Pictured: Aislinn Welch, Jacqueline Welch, Suzanne Tom, Jeremy Martin and Brenda Martin. Photo Sora O'Doherty

This year will be the last "Haley's Run for a Reason Color Run" in Orinda. After organizing the event in support of the Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood Foundation for the past 14 years, organizer Suzanne Tom has decided that it's time to move on. But she is ending with her most colorful run ever. This year runners will be able to run through blue, magenta, purple and chartreuse color stations.

Tom began the run about five years after losing her daughter Haley to Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood, which is like Sudden Infant Death Syndrome but occurs after the first year of life. When Haley died, her sister Megan was just 19 days old. Megan is now 18 years old, and Aston, Tom's son, is 16. If Haley were alive, she'd be leaving college and starting on her new life, so Tom thought that this was a good place to stop.

She started the run in part because it pained her to realize that people had stopped talking about Haley, and she acknowledges that this is a difficult issue for many people, not knowing whether it is more painful to speak of lost children or to never mention them. But Tom says that for the past 14 years she and her family have imagined the bright, playful little girl growing up.

When Haley died in 2000, there was no such thing as Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood. Two moms started the SUCD group as a part of a SIDS program. Since then SUCD has grown into its own foundation with a board of directors. Last year saw the first SUCD conference

being held for medical researchers and SUCD families. Although it is a very rare condition, only 1.5 out of 100,000 toddlers die of SUCD, there are now some 600 affected families worldwide. At the conference it was revealed that scientists have been able to identify the cause of death in a child who died two years after Haley. Seizures appear to be a big factor in the condition.

Tom will continue to be an SUCD ambassador, more involved on the national level than currently. It is possible that another SUCD family may want to continue the fun run in the future. In the past 13 years, Haley's run has raised over \$350,000 for the SUCD foundation. Families that experience SUCD are now immediately provided with resources, which is amazing, Tom said. Haley's family has made a very conscious decision to maintain a happy family life.

"How heartbreaking it would have been for Haley if she looked down and we'd been sad," Tom added. Also, "we don't put things off until later." Tom realized that she had very few photos of herself with Haley, as she had usually been the photographer, so she encourages other families to take a lot of photos with all family members.

"Grieving is a very lonely process," Tom concluded; "I'm glad there is a support group for moms now."

Check in and late registrations for Haley's Run for a Reason will be from 7 to 8 a.m. on July 4. The 5-mile run and the 2-mile family walk will start at 8 a.m.