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DAN HIMBRECHTS AP

BRIGHT START TO '24

Fireworks explode over the Sydney Opera House and on the Harbour Bridge as part of the New Year's Eve celebrations in the Australian city. More than 1 million people watched the 12-minute display from the shore and from boats in the harbor.

HOW IS \$6M USED ON MIGRANT SERVICES?

Through county funds, nonprofit runs welcome center where asylum seekers can receive food, shelter, more

BY EMILY ALVARENGA & MAURA FOX

The South Bay nonprofit contracted by the county to spearhead migrant services will continue to run a temporary welcome center in central San Diego through the end of March, despite ongoing calls from other local aid groups for increased transparency and accountability from the organization.

SBCS — formerly South Bay Community Services — was first contracted to run the center in October and put in charge of \$3 million for migrant services so nonprofits could continue to provide resources to new arrivals seeking asylum after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

The county recently renewed its contract with SBCS after the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted in December to allocate an additional \$3 million to the effort.

The first round of funding, which was intended to last



ANA RAMIREZ U-T

Migrants are offered a warm meal, access to Wi-Fi and other services at an undisclosed location in San Diego last month.

through Dec. 31, was used to relocate the temporary migrant welcome center from the parking lot of the Iris Transit Station in Otay Mesa to a new, undisclosed location in central San Diego and provide services at the center — everything from access to Wi-Fi,

phone chargers and food to assist-ance with transportation and temporary shelter.

SBCS CEO Kathryn Lembo said that the nonprofit estimates it will have spent \$3.135 million by the end of 2023.

The second round of funding is

expected to last through March to provide services at the welcome center — intended to be temporary resources to help get asylum seekers on their feet before they continue on to their final destinations.

In its first three months, the welcome center has settled into a rhythm, establishing more services as it better understands migrants' needs.

But after spending every penny of the \$3 million it was allocated — something other nonprofits have raised concerns over — SBCS is looking to continue managing cost efficiency in the next three months to ensure the center can operate as long as it's needed, Lembo said.

It's unclear how the county plans to address the situation once the second \$3 million funding allocation runs out, though it has said repeatedly that it continues to ask the federal government for additional assistance. Lembo said SBCS is also searching for addi-

SEE CENTER • A7

SEE GAZA • A6

FIGHTING RAGES IN SOUTH, CENTRAL GAZA

Hamas fighters fire barrage of rockets into southern Israel

BY WAFAA SHURAF, BASSEM MROUE & TIA GOLDENBERG

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip

Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 35 people Sunday, hospital officials said, as fighting raged across the tiny enclave a day after Israel's prime minister said the war will continue for "many more months," resisting international calls for a cease-fire.

The military said Israeli forces were operating in Gaza's second-largest city, Khan Younis, in the south, and residents reported strikes in the central region, the latest focus of the nearly three-month air-and-ground war that has raised fears of a regional conflagration.

The U.S. military said its forces shot and killed several Iran-backed Houthi rebels when they tried to attack a cargo ship in the Red Sea, an escalation in a maritime conflict linked to the war. And an Israeli Cabinet minister suggested encouraging Gaza's population to emigrate, remarks that could worsen tensions with Egypt and other friendly Arab states.

Israel says it wants to destroy Hamas' governing and military capabilities in Gaza, from where it launched its Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. Hamas fighters killed some 1,200 people after breaking through Israel's extensive border defenses, shattering its sense of security. They also captured around 240 hostages, nearly half of whom were released during a temporary cease-fire agreement in November.

Just after midnight on New Year's Day, Hamas militants fired a barrage of rockets, setting off air raid sirens in southern and central Israel. No injuries were reported.

Displaced Palestinians found little to celebrate on New Year's Eve in Muwasi, a makeshift camp in a mostly undeveloped area of southern Gaza's Mediterranean coast designated by Israel as a safe zone.

SEE GAZA • A6

CITY WEIGHS RECREATION OPTIONS FOR MISSION BAY

BY DAVID GARRICK

More than 100 acres of long-vacant land on the southern edge of Mission Bay might soon become a lively combination of sports fields, boat ramps, picnic areas and entertainment venues.

Development of the area San Diego officials call South Shores, just east of SeaWorld and just south of Fiesta Island, has been delayed for decades by concerns over its history as a city landfill where toxic waste was dumped in the 1950s.

But there is now urgency to develop the area, now that plans to redevelop Fiesta Island and the bay's northeastern corner are threatening to force several Mission Bay clubs and activities either to move or to shrink their footprints.

City officials recently launched an 18-month effort to decide which activities can take over South Shores, how many acres each will get and where on South Shores they will be located.

The city is expected to host several public meetings in coming months, including one either this winter or in the spring, a city spokesperson said last week.

City officials must also determine whether the landfill areas SEE RECREATION • A6

NEW LAWS ON GUNS, SICK LEAVE AND POT WILL TAKE EFFECT TODAY IN CALIFORNIA

Changes include protections for LGBTQ+ youths, harsher penalties for fentanyl dealers

BY SOPHIE AUSTIN, TRẦN NGUYEN & ADAM BEAM

SACRAMENTO

Doctors in California who mail abortion pills to patients in other states will be protected from prosecution. Workers will receive more paid sick leave on the heels of a big year for labor. And companies can't fire employees for using marijuana outside of work.

These are among the hundreds of laws that take effect today in the nation's most populous state.

Each year, Gov. Gavin Newsom signs hundreds of laws passed by the state Legislature. Most take effect Jan. 1 the following year. But sometimes lawmakers will delay a law's effective date for a variety of reasons, including giving people more time to prepare for the new rules.

Some of the highest-profile bills passed by the Legislature in 2023 will not take effect until later. Fast-food workers will get a min- SEE LAWS • A4

MOST REQUESTS FOR SHELTER GO UNFULFILLED IN SAN DIEGO

Housing Commission data shows demand for beds has risen since city passed its ban on camping

BY BLAKE NELSON

It's a common refrain. "Homeless people sometimes won't accept shelter."

Police say it. Outreach workers live it. Reporters witness those in encampments rejecting assistance.

But among hundreds of people citywide who do ask to stay at traditional shelters on any given week, the vast majority do not appear to get a bed, a share that's grown since San Diego approved its camping ban.

Data from the San Diego Housing Commission shows that fewer than 20 percent of shelter requests were successful in recent weeks. Said another way, for every five homeless people who at least initially agreed to accept help, less than one ended up under a roof.

The commission oversees around a dozen facilities in San Diego, including several downtown run by Father Joe's Villages and Alpha Project. Multiple locations managed more directly by the city are not included in the data, including two safe sleeping sites near Balboa Park.

A number of those spots were recently



NANCEE E. LEWIS U-T FILE

A man unpacks some of his belongings at an Alpha Project shelter in 2019.

open, and it's possible some people turned down the commission's larger shelter system for the city's.

Nonetheless, San Diego has a shortage of beds, Lisa Jones, who recently became the commission's president and CEO, said at a board meeting late last year.

There's "still a high number of people looking for shelter," she added.

Local officials continue to push for more space as well as additional affordable housing, although many proposals will take months, if not years, to complete.

Requests for shelter, known as "referrals," SEE HOMELESS • A6

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