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MICHALE SMOLENS Columnist

Misconduct increases after papers close, study says

The closure of local newspapers across the country over the years has been coupled with concern about how public officials would behave without the community watchdog looking over their shoulders.

The handwringing has been justified. Studies have shown that public corruption and taxpayer costs have increased after newspapers were shuttered.

But there was sparse research on the impact of newspaper closures on local corporations, and the results of studies that had been done were mixed. A new report draws more definitive conclusions.

A nationwide study co-authored by a UC San Diego professor published this year says that legal violations by corporations increased and the fines they were assessed spiked when local newspapers went away. The larger fines suggest companies had become bolder in breaking the law.

“When local newspapers closed down, the response was companies did misbehave in that way,” said Gerardo Pérez Cavazos, a professor at the UCSD Rady School of Management who specializes in corporate misconduct and corporate governance.

The study — “When the local newspaper leaves town: the effects of local newspaper closures on corporate misconduct” — said overall violations went up 1.1 percent while fines increased by 15.2 percent.

The researchers found a broad array of increased violations involving securities, environmental, consumer protection and workplace safety laws, among others.

“Thus, our study provides a comprehensive analysis of the effect of local newspapers on firms’ misconduct,” said the report, which was also authored by Jonas Heese of the Harvard Business School and Caspar David Peter of the Rotterdam School of Management.

Given the study involves known violations, the researchers also suggested there likely was a greater increase in undetected violations that, if uncovered, would have resulted in more fines.

The study, citing research by the Pew Research Center, said circulation of local newspapers in the United States had decreased by 50 percent over two decades as of 2019. But the study looked at communities where the news organizations actually ceased, and did not include mergers, reduced frequency of publication or change to online-only because that doesn’t necessarily affect local news availability.

The researchers also looked at other potential factors for the increase in corporate malfeasance.

“This effect is not driven by the underlying economic conditions, the underlying local fraud environment, or the underlying firm conditions,” the study said.

Enhanced enforcement also was factored into the analysis. For example, the study noted the number of workplace violations increased substantially from 2006 to 2007 after several initiatives by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to crack down on job-site safety violations.

That trend appeared across the study’s sample that included areas with closed newspapers and areas where newspapers remained open, which

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CHULA VISTA MAN PLEADS NOT GUILTY TO MURDER

Larry Millete accused in wife’s disappearance; no body found

BY DAVID HERNANDEZ

CHULA VISTA

The husband of a Chula Vista woman who vanished nine months ago pleaded not guilty Thursday to a murder charge.

Larry Millete, 40, was arrested earlier this week in connection with the disappearance and presumed

death of May “Maya” Millete, 39. Her body has not been found.

In addition to murder, Larry Millete also pleaded not guilty in a Chula Vista courthouse to a felony charge of illegal possession of an assault weapon. If convicted, he could be sent to prison for more than 25 years to life.

During Millete’s arraignment, Superior Court Judge Maryann D’Addezio ordered the defendant to remain jailed on a no-bail status. The judge also issued an order that requires him to surrender any weapons and stay away from the couple’s three children.

No new details about the

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JARROD VALLIERE U-T
Larry Millete, 40, is arraigned at a Chula Vista courthouse Thursday, days after his arrest.

COOL STUFF FOR SCHOOL



KRISTIAN CARREON
Alicia Quinn, VP of new business development at United Way of San Diego County, hands out school supplies Thursday to children at Joyner Elementary in City Heights. The United Way collaborated with Blue Shield California Promise Health Plan on the effort.

PALM TREE REMOVAL SPARKS PROTEST

Ocean Beach residents upset over plan to cut 8 plants nearing 70 feet

BY LYND SAY WINKLEY

SAN DIEGO

For decades, towering palm trees have lined the streets of Ocean Beach.

Longtime residents describe the trees as iconic, and say they are part of the fabric of the seaside community. It was this deep appreciation, residents say, that motivated about two dozen people Thursday to protest the removal of eight trees.

The palms in question are along Newport Avenue and Santa Barbara Street and are about 70 feet tall, residents say. It’s their height that’s causing the problem.

Every five to 10 years, San Diego International Airport conducts a survey to ensure no obstacles protrude so far into the sky that they could interfere with the sensitive navigation sensors pilots rely on to fly when visibility is low. How much space planes need to fly safely in



KRISTIAN CARREON
A group of residents protest the city’s plan to cut down eight palm trees in Ocean Beach on Thursday.

these circumstances isn’t determined by the airport, though. It’s a buffer zone the Federal Aviation Administration sets.

Airport and city officials said the survey, which took about two years, found that the eight Ocean Beach palms, and about a dozen other palms in the Bankers Hill

area, were found to be obstructing that buffer zone.

“According to the FAA, during inclement weather conditions these trees may interfere with the designated flight path and potentially cause arriving planes to be diverted away from the airport,”

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TWO PEOPLE FOUND SHOT TO DEATH IN EAST VILLAGE HIGH-RISE

Homicides took place in Spire San Diego building; resident heard shots

BY ALEX RIGGINS & DAVID HERNANDEZ

SAN DIEGO

Two people were fatally shot Thursday afternoon inside an East Village high-rise apartment building, and homicide detectives were called in to investigate, police said.

The bodies were found inside one of the units in the Spire San Diego building at 1475 Island Ave., San Diego police Officer Darius Jamsetjee said.

Police responded to the building after receiving a call about 3:10 p.m., Jamsetjee said. Few other details about the incident were immediately available.

Spire resident Bernardo Bustamante said he and his family were walking to an elevator inside the building when he passed a fellow resident who asked if he had heard the sound of six gunshots. Bustamante said he thought it was construction work.

Bustamante and his family walked out of the elevator to find several officers in the lobby with long rifles, he said.

They guided the family out of the building.

There are several layers of security to enter the building, according to Bustamante, who said residents have to show a key at the entrance, then use the key to operate the elevator.

A short time after the bodies were discovered, patrol officers located a vehicle and driver thought to be connected with the homicides, according to police radio traffic. Officers followed the car

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Anti-vaxxers allege workplace discrimination; refuse to address need to avoid undue harm



CHARLES T. CLARK Columnist

Whenever I write about COVID-19 and vaccinations, I inevitably get a comment from at least one reader arguing that my column lacks an anti-vaxxer perspective.

They aren’t entirely off in that assessment. Although I will typically summarize the arguments anti-vaxxers make, I rarely directly quote them for a very simple reason that I

freely share with readers.

I believe in science and modern medicine, and I refuse to platform someone just for them to spout unfounded, ill-advised, anti-science sentiments. I also tell those inquiring readers that in the event I do note the anti-vaxxer views, I feel that it’s my responsibility — and the responsibility of anyone who has a platform — to do so in a thoughtful way with plenty of context around it.

Now, I’m under no illusions that me doing that changes much in the grand scheme of things, and it may even turn off some of those who need some convincing about get-

ting vaccinated. But it does allow me to say that my writing doesn’t cause additional harm because I’m not giving a roadmap for others to join the anti-vaxxer crusade or giving their cause legitimacy.

It’s funny, because the idea of avoiding undue harm not only guides many of my decisions as columnist, but it’s also at the heart of why I find the whole anti-vaccine fervor so frustrating — which was something I was reminded of because of anti-vaxxer activity over the past few days.

On Sunday the Orange County Register and the San Francisco

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