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U.S. TO SURPASS 600,000 VIRUS DEATHS

Despite progress from vaccines, toll continues to climb

BY DAN LEVIN & JULIE BOSMAN

In the next few days, the United States will surpass 600,000 deaths from COVID-19, the highest death toll in the world. The milestone approaches even though virus cases and deaths in this country have fallen sharply, vaccinations have been distributed widely, and many people have shed their masks and resumed pre-pandemic lives, including in California and New York, which both fully reopened Tuesday.

Yet the coronavirus remains agonizingly present for those who knew the hundreds across the country still dying of it each day.

Although the sheer number of deaths in the United States is higher than anywhere else, the country's toll is lower, on a per capita basis, than in many European and Latin American countries, including Peru, Brazil, Belgium and Italy. It is 10 times the toll that former President Donald Trump once predicted.

"It's a tragedy," said Stephen Morse, a professor of epidemiology at the Columbia University Medical Center. "A lot of that tragedy was avoidable, and it's still happening."

In the early days of the pandemic, federal officials had shocked the country by announcing at a White House briefing that even with strict stay-at-home orders, the virus might kill as many as 240,000 Americans.

"As sobering a number as that is, we should be prepared for it," Dr. Anthony S. Fauci said. SEE DEATHS • A6



SANDY HUFFAKER

Maskless passengers are seen in the baggage claim area at San Diego International Airport on Tuesday as the state retired its Blueprint for a Safer Economy tier system and lifted capacity and physical distancing restrictions for most businesses and activities.

SAN DIEGANS REJOICE AS RESTRICTIONS LIFT

State ends occupancy, physical distancing requirements; rules around wearing masks vary

U-T STAFF

Though pandemic restrictions fell across the state, Tuesday did not bring an immediate unmasking in San Diego County.

While bar, restaurant and gym patrons seemed the most ready to move into a more-open way of living, many noses remained covered in grocery stores and other venues where those who are fully vaccinated are no longer required to mask up.

The scene did not surprise Dr. Wilma Wooten, the county's public

health director. During her final weekly COVID-19 briefing, the physician said that she didn't expect the lifting of restrictions to be like flipping a light switch.

"It will take some time to kind of ease or glideslope into that comfort level," Wooten said.

There was plenty of formal commemoration of the moment Tuesday. Sadly, no one living in San Diego County was among the 10 \$1.5 million winners in the state's Vax for the Win sweepstakes.

While masks are still required for

CORONAVIRUS FIRST ARRIVED IN U.S. IN DECEMBER 2019

Analysis of blood samples suggests virus appeared weeks before it was recognized by health officials.

the unvaccinated and in some settings — health care, public transit, airports — bedrock institutions began to feel their way forward.

More than 200 people gathered at the County Administration Center early Tuesday morning to mark the reopening of San Diego businesses

and offices. With live music and free breakfast burritos and coffee, the event indicated a return to public life after more than a year of lockdowns amid the pandemic.

"The last year has tested us, it has tried us," Board of Supervisors Chair Nathan Fletcher said. "Today we really appreciate the lifting of the tiers."

As in stores and restaurants, attendees were a little uncertain about how to go back to a world stripped of public health protocol. Dave Laguarda. SEE PANDEMIC • A6

INDICTMENTS PIN WAVE OF MURDERS ON CARTEL ENFORCERS

Los Cabos accused in slayings of two S.D. teens in Tijuana

BY KRISTINA DAVIS

Four men alleged to be leaders in a Mexican cartel enforcement cell have been indicted in San Diego on drug-trafficking charges and are accused of orchestrating a wave of violence in Tijuana, including the murders of two San Diego teenagers in 2018, according to federal prosecutors.

Edgar Herrera Pardo oversaw a group of enforcers called Los Cabos who worked to secure the Baja California corridor for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, according to prosecutors. The drug-trafficking organization, known by its Spanish initials CJNG, has risen in influence in recent years and has been battling the more entrenched Sinaloa Cartel for control of the lucrative Tijuana-San Diego smuggling route.

Herrera is charged alongside alleged lieutenants Carlos Lorenzo Hinojosa Guerrero and Edgar Perez Villa in a superseding indictment returned by a San Diego federal grand jury in March. SEE CARTEL • A9



EDUARDO CONTRERAS U-T

Pall bearers salute the casket of SDPD Detectives Jamie Huntley-Park and Ryan Park after their memorial service.

COMMUNITY DEEPLY MOURNS OFFICERS

Detectives Jamie Huntley-Park and Ryan Park remembered as 'exceptional' in their work and lives

BY DAVID HERNANDEZ & KAREN KUCHER

Detectives Ryan Park and Jamie Huntley-Park were inseparable, from the start of their relationship as police recruits until the tragic end when they were killed in a wrong-way freeway crash.

On Tuesday, they were buried together in the same casket.

"If they weren't together, they were talking about each other," San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit recalled earlier in the day during a memorial service for the couple.

More than 300 people gathered

at Maranatha Chapel in 4S Ranch near Rancho Bernardo for the late-morning service. For nearly two hours, uniformed officers, family members and friends listened as speakers recalled the lives of Park, 32, and Huntley-Park, 33, who were husband and wife.

San Diego police Chaplain Chuck Price, who gave the opening prayer, told mourners he hoped they would celebrate and honor the couple, calling them "incredible human beings who now rest in a single casket."

Nisleit remembered the couple. SEE OFFICERS • A10

UNDER NEW POLICY, MORE CHILDREN MAY JOIN FAMILIES IN U.S.

Plan boosts pool of Central Americans who can seek entry

BY TRACY WILKINSON

WASHINGTON

Under a new Biden immigration policy, far more Central American children could be reunited with family members already in the United States.

The Biden administration on Tuesday announced the major expansion of a program that would allow many such youths into the country legally, part of its stated goal to increase "legal pathways" for immigration.

The changes could boost

the number of Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Honduran children joining their families in the U.S. from several hundred to tens of thousands.

"It could be a substantial increase, and we hope it will be," a senior administration official said in an interview, speaking on condition of anonymity to brief a reporter on the policy before its formal announcement.

"This is going to be a life-saving measure for so many children in danger," said Daniella Burgi-Palomino, who handles immigration issues for the Latin America Working Group, a Washington-based advocacy and research organization. "This is a big step." SEE CHILDREN • A9



U.S. OPEN TORREY PINES

RIVALS TEE OFF ON EACH OTHER

The feud between Bryson DeChambeau (left) and Brooks Koepka is good for the game, writes Bryce Miller.

FOOD

WARMLY WELCOMED

Warm and flaky stuffed rolls — for the meat lover or vegan — blanket you in cozy comfort. E1



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