



PLAYERS on the Pali High football team burst through a banner before the Sept. 5 game in Santa Monica.

COLUMN ONE

A fresh set of downs for Pali High

The football team of wildfire nomads searches for elusive normalcy. Could the program survive upheaval after the campus burned?

By Daniel Miller

wenty-four days after the worst wildfire in L.A. history burned their stadium, members of the Palisades Charter High School football team stretched and twisted on a middle school field in Santa Monica.

To the north, a sickly orange haze hung along the horizon, a reminder of the inferno that had reduced parts of their school to a ragged tangle of charred masonry, metal and wood. About 10 players had lost their homes in the Palisades fire.

During these confusing, grief-ridden days, those close to the football team — which in 2024 made it to the City $Section\,Division\,I\,championship\,game\,--\,questioned$ whether continuing the program was possible.

Would there be enough players to field a team? Would first-stringers transfer? With their Stadium by the Sea in ruins, what would constitute a home game?

But on Jan. 31, the same day the Palisades fire was declared 100% contained, simply gathering for a practice felt like a kind of quiet reclaiming.

A dramatic viral video featuring several star players would set the tone for the next eight months as the team, forced into a fellowship of nomads, searched for what it had lost: normalcy.

"I am not going anywhere," the players echoed in the social media clip.

"We will field a football team," one of them insisted. [See Pali High, A10]

Mexico's president is carving own path

In first year, country's first female leader has high approval ratings despite challenges.

By KATE LINTHICUM

MEXICO CITY — Each September, Mexico's president appears before a crowd of tens of thousands in the nation's central square to perform the grito, the shout of independence commemorating the country's break from colonial rule.

This year, for the first time, a woman will lead the masses in chants of "Long live Mexico!"

Monday's ceremony in Mexico City's main plaza will be a historic moment for the nation and for President Claudia Sheinbaum, who, in her first year as the country's first female leader, has maintained remarkably high marks despite a spate of domestic and international challenges.

Sheinbaum, 63, who took office last Oct. 1, boasts approval ratings above 70% and has notched multiple victories: winning passage of constitutional reforms, overseeing unprecedented judicial elections and deftly negotiating with President Trump, making concessions on immigration and security to avert the worst of his threatened tar-

iffs on Mexican goods. She has also overseen a 25% drop in homicides, an impressive feat in a country exhausted by drug violence that she chalks up to her administration's aggressive new crackdown on organized crime.

"We're doing well and we'll get better," Sheinbaum said this month during a speech to Congress, where [See Sheinbaum, A4]



A PRESERVED brain highlights the UCLA Brain Research Institute's work.

UCLA puts federal cuts on display with science fairs

By Jaweed Kaleem

UCLA scientists, medical professors and graduate students are accustomed to presenting their research into cancer, stroke, brain injury, nerve regeneration at conferences of their peers with the aid of high-tech audio and visual equipment.

But in back-to-back

events in Westwood Village and on a campus courtyard last week, they tapped into their high school memories. erecting handmade posters on easels and bringing in props from their labs - including a human brain — to simply explain their complex work.

Welcome to the "Science Fair for Suspended Research," perhaps an understatement of what's at stake. UC President James B. Milliken said early this month that the University of California is facing "one of the gravest threats in UC's 157-year history" after the Trump administration cut off grants before demanding a \$1.2-billion fine as punishment for UCLA's alleged

antisemitism. [See UCLA, A9]

CRIMES OF THE TIMES

Popular L.A. sheriff touted reforms. Then a young FBI agent showed up

When Leah Marx began visiting Men's Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles in 2010, it did not immediately raise alarm among the people who ran it. Most of the time, jailers just looked at her federal ID and let her in without asking why she was there. If they did, she said she was investigating a human trafficking case. It was a good-sounding story. Believable. Perfect to deter further questions.

He promised transparency, but stories of corruption persisted

By Christopher Goffard

Marx was in her late 20s, just beyond her rookie year at the FBI. She had been sitting at her desk when her supervisor handed her a letter from an inmate alleging jailers were brutalizing people in their custody. It was different from other letters. It had details.

Now she and her FBI colleagues were at the jail conducting secret interviews, trying to separate fact from

[See Baca, A11]

U.S. Christian nationalists call Kirk a 'martyr'

Experts on faith warn of potential for extremism and retribution

By Hailey Branson-Potts

A few hours after Charlie Kirk was killed, Sean Feucht, an influential rightwing Christian worship leader, filmed a selfie video from his home in California, his eyes brimming with tears.

The shooting of one of thenation's most prominent activists, conservative Feucht declared, was no less than "a line in the sand" in a country descending into a spiritual darkness.

"The enemy thinks that he won, that there was a battle that was won today," he said, referencing Satan. "No, man, there's going to be millions of bold voices raised up out of the sacrifice and the martyrdom of Charlie Kirk."

Soon afterward, Pastor Matt Tuggle, who leads the Salt Lake City campus of the San Diego-based Awaken megachurch, posted a video of Kirk's killing on Instagram, adding the caption: "If your pastor isn't telling you the left believes a evil demonic belief system you are in the wrong church!"

Kirk's death has triggered a range of reaction, much of it mournful sympathy for the 31-year-old activist and his family. But it also has sparked conspiracy theories, hot-take presumpthe left responsible and calls for vengeance against Kirk's perceived enemies.

At a vigil for Kirk in Huntington Beach last week, some attendees waved white flags depicting a red cross

[See Kirk, A8]

His 25-year fight to win innocence

Man convicted of attempted murder as a teen freed after LAPD scandal was revealed.

By James Queally

On the night Los Angeles police claim he carried out an act of gangland vengeance. Oscar Eagle could barely walk.

In March 1998, Eagle was only 17 and using crutches to get around after he was wounded in a drive-by shooting. The bullet is still in his leg to this day, marked by a coin-shaped indentation on his calf.

At the same time that police allege Eagle opened fire on an 18th Street gang member in an act of retribution, he says he was at an East L.A. hospital because a friend's cousin was giving birth, according to court re-

Eagle knew he was innocent. Witnesses placed him

at the hospital and he said medical records could prove he wasn't mobile enough to carry out the crime.

But a combination of dubious legal representation and an arrest made by members of a notoriously corrupt unit in the Los Angeles Police Department saw Eagle sentenced to 25 years to life

In July, a judge granted a int motion from the Cali fornia Innocence Project and the L.A. County district attorney's office to vacate Eagle's conviction, citing ineffective assistance of counsel and questions about the behavior of LAPD detectives on the case.

For reform advocates, Eagle's case epitomizes the problem with prosecuting teens as adults, but it also marks a positive sign for the L.A. County district attorney's office's conviction review unit under Nathan Hochman, who personally appeared at the hearing

where Eagle was set free. [See Eagle, A9]



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Time

EMMYS PREVIEW

Which shows and stars will win big? Awards expert Glenn Whipp share his picks. Also, what to make of host Nate Bargatze. ENTERTAINMENT

1,000 kids at risk of deportation

A list that started with Guatemalan children is now feared to include Hondurans and Salva-

dorans. NATION. A6

Business Opinion Voices A16



Another burro shot by an arrow

Cupid is recovering after the latest in a string of bow attacks on wild donkeys in Moreno Valley. california, b5

Weather

Mostly sunny. L.A. Basin: 83/65. **B10**

For the latest news, go to latimes.com.

UCLA fairs show science interrupted by Trump

[**UCLA**, from A1]

Standing near their displays, these high-level researchers said they are nervous about the future of their life's work. The Trump administration has suspended \$500 million of their medical scientific research grants. The intent of the science fair — a rudimentary act of frustration and hope - was to garner more public attention for the lifesaving and cutting-edge research they quietly conduct behind closed lab doors.

Billions are similarly frozen at Harvard and other elite universities. At UCLA, nearly all the grants on hold are from the National Institutes of Health, after a court case led to the restoration of \$81 million in briefly suspended National Science Foundation awards.

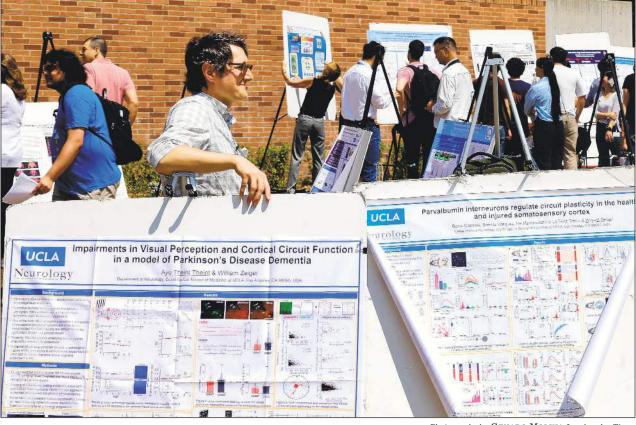
The fairs unfolded before a key federal court hearing this week that could bring back hundreds of millions of dollars in NIH funding. The UC regents will also meet for their first public discussions since the late July cuts.

"It's been very stressful," said William Zeiger, an assistant professor in the neurology department. His funding was cut in the third year of a five-year grant to study Parkinson's disease. He is using emergency funds to continue his research, which does experiments on mice. But he may have to eventually cut staff.

"Even if we were to physically stop doing the research, we still have an obligation to maintain the tools, the people, the animals that we've been caring for and have been so central to doing this research," Zeiger said, uncertain about what's ahead and how to preserve years of work.

"It's not like you can just hit pause and pick it up and continue," said Vidya Saravanapandian of UCLA's Brain Research Institute. She stood at a table Wednesday displaying two 25-yearold preserved human brains she placed on cafeteria trays. Office workers out to lunch got an impromptu lesson on its parts.

Saravanapandian earned her doctorate from UCLA in 2021 using an NIH training grant, and her research led to a brain discovery related to Dup15q syndrome, a chromosomal disorder that can lead to autism. The discovery is now part of clinical trials. But the same grants for current students are suspended.



Photographs by GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times WILLIAM ZEIGER stands by his Parkinson's research at UCLA's "Science Fair for Suspended Research."

"The time that we're losing now hugely impacts the progress that we've been making in science," Saravanapandian said.

Stroke recovery

Elle Rathbun, 29, set up Wednesday on the grassy patch across from a Chipotle and Pret a Manger. Like a sidewalk marketer, she handed out fliers with an image of the brain that said, "Neuroscience research matters.

A sixth-year neuroscience doctoral candidate, she lost a \$160,000 NIH grant in July. Her research looks at potential treatments to repair the brain after a stroke.

memorized her She

"After a stroke, affected cells in the brain die and the area forms a scar that shrinks over time. Our research displaces that dead tissue with a biomaterial also known as a hydrogel. It reserves that space and acts as a scaffold to rebuild that part of the brain," said Rathbun, who runs experiments on mice.

Like many doctoral students whose salaries and lab work are paid for by federal grants, Rathbun is now applying for funding from private organizations and stretching the non-NIH funds left in her lab's budget.

But the clock is ticking. "Everyone is floating



RESEARCHERS display their work after \$500 million in federal grants were suspended this summer.

right now as best as they can, but I think it's going to get much, much worse" if funding isn't restored soon,

Cigarette addiction

A few steps away was Michael Apostol, also a neuroscience doctoral student. He stood in front of a poster that said, "Re-calibrating the mind: how brain stimulation can treat depression and addiction.

He also brought a prop. He pointed to a transcranial magnetic stimulation device, a small handheld machine that has been proven effective in treating depression by boosting helpful brain activity and reducing harmful brain patterns. His defunded research studies how to use the device to reduce cigarette cravings and nicotine withdrawal.

Apostol had an NIH training grant that covered his salary. Now he is trying to find a teaching assistant job to make up for losses. Some passersby were in

the area for doctor's appointments at UCLA facilities, while others were running errands at the nearby UPS and Amazon stores. "So this is what the

Trump cuts are all about," said one visitor, glancing at a display about how studying communities of ants can help humans understand supply chains and disease transmission.

"What does this have to

do with Jewish people? I'm confused," he said.

Basic research

Much of the research at UCLA is "basic research," which focuses on advancing human knowledge of the body, Earth and medicine so it can be used as a building block of specific experiments to develop, for example, drug treatments.

Lydia Daboussi, an assistant professor in the neurobiology department, conducts such research through her study of cells. Her fiveyear, \$1-million NIH grant has been suspended, threatening her lab's ongoing discoveries on nerve regenera-

"Nerve injury is something that essentially 40% of Americans will experience either through carpal tunnel, injury, diabetes, HIV, chemotherapy,' cancer. Daboussi said. "Nerves can be really sensitive and people want to be able to get up and walk around and not experience pain all day. Our lab is focused on trying to understand how we can better assist our bodies to re-

The grant money paid for storage and upkeep of lab materials such as cells, as well as the costs for a staff of six that included undergraduate and graduate researchers.

These days, what doesn't make sense to Daboussi is Trump's raft of reasons for canceling her lab's mission allegations around antisemitism, UCLA's admission process and the equal treatment of transgender people on campus.

'Our research grant touches none of those topics," she said. "To my knowledge, we have participated in none of these activities.'

Evolution within

Those who showcased Wednesday were largely from the medical school, one of the hardest-hit areas among the hundreds of grant suspensions at UCLA.

On Thursday, members of the UAW 4811 union also held a science fair outside Rolfe Hall on campus. The union represents graduate student teaching assistants, researchers and other academic workers who work closely with faculty.

One of the displays at the UAW event was titled, "Evolution in your tummy: on the hunt for adaptations in the microbiome to improve health." The project lost \$2 million between two suspended grants, leading to a slowdown in research to develop new treatments for inflammatory bowel dis-

UC's next moves

In addition to grant cuts and fine demands from UCLA, the Trump administration has also proposed sweeping changes at the Westwood campus. They include the release of detailed admissions data — the government accuses UCLA of illegally considering race when awarding seats — restrictions on protests, and an end to race-related scholarships and diversity hiring programs. The Department of Justice has also called for a ban on gender-affirming care for minors at UCLA healthcare systems.

UC leaders, led by Milliken and the Board of Regents, are negotiating to restore funding. But wide gulfs remain between the government's proposals and UC.

The regents have also considered whether to sue the Trump administration at the encouragement of Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Times photographer Genaro Molina and staff writers Marcos Magaña and Brenda Elizondo contributed to this report.

A gang shooting, an LAPD scandal and an innocent man

[**Eagle,** from A1]

'This is what I've been dreaming of every day," a tearful Eagle, 45, said during an interview in late July.

Formed in 2015 and expanded under former Dist. Atty. George Gascón, the conviction review unit has seen continued commitment from Hochman. After facing criticism for recording just four exonerations from 2015 to 2020, the unit has been involved in 12 in just the last four years, according to a district attorney's office spokesperson.

"I think that a D.A. sends a strong message when you appear in court, that it's both a case of serious concern to the D.A.'s office, and it's one where you want to see justice done," Hochman said.

Seeing L.A. County's top prosecutor personally endorse his release is a stark turnaround for Eagle, who spent most of his life believing police would do anything to keep him behind bars.

After entering California's adult prison system as a teenager, Eagle said he watched a friend die in a riot at Pelican Bay. He spent vears in isolation after he says he was erroneously conto the Mexican nected

Both of his parents died while Eagle was locked up, and he can't even mention their names without tearing up to this day.

Eagle said he grew up in a section of Pico-Union where all his neighbors were affiliated with a local gang set, the Burlington Locos. A young tagger who went by "Clown," he too wound up part of the crew.

In the late 1990s, Eagle became a target of detectives with an infamous LAPD unit known as C.R.A.S.H., short for Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums.



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

OSCAR EAGLE, 45, was wrongfully convicted of attempted murder as a juvenile.

At the time, the LAPD's Rampart division was home to C.R.A.S.H. officers who falsified reports and framed civilians, later triggering a scandal that ended with the U.S. Department of Justice placing the LAPD under a

consent decree. Eagle says that in 1996 he was wrongfully arrested for gun possession as a juvenile by Rafael Perez, the central figure of the Rampart scandal. Perez later admitted the report that led to Eagle's first arrest was falsified, ac-

cording to court records. But it was Eagle's next run-in with police that proved far more consequen-

In March 1998, 18th Street Gang member Benjamin Urias was shot twice on Burlington Avenue in what police believed to be retribution for a prior attack on a Burlington Locos member, court records show. Urias, who was hospitalized for two days and released, told police the shooter walked with a limp.

Investigators from C.R.A.S.H. unit based in Rampart locked onto Eagle, due to his gang connections and the fact that he was said to be walking with a limp after he was injured in a shooting, according to his attorney, Megan Baca, of the California Innocence Project.

Charges against Eagle were initially dismissed after Urias failed to show up for a preliminary hearing. But a month later, LAPD homicide detectives Thomas Murrell and Kenneth Wiseman prodded the shooting victim to pick Eagle out of a photo lineup, according to the motion to vacate his con-

Urias initially told police he did not recognize anyone in the lineup, records show.

"OK, circle that guy ... $Number 4 is the \, one \, you \, were \,$ pointing to," Murrell said to Urias, according to a recording of the interview described in court records.

An LAPD spokesperson declined to comment. The audio recording that called the validity of the identification into question was never raised at Eagle's trial, according to Baca.

Despite concerns about the behavior of the detectives. Hochman said he was not immediately ordering a review of other cases involving Murrell and Wiseman. Neither Rampart detective was part of a C.R.A.S.H. unit.

Murrell denied any wrongdoing and told The Times he remembered Eagle's name because the then-teenager was a suspect in multiple gang homicides at the time.

He did not offer specifics, but dismissed Eagle's medical alibi, contending the teen "wasn't on crutches" when

police arrested him.

"If he made an ID, we didn't cheat, I can tell you that ... I've never done that," said Murrell. "We did everything by the book."

Attempts to contact Wiseman were unsuccessful.

Eagle said things were only made worse by his former attorney, Patrick Lake, who didn't make an opening statement at trial or raise any of Eagle's alibi evidence. When Eagle questioned his lawyer, Lake joked that he was "saving the best for

As Eagle's family grew frustrated in the gallery, he said his mother passed him a note that simply read "fire him." Eagle tried to get rid of Lake, but a judge denied his request. Eagle was convicted of murder. And since he was tried as an adult, he faced 25 years to life.

Lake did not respond to a request for comment. Baca said she had one conversation with Lake, in which he claimed he didn't remember Eagle or his case.

At the time, prosecutors in California could directly file charges against teens in adult court, sending hundreds of children every year to adult prisons such as Pelican Bay, where Eagle wound up. That practice has been abolished by a change in state law, but Baca said she's encountered too many cases where teens had their lives stolen because they were wrongfully convicted and tried as adults.

"It's egregious, but I think that it happens all the time," Baca said. "So many of my clients were juveniles and they got adult life."

Eagle said his stay in prison was long and painful. He spent six years in segregated housing, essentially isolation, after Baca said her client was wrongly labeled as a Mexican Mafia associate. He denied any affiliation with the powerful prison-based

syndicate. Eagle said prison officials took a leap in logic to link him to the gang based on a "kite," or prison note, sent by another inmate.

As he grew older behind bars, Eagle started to read voraciously. His father sent recommended books. Eagle says he gravitated toward the Bible.

Even though he knew he hadn't committed the crime that put him in prison, Eagle said he still realized there were things about his life that needed to change.

"I was 30 years old. My perspective started to change. And I started to see this past life that I was living was nonsense," he said. "I started to have a conscience."

In 2023, after repeated failures to get his case overturned on appeal, some of Eagle's friends got the attention of Baca and the California Innocence Project, which worked to bring the case before the conviction review unit.

At the same time, Eagle said, he started exchanging letters with an ex-girlfriend from high school, a woman named Monica.

In July, the two squeezed next to each other on Baca's couch at the lawyer's Long Beach home, hands interlocked. They've since gotten married and are looking to move to Arizona, away from the city and county that nearly took everything away from Eagle.

There's still a lot for Eagle to get used too — he's never driven a car, the concept of Uber is still bizarre to him but Monica says there's one silver lining to the prison term Eagle never should have served. She wouldn't have married the guy who was sent away all those years

"He's a whole new person from when he went in," she