



6755 Newlin Ave.
Whittier, CA 90601
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Mark Your Calendar!

Friday, Oct. 14

The Whittier Historical Society invites all members to its annual membership meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 14. Come see an actual board meeting and hear board member John Garside discuss his production of "The Crash of Flight 416 West: Forgotten tales of Turnbull Canyon."

Monday, Oct. 31

Free trick or treating at the Museum, 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Monthly Newsletter of the Whittier Historical Society & Museum

Museum hours:
Friday & Saturday
1 to 4 p.m.

website:
whittiermuseum.org

Email:
info@whittiermuseum.org

The mission of the Whittier Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and exhibit materials of historical and cultural significance to the history of the greater Whittier area.

The Whittier Museum

GAZETTE



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October 2016

Nixon mural graces Uptown

By Keeanna Garcia
Writing Intern

Nixon appears in more places than you think.

On the corner of Bailey and Comstock is a striking monochromatic mural of the country's 37th president behind two micro-phones pointing his right index finger at whomever passes by.

As of September the \$500 still-life is an officially permanent addition to Uptown.

"I contracted (the mural)," said Gio Alonso, LLGA Holdings partner and Whittier College student. LLGA owns Auntie's Bakery and Lift Coffee Roasters - also new additions to a revitalized Uptown.

"My partner, Leeba Lessin, and I set out on a mission to challenge art and innovation here and we figured that it



Photo by Tim Traeger

Entrepreneurs Gio Alonso, left, and Leeba Lessin give a thumbs-up in front of a new mural of President Richard Nixon that now adorns the wall of their business on Bailey Street north of Comstock Avenue in Uptown Whittier. The mural was created by artist Cosmin Lucaciu.

was kind of a straightforward idea to pay respects to a leader who came from Whittier."

In order to foster the mission, it was imperative for the artist to personify the former president.

"I went out and searched for an artist that can respect Nixon and respect where he came from, what he did for the community, and then subsequently what transpired in his academic and

political career," Alonso said.

Thirty-one-year-old Cosmin Lucaciu would become the artist to animate this vision. Painted walls is not his expertise.

"Murals are not something that I do often. This is probably the first big public mural I have done," Lucaciu said. "It was nice to see how many people

2016-2017

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Nixon/From the front page

probably the first big public mural I have done," Lucaciu said. "It was nice to see how many people stopped to talk to me about it, or to take pictures. That's something you don't get when you're in a studio."

Although the mural is important to Lucaciu's reputation, his initial response to the project was mixed.

"Painting any mural in a public downtown area is a great opportunity for an artist. But painting a mural of Nixon is a different story," Lucaciu said.

"I actually backed out of the project shortly after I agreed to it (because of) the pressure that came along with it. My biggest concern was that my particular style of painting wouldn't portray him in a realistic and positive manner. The last thing I wanted was another cartoon caricature of Nixon that we so often see."

Alonso, too, agrees the 12-by 16-foot mural needed to demonstrate homage rather than ridicule, despite common knowledge of the 1972 Watergate scandal.

"I know that he's popular for having the peace signs up, but I wanted to convey

him in a more respected and professional sense," Alonso said. "He still came from Whittier and he was still the president of the United States. Nobody wants to be defined by their worst actions."

Conal McNamara, director of Community Development for Whittier, also agrees that Nixon's municipal contributions deserve respect.

"With regard to the benefit of the mural to the community, Richard Nixon has a rich association with the city of Whittier."

Now that the mural is complete, Lucaciu is ecstatic.

"I definitely feel a stronger connection to Nixon and Whittier after this project and I'm extremely surprised of all the positive feedback I have received," Lucaciu said.

"I'm very thankful for the opportunity to pay tribute to Richard Nixon."

Keeanna Garcia is a Whittier College student.



Photo by Apolonia Iezza

Yolanda Garcia is all smiles at Casita del Pueblo in Uptown.

Day of the Dead alive in Whittier

By Apolonia Iezza

Writing Intern

People don't usually associate skulls and the dead with happy thoughts, but Yolanda Garcia is changing all that.

Garcia, owner of the vibrant ethnic store Casita del Pueblo on Philadelphia and Bright Ave, aims to bring cultural awareness, on behalf of the Latino community, to Whittier.

The store's theme and focus lies on Day of the Dead. "It's a holiday that integrates Spanish, Meso-American, and Indigenous culture, to commemorate our loved ones who have passed away," Garcia said.

It's not meant to be a mournful service, but a lively celebration. In hopes to educate others, as well as bring the community closer, she hosts a Day of the Dead festival in Uptown Whittier.

Dead/Page 3

VW shop a parody Gold Mine

By Keeanna Garcia

Writing Intern

This is one for the rubbernecks.

For years drivers heading along Pickering Avenue just south of the Whittier Museum have been privy to a cast of characters performing from a most unusual theater – hanging out the window of a half VW Bug.

What began as a small autoparts shop founded by the owner of a 1957 Oval Window Volkswagen has become an attention-grabber familiar to Whittier residents.

VW Gold Mine at 7016 Pickering Ave. specializes in old and new VW parts and is home to the locally famous half bug known to commemorate holidays, current events, even the scandals of Tiger Woods and Octomom.

“I started (business) in October 1973 on Greenleaf and moved in 1979,” said Ralph Chase, founder and proprietor. “I have the first Volkswagen I bought and I’ve owned it 50 years.”

Chase’s penchant for Volkswagens stems from decades prior, as his wife and business partner Karen “Diva” Chase recalled.

“He’s just always had this love for it. He was in a car club and it just seemed a natural thing to do. He’s never wanted to do anything else.”

After 13 years of business on Pickering, Diva envisioned a yuletide project that would forever alter the Gold Mine’s reputation.

“The Whittier Chamber of Commerce had a Christmas Decorating Contest and I came up with the idea of trying to make it look like (the Bug is) flying up in the air. Ralph and some of his friends, aka “the crew,” started talking and came up with a way to do it. I had a guy come in that used to work at STATS and he custom-made the reindeer. This is what started it.”

One project in particular pioneered what would later become a Gold Mine routine.

“I kept bugging (Ralph) to put the half



Photos courtesy of VW Gold Mine

‘Octomom’ Nadya Suleman has been parodied by VW Gold Mine, as has golfing legend Tiger Woods.

bug on the building and finally, again, he made it happen,” Diva said.

“One friend (brought) a big crane to lift it up and another friend was a professional welder. Everybody just pitched in for this project and it’s always been kind of a community thing.”

Though popular in the Whittier community, VW Gold Mine received wide media coverage for its 2009 tribute to Nadya Suleman, better known as Octomom because she bore eight children after undergoing in-vitro fertilization.

“That attracted so much attention. Channel 11 came and filmed it and then it was picked up on all the local stations. We had no idea but customers were coming in telling us, ‘Guys you’re on every channel!’ It was very exciting,” Diva said.

“The local newspaper and the LA Times, they were all very interested.”

Similar to blasting Michael Jackson tunes alongside his half-bug tribute, the Chases created a mix-tape to correlate with the Tiger Woods project.

“We (made) a CD with eight love songs for cheaters and we gave them out to our customers. Suspicious Minds, a Stevie Wonder song, it was a lot of fun.”

These project ideas, however, are not limited to the Chases.

“We welcome anybody’s input,” Diva



said. “It’s very difficult because we have to draw the line at good taste and offending everybody. That’s not our intent. The intent is really to bring a smile.”

VW Gold Mine is a microcosm for the Whittier community.

“People have donated things, given suggestions ... it really does take a whole crew to put it up and get it ready,” Diva said.

Keeanna Garcia is a student at Whittier College.

Dead/From Page 2

Last year was their tenth annual festival, making the event more than a decade old.

“People love to participate in it because it promotes local businesses and showcases handmade ethnic art made by local vendors,” she said. The festival is hosted on the Oct. 9 because that’s the time people start preparing for Day of the Dead, which is officially celebrated on Nov. 2, or “All Soul’s Day.”

Although this holiday is derived from a shared ancestral heritage, the rituals have been personalized and molded through generations.

Whittier College professor Jose Orozco said, “It’s a transnational celebration. Day of the Dead originated in Southern Mexico with indigenous communities but now we see it commercialized in America.” He said this is neither good nor bad.

“It adds a value to the holiday but also loses a certain value at the same time.”

Garcia said she believes this holiday can be spiritually healing because it reminds people that there is life after death.

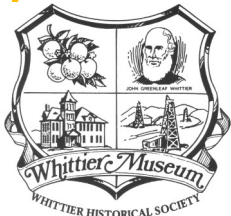
“It’s a tribute to them,” she said.

She explains that it may not only bring peace to those who lost loved ones but to the souls that have crossed over.

She continues to keep her heritage alive for her the sake of the community and her children.

“I think it’s important to teach our kids where their parents came from. I really believe when we educate them, we empower them,” Garcia said. Moreover, she hopes this “will help them develop a tolerance and appreciation for other people’s culture.”

Apolonia Iezza is a Whittier College student



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the Whittier Museum**

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BOO!

The Whittier Museum invites you to a
Spooky, Safe and Fun Halloween Night

October 31st

4:30 P.M. - 7:30 p.m.

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