**SCT\_0929\_EYE\_TopStories**

**Italics in Yellow**

**Children’s Book**

**Caption: MHamiltonBook –** San Clemente High School senior Micah Hamilton authored the new book *Uniquely Cyrus*, which follows a young kid who embraces being Black after a classmate questions his skin complexion and hair. Photo: Collin Breaux

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**San Clemente High Student Publishes Children’s Book to Promote Self-Acceptance**

*By Collin Breaux*

Growing up in San Clemente left Micah Hamilton with a lot to adjust to.

“Despite my young age, I found myself immediately not like the other kids at school,” the 17-year-old San Clemente High School senior said. “I had a darker complexion with big puffy hair, while the people I sat next to had beach-bronzed skin and blond hair.”

“While not everyone fit this exact description, to my young mind, the majority did,” Hamilton added. “As a result, I not only felt isolated but insecure in myself, as I lacked the representation or community I sought so badly.”

With the help of family and friends, Hamilton eventually learned to love himself. Wanting to inspire other kids to embrace their physical appearance, Hamilton decided to write a children’s book called *Uniquely Cyrus* to celebrate diversity and self-acceptance.

The book illustrates a young Black kid named Cyrus who is questioned about his dark skin and curly hair by a classmate on his first day of school. Cyrus then receives encouragement from his mother, who tells him he is unique and caring—which gives him confidence. The insecurities and hardships Cyrus goes through are the same ones Hamilton experienced growing up.

Hamilton decided to create a children’s book after researching ways he could let other kids know that looking different is OK. He started on the book in May and worked on it until mid-September.

“Eventually, I found someone online who wrote a children's book. This idea intrigued me, but was daunting, for sure,” Hamilton said. “Nonetheless, I withdrew money I earned from working at Starbucks over the past year and half and bought a brand-new iPad in May of this year. This iPad opened the door for me to start my own journey.”

Though Hamilton has always been creative, drawing on an iPad was a new experience.

“After days and weeks of trying to find my style, I finally landed on one I felt would be suitable,” Hamilton said of the book’s illustrations. “Over the summer, I found myself illustrating for hours a day, perfecting my project, hoping the impact I could have would all be worth it. Eventually, the illustrations were done, and I moved onto writing the actual story.”

Hamilton had every page storyboarded before he began illustrating. Selecting the right words so kids could understand the theme, though, was a struggle.

“After more hard, long hours of research, illustrating and writing culminating in the perfect story, I was done. After spending easily over 150 hours on this project, I knew I wanted to publish my story,” Hamilton said.

“Once published, I felt an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and pride in my work,” he continued. “I felt this book was exactly what I needed to give me a sense of closure after years of insecurity, as the message was one I wish I was given at a young age.”

Hamilton said that his family and friends have read and enjoyed the book.

“They were proud of me,” he said.

When asked if he would write another children’s book, Hamilton said that is something he’s open to, but—for now—he’s busy applying to colleges. Art continues to be a big part of his life, he added.

“Living vicariously through Cyrus, I hope to inspire young ones and show them that no matter what you look like, you should be confident and cherish your beautiful skin,” Hamilton said.

*Uniquely Cyrus* is available for purchase on Amazon.

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**Sugar Blossom**

**Caption: SugarBlossomCookbook –** Lei Shishak, the founder of San Clemente’s Sugar Blossom Bake Shop, is set next month to release her fourth cookbook, *Easy Plant-Based Cooking for Two*, which focuses on plant-based eating. Photo: >>>>>>

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**Sugar Blossom Bake Shop Founder to Release Vegan Cookbook**

*By C. Jayden Smith*

In her latest venture, the founder of San Clemente’s Sugar Blossom Bake Shop is set to release her fourth cookbook, *Easy Plant-Based Cooking for Two*, in hopes of guiding more people to regularly eat better.

After the success Lei Shishak found with the Downtown San Clemente bakery led her to write her first cookbook in 2014 full of baking recipes, she found a passion that combines her interests.

“I love the experience of creating something from nothing, basically,” Shishak said. “I love creating in the kitchen and developing new recipes, and I really love writing, too.”

Sugar Blossom came into existence after a career as an executive pastry chef across Los Angeles and Orange County that saw Shishak work in Dana Point and gain familiarity with San Clemente.

When she saw a storefront that was open for lease next to BeachFire Bar & Grill on Avenida Del Mar, she jumped at the opportunity to fulfill her dream and open the bakery in 2010.

Shishak said she was excited to bring a new kind of business to downtown and was blessed by how the community welcomed her, adding that her love of creativity and sharing knowledge translates directly into writing cookbooks.

During her time at Sugar Blossom, which she sold in 2020, Shishak recalled that people would come in to order a cake with their own design ideas in mind, but also wanted her to add her spin.

“I don't expect the people who buy my cookbooks to make the recipe exactly as written,” she said. “I mean, part of the joy of cooking is adding your own flair.”

No part of the process of learning to eat more plant-based foods should be restrictive, according to Shishak, as she said she also doesn’t expect a reader to immediately cut out all animal products from their diet.

“I get that it’s a process, and it’s a process for me, too,” said Shishak. “I’m not 100% meat-free, and I don’t know if I ever will be, and I think that’s personally fine.”

With more free time on her hands from March 2020 onward—after her 10-year lease on Del Mar ended and the pandemic spread—Shishak took six months to determine what she wanted to write about next. Once she concluded that she enjoyed cooking at home and eating healthy, she decided to expand her knowledge of incorporating more vegetables in her diet.

Shishak earned a Plant-Based Nutrition Certificate online from the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies and started developing recipes that also fit her current lifestyle in a two-person household.

“There’s definitely a huge momentum towards plant-based eating and also a huge momentum towards limiting waste in the kitchen, and this cookbook really combines those two areas,” she said.

The number of plant-based options at restaurants that are solely vegan or vegetarian eateries, as well as meat alternatives at grocery stores throughout Southern California, is incredible, said Shishak, who added that it was “really nice” to see people so interested.

She has seen a societal shift toward attaining longevity through her efforts to stay updated on health trends, of which the shift has led people to continually gravitate to eating healthier.

“This book is really for the beginning plant-based eater,” said Shishak. “It doesn’t lecture you that you have to only eat plants. I’m very supportive of slowly incorporating more plants into your diet.”

The abundance of anti-inflammatory nutrients, improved heart health, decreased blood pressure, and a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, according to Shishak, are all benefits that can be derived from plant-based eating.

She added that people can find frozen fruits and vegetables and buy bulk grains and nuts to help save on their grocery budgets.

“Ultimately, I have found that it’s cheaper,” Shishak said of plant-based eating. “When I was writing this cookbook, I really kept track of how much I was spending on buying the ingredients for the recipes, and I cut my grocery budget in half.”

She again encouraged readers to personalize their food experience, such as adding a soft-boiled egg or swapping vegan Parmesan cheese for cow’s milk Parmesan.

“My hope is that anyone who’s interested in just incorporating more plants into their diet would buy this book and not hesitate just because all the recipes happen to be vegan,” said Shishak.

*Easy Plant-Based Cooking for Two: Delicious Vegan Recipes to Enjoy Together* will be released on Oct. 18, and it [is available for pre-order on amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/Easy-Plant-Based-Cooking-Two-Delicious/dp/1510772081/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=3FYWMITZ7XG97&keywords=easy+plant-based+cooking+for+two&qid=1664294447&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjM4IiwicXNhIjoiMC4wMCIsInFzcCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&sprefix=easy+plant-%2Caps%2C495&sr=8-1).

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**E-Bike Orientation**

**Caption: EBikes - >>>>>>>>>>>. Photo: C. Jayden Smith**

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**Headline**

*By C. Jayden Smith*

**= Two more e-bike related stories below**

**Caption: EBikes –** >>>>>>>>>>>>>. Photo: >>>>

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**Education-First Approach Emphasized During City Council Discussion on E-Bike Safety Concerns**

*By Madison Beveridge*

With the continuing rise in popularity of e-bikes, scooters and similar modes of transportation, safety concerns were at the forefront of a conversation during the San Clemente City Council’s Sept. 20 meeting.

The council’s discussion, which included insight from law enforcement and members of the public, followed the City of Carlsbad’s decision in late August to [declare a state of local emergency](https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/carlsbad-declares-emergency-bike-e-bike-collisions/509-df61b2d1-ca96-4558-a635-ab4d802a18a5) over worries of an increase in bicycle and e-bike collisions.

On Aug. 25, Carlsbad declared the emergency for bike, e-bike and traffic safety, and on Aug. 30, the Carlsbad City Council [ratified the emergency](https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/city-of-carlsbad-review-state-of-emergency-bike-and-e-bike-safety/509-5294fde9-629c-48bf-8b6e-cbf961c4a539), approving a $2 million appropriation in emergency funds to address traffic safety.

Lifelong San Clemente resident, teacher and City Council candidate Mark Enmeier addressed the council during last week’s meeting and touched on Carlsbad’s commitment to e-bike safety. Enmeier explained that Carlsbad’s policies come after two [deaths related to e-bikes](https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/loved-one-speak-out-after-carlsbad-mother-killed-e-bike-crash/509-0e5ec5c0-014f-4095-8be9-906bbbbc2252), a reality he does not want to witness locally.

“I shudder to think of what tragedy our city has to go through before we act,” Enmeier said.

Enmeier further explained that educating individuals, specifically youth, on why helmets, traffic awareness and other safety measures are important is valuable in creating a viable solution.

In response to Enmeier, Councilmember Laura Ferguson emphasized her support of enforced safety measures.

“I totally support e-bike safety,” Ferguson said. “We have implemented many initiatives to help with education of parents and children.”

Currently, San Clemente has several tactics in place.

Included is the Bike Safety Rodeo for the local community that was most recently held in May 2022, when e-bike vendors were invited to spread awareness on how to safely ride. The event is primarily intended for individuals 17 and under.

This past January, the City Council also approved the prohibition of e-bikes on the Beach Trail, with enforcement of the ban beginning in May.

In addition, marketing and social media outreach has played a large role in the city’s push for safety. On Sept. 12, in partnership with local comedians Chad and JT, a comedic yet informative [public service announcement](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAqDQvkI974) was published, highlighting the importance of proper precautions such as wearing a helmet.

Capt. Tony Benfield, chief of San Clemente Police Services, commented during the council meeting and explained that he has seen an increase of helmet use, prompting fewer stops than in the past. When individuals are stopped, though, law enforcement is taking an educational approach, rather than issuing a citation.

“We are trying to create awareness," Benfield said.

Benfield explained that there is a difference between electric motorcycles and e-bikes. While the two may look similar, e-bikes are legal, but electric motorcycles are entirely illegal and intended for out-of-city use only.

“There is no way to make them legal,” Benfield said. “You have to have a license and an M1 endorsement to drive those, and even if you have that, the equipment itself is not street-legal.”

Benfield explained that while some of these vehicles are still on the road, law enforcement is eliminating them as much as possible, impounding and towing when necessary.

In addition to speaking on the legality, Benfield noted how he has witnessed families deal with the surge of e-bike use among youth.

“It’s always going to be an issue in a city where there is little option for them to ride; a lot of parents are not OK with the idea of kids being in the street, and that’s why many of them are up on the sidewalk,” Benfield said. “Many family members think that’s the safest place for them to be.”

Councilmember Kathy Ward responded to the proposition for furthered precautions and highlighted the city’s already “robust policies.” Ward also remarked that she feels a great deal of education should be left to parents.

“Not every street in our city is going to be safe to ride a bike; that is why we have the Pacific Coast Bike Trail,” Ward said.

In contrast, Mayor Pro Tem Chris Duncan explained that he feels the city does have the responsibility and owes it to the community to help with education. After recounting an incident in which he witnessed a child get injured on an e-bike, he said that education should not be left solely to parents.

“We can’t just say to parents, ‘It’s on you,’ ” Duncan said. “We need to implement a training program that would be staffed by the city; I think we need a bike registration program so we can keep track of the bikes.”

During the meeting, Mayor Gene James also spoke, explaining his stance and noting that retailers of e-bikes play a role, too.

“I think e-bike retailers need to take the lead, they need to get together, they need to create a safety program,” James said.

Moving forward, the city’s Public Safety Committee will come to the City Council’s meeting on Oct. 18 with detailed information on what the City of Carlsbad has done and how San Clemente can also mitigate collisions.

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**Safe Routes Program**

**Caption: SafeRoutes –**

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**Capo Unified Addresses E-Bike Use with New ‘Safe Routes to School’ Policy**

*By Collin Breaux*

Given the rise in use of electric bikes, the Capistrano Unified School District is establishing a policy to govern their use on school campuses.

The CUSD Board of Trustees voted on Sept. 21 to allow the district to implement a “Safe Routes to School” policy that’s meant to provide guidelines for students on how to ride safely and properly store their e-bikes at school.

In-depth details of the policy—that Board President Martha McNicholas noted is “still in development”—were not spelled out during the meeting or in an agenda report as each school site is responsible for developing their own procedures.

“Strategies in support of the Safe Routes to School Program shall be based on the grade levels of the students and an assessment of the conditions and needs of each school and the surrounding neighborhoods,” the district said in its report.

Aside from suggesting minor revisions, the trustees did not extensively comment on the policy, which had been introduced by the board during its meeting last month.

The policy “is essential for our schools and our community,” said Michele Ploessel-Campbell, executive vice president of the Capistrano Unified Council Parent Teacher Student Association. “It will help save student lives.”

Ploessel-Campbell also noted that the Niguel Hills Parent Teacher Student Association recently hosted an e-bike education event in conjunction with the Dana Hills Parent Teacher Student Association, where the Safe Routes to School policy was mentioned.

Safety concerns over e-bikes have become a hot topic in South Orange County, with officials, law enforcement and school resource officers emphasizing an education-first approach to addressing community concerns of reckless ridership.

“Students riding e-bikes to/from school and the storage of e-bikes on campus needs to be regulated,” the district said in its report. “A committee of district and site administrators developed a protocol for e-bikes, which includes storage, security, permits, education, bike classifications and safety. This policy has been reviewed and edited by legal counsel.”

The policy specifically outlines that the CUSD superintendent or a designee may appoint a Safe Routes to School Program coordinator and identify or establish district or school site committees to oversee and coordinate related activities.

The district can also collaborate with other entities including transportation agencies, cities, county agencies and community organizations.

“The Superintendent or designee shall explore the availability of grant funds and other sources of funding to support related projects and activities,” the policy states. “The Superintendent or designee shall periodically report to the board on the implementation of program activities and progress toward program goals.”

An agenda item intended to [advocate for local public health departments to have more say in public health matters](https://www.danapointtimes.com/trustees-consider-resolution-calling-for-local-control-over-covid-guidelines-push-final-vote-to-september/)—brought about by COVID-19 restrictions being mandated by the state—was removed from the Sept. 21 agenda.