

Walter Mencken's



# S.D. ON THE Q.T.

The News You Won't Find Anywhere Else

## Nip and Tucker

Transit Director Recounts "Lifesaving" Budget Cuts

STEAM ROOM AT THE FOUR SEASONS AVIARA SPA, CARLSBAD (AP) — Like many people who wake up in Las Vegas after a 48-hour spree of nonstop partying, North County Transit District executive director Matt Tucker had a problem. He was \$20,000 in debt to various casinos, bookies, drug dealers, and escort services. "Worse still," he told a group of interested fellow spa-goers recently, "that was on top of the 20 grand I brought to town" — a bonus awarded by the NCTD's board of directors in appreciation for his help in healing the district's nearly \$20 million 2009 budget shortfall. "I mean, the bonus is why I went to Vegas in the first place," he mourned.

Tucker reasoned that he could probably make deals with some of his creditors to make payments out of the \$10,000 raise his on-the-job performance had garnered in addition to the bonus. But that still left \$10,000 worth of debt, and

"Thank God for Costello's Booze Cruise."

no solution immediately presented itself to Tucker's throbbing, foggy mind.

"Sure, I was set to get 5 percent raises through 2013, but these people don't have a reputation for being patient, you know? I needed cash, fast, and I had already cut things pretty close to the bone — laying off staff, outsourcing bus drivers and mechanics to a private employer at reduced hourly wages [\$19.10 to \$16.20, in some cases], even making sure longtime employees were let go before they could collect their \$3500 20-year-employee bonus. And it's not like I was rich — even after the raise, I was still making below \$220K. You try living in Carlsbad on that kind of chump change."

Salvation, said Tucker, came in the form of David Joseph

Costello, a 40-year-old bus driver who was arrested June 1 while driving an NCTD bus. At the time of his arrest, Costello



NCTD executive director Matt Tucker

had a blood alcohol level of 0.25 percent, more than six times the legal limit for commercial drivers. And it turned out that he had already been

cited no less than nine times for alcohol-related offenses in North County.

"The outrage gave me all the leverage I needed to go into the district's employee records and get rid of anybody with any kind of alcohol or drug problems in their personal history," explained Tucker. "In all, I was able to remove 30 employees. And I instituted a hiring freeze while we established new guidelines for applicants' background checks. We had to shut down a couple of bus routes, but sometimes you have to put safety before convenience. And guess what I get as a performance bonus for that kind of budget trimming? Bingo: \$10,000, payable at my September performance review..."

"If I can just keep Silky Smyth off my back for a few months, I'm home free," exulted Tucker.



## Special San Diego

What Brings Travelers to America's Finest City?

OMNI HOTEL, DOWNTOWN — Tourist season has come around again, bringing with it happy travelers eager to sample our city's many attractions. We stopped some new arrivals in the lobby to ask them how they came to choose San Diego as their vacation destination.

"We're totally going to do Soak City," gushed Sara Lee Tunston, a 14-year-old native of Dayton, Ohio. "I'm sure it's way better than the Soak City at Cedar Point in Sandusky [Ohio]."

Scott Jackson, a sixth-grader from Lawrence, Kansas, said that he couldn't wait to visit Carlsbad's Legoland theme park. "I'm gonna beat out all the losers waiting around back home for Legoland Kansas City," said Jackson, referring to Legoland's planned second North American location. "And

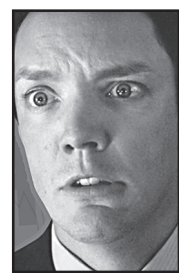
I think Dad wants to get some KC Barbecue at that place where they filmed *Top Gun*."

"Affirmative!" said Jackson's father, Frank. "And after that, we're all heading to the rodeo in Lakeside! I only wish Cajon Speedway was still going, so that we could maybe take in a race," he concluded, referring to the auto racetrack that closed in 2004.

Meanwhile, Carlo and Lunetta Brivio, in town from Italy to take their son Marco to Sea World, expressed relief at finding a Bice down in the Gaslamp. "Thank God Milan is sending something to Southern California besides Alfa Romeos," sighed Lunetta. "I haven't had a decent meal since we arrived. But then, what do you expect from the city that gave the world a restaurant named after a children's toy?"

## WHO PLAYS WHO

### SAN DIEGO PADRES' HEART OF THE ORDER EDITION



**Matthew Lillard** found success early with *Scooby-Doo* (though he had to share comedic duties with a talking dog).



**Nick Hundley** found success early with the 2010 Padres (though he has to share backstop duties with Yorvit Torrealba).



**Brad Dourif** bedeviled opposing forces as Grima Wormtongue in *Lord of the Rings*



**Chase Headley** bedevils opposing pitchers as the number five batter for the Padres. (Alternate selection: Trevor Hoffman.)



**David Koechner** is an offensive ass in *The Office*.



**Adrian Gonzalez** is the offensive heart of the Padres.

## Gasbags from the Mailbag



"Fat" is relative. Apparently, so is "Nasty." I am writing to express my outrage at the gross unfairness and harmful characterization contained in your recent story "Chub Scrub" (May 26, 2010). In the story, you refer to "that one really nasty part of Mission Bay." While it is true that Mission Bay's Vacation

Isle North Cove did appear on the Heal the Bay Foundation's "Top 10 Beach Bummers" list for 2010, it's still a lot cleaner than most of beaches in the Gulf Coast these days. No tar balls here, folks.

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