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NO. 4 VOL. XXXVI

## Why Kearny Mesa will be San Diego's Next Hot Neighborhood

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John Gomez



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**COVER STORY:  
Kearny Mesa Rising**

If you were a planner and wanted to make a big dent in San Diego's housing shortage, how does 26,000 new homes grab you? That's the population that the City of San Diego envisions for Kearny Mesa over the next 30 years in its recently approved Kearny Mesa Community Plan update. The growing neighborhood — already San Diego's second-largest employment center, will also add up to 25,000 more jobs over that span of time. Page 8.



**San Diego County's 2021 Men of Influence**

Ronson Shamoun, founder and CEO of RJS Law, leads off our report of outstanding male community leaders in San Diego. Whether in business, law or other industry, the men have made significant contributions to their respective professions in San Diego County.



**An Agent for Change**

In the midst of the fear, risk and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, businessman Jeff Lavender decided to launch his own travel agency. His vision: to welcome back the masses to all of the things they had put a hold on, be it the embrace of a grandchild, a glass of wine with friends, or a long-awaited vacation with family.



**Passion in Business**

Dani Alger and Anna Clevenger are more than just business partners; they are best friends. Separately, the two women wanted to run their own photography business, but eventually decided to combine their talents. The result is DNA Photo+Style, the business they launched in 2019. The company has carved out its own place in the photography world as a source of branding for both businesses and individuals.

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The S-3B Viking

# SAN DIEGO SCENE

## NASA retires a research workhorse to San Diego Air and Space Museum

When the U.S. Navy retired its fleet of S-3B Vikings from active duty in 2009, not all of them were grounded. At NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, one S-3B was being used almost daily as a flight research aircraft.

Acquired in 2004 and flown for the next 16 years on a variety of research missions, this S-3B Viking is about to fly off into the sunset and retire at the San Diego Air and Space Museum where it will be used to educate the public about its important role in the U.S. Navy and at NASA.

"This is the last S-3B flying today anywhere in the world," says Jim Demers, Glenn's Flight Operations Manager. "It's been a workhorse for NASA, but we just can't source its unique parts anymore."

Originally designed by Lockheed Martin as an anti-submarine warfare aircraft, NASA's S-3B Viking was completely reconfigured in 2006 for flight research purposes. All weapons systems were removed and replaced with civilian avionics, GPS, and satellite communications systems to conduct flight communications research.

One of its major contributions was helping NASA's aeronautical innovators define communications standards that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) can apply to the unmanned aircraft systems for safe operation in U.S. airspace.

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Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS LAW, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego-School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class. He was recently presented with the following awards:

- San Diego Metro Magazine- Best Attorney 2016
- San Diego Magazine- Top Attorney 2016
- San Diego Business Journal- Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016
- Martindale Hubbell's- AC Preeminent Rated 2014, 2015 & 2016
- San Diego Daily Transcript- Top Attorney 2014 & 2015
- San Diego Metro Magazine- 40 Under 40 - 2015



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## New wearable finger wrap can let you power electronics even while you sleep

By **Liesel Labios | UC San Diego**

A new wearable device turns the touch of a finger into a source of power for small electronics and sensors. Engineers at the University of California San Diego developed a thin, flexible strip that can be worn on a fingertip and generate small amounts of electricity when a person's finger sweats or presses on it.

What's special about this sweat-fueled device is that it generates power even while the wearer is asleep or sitting still. This is potentially a big deal for the field of wearables because researchers have now figured out how to harness the energy that can be extracted from human sweat even when a person is not moving.

This type of device is the first of its kind, said co-first author Lu Yin, a nanoengineering Ph.D. student at the UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering. "Unlike other sweat-powered wearables, this one requires no exercise, no physical input from the wearer in order to be useful. This work is a step forward to making wearables more practical, convenient and accessible for the everyday person."

The device also generates extra power from light finger presses—so activities such as typing, texting, playing the piano or tapping in Morse code can also become sources of energy.



This thin, flexible strip can be worn on a fingertip and generate small amounts of electricity when a person's finger sweats or presses on it.

## Developers brand 17-story La Jolla project as a luxury senior housing development

Belmont Village La Jolla, a 17-story residential project being constructed at 3880 Nobel Drive, is being touted as a luxury senior housing development by Belmont Village Senior Living and Greystar, developers who purchased the land together in 2020.

Belmont Village La Jolla will offer 180 residential units of independent living, assisted living and memory care as well as community amenities, wellness activities, enrichment programs and clinical care upon completion in summer 2022.

Belmont Village is collaborating with the UC San Diego Stein Institute for Research on Aging to promote resilience and well-being through programs and activities for Belmont Village La Jolla residents.

In addition to the UCSD collaboration, other signature amenities at Belmont Village La Jolla will include a professionally managed fitness center, full-service salon and spa, private screening room, bistro for casual dining and full-service dining room, personal wine storage, sports lounge and arts and crafts studio. The community also will feature a variety of outdoor areas, such as terraces for dining, a fireplace and entertainment area, heated saltwater swimming pool, ocean views and private balconies on the top two floors.

The units offered will be studio, one and two-bedroom residences.



Rendering of Belmont Village La Jolla

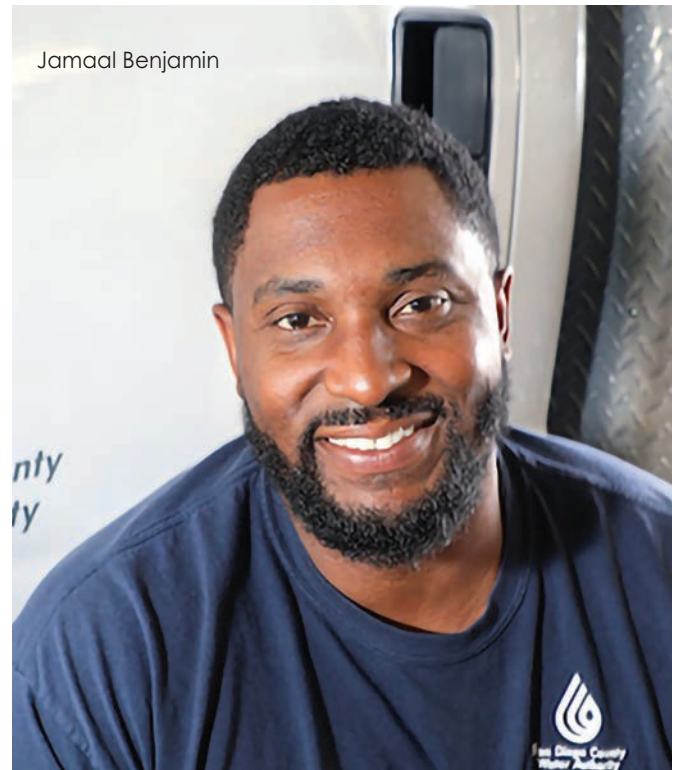
## San Diego County Water Authority taps SkillBridge Program for talented veterans

The San Diego County Water Authority is the first public agency in California to participate in the Department of Defense SkillBridge Program, which connects transitioning military service members to career-track job training opportunities. The regional initiative is off to a fast start with two SkillBridge interns starting their civilian careers at the Water Authority this summer.

The Water Authority's Operations & Maintenance Department recently welcomed two SkillBridge interns, Gerald Moore and Jamaal Benjamin, who each bring more than 15 years of experience in the Navy.

The Water Authority is benefitting from Moore's background in operating and maintaining computer systems. "The Water Authority is all about teamwork and service, and they've welcomed me to their team with open arms," said Moore. "This is a new phase of my career and life. I'm excited to find out where this journey will take me."

Benjamin is using his knowledge and experience working with complex electrical, electromechanical, and electrohydraulic systems to help maintain and repair critical water facilities. "Having an opportunity to tap my military training and background in a civilian context is an ideal way to increase my career options in the water and wastewater industry," said Benjamin.



Jamaal Benjamin

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Congratulations to  
**Ronson J. Shamoun**  
for being recognized  
as one of the 2021  
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We are proud of all of  
your accomplishments  
and are inspired by  
your commitment to  
making a difference  
in our community!

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## Disposable face masks: A new pollution threat

Visual Capitalist

In response to government mandates, the world's factories produced 52 billion disposal face masks in 2020. It's estimated that 1.6 billion of them ended up in our oceans. This equates to roughly 5,500 tons of plastic pollution.

It will take them 450 years to biodegrade.

Despite their single-use nature, disposable masks are expected to take more than four centuries to decompose while in the ocean.

These masks are commonly made of polypropylene, which easily breaks up into microplastics. While the effects of microplastics on human health are not yet determined, these fragments are incredibly common in our water supply— for example, 94 percent of U.S. tap water is deemed to be contaminated.



Disposable face mask in the ocean (Credit: The Conversation)



Skylar Holewinski

### Ballast Point Brewing Co. awards inaugural 'Brewing for Diversity' scholarships

When it came time to choose the recipient of UC San Diego Extension's inaugural Brewing for Diversity Scholarship, the selection committee couldn't decide between the two top candidates — Elia Gómez Smith and Skylar Holewinski — so they kicked the decision over to Ballast Point Brewing, the scholarship's sponsor.

"The owners agreed that both were awesome and deserving, so they offered to award two scholarships instead of one," said Misha Collins, Ballast Point's community engagement manager.

Elia Gómez Smith currently works for UCSD Medical Center in a health care job made all the more difficult by the pandemic. Taking courses in brewing allows her to pursue a more creative and scientific endeavor. Based on her experience caring for others, she came up with a plan to focus on the elements of remembrance, tradition, and community in the beer industry.

Skylar Holewinski has a 15-year professional background in formal research with a focus in biopharma clinical trials. She finalized her degree in biology from UC San Diego later in life, at age 36. It became personally important to Skylar to find a viable path to utilize and strengthen her degree in a hands-on format. When she saw an announcement for the scholarship and the time flexibility of the program in brewing, it felt like a natural next step — and a different way to think about science.



Elia Gómez Smith

### S.D. mayor appoints Hafsa Kaka as director of homelessness strategies

Mayor Todd Gloria has appointed Hafsa Kaka (pronounced Kay-ka) as director of the newly-established Homelessness Strategies and Solutions Department.

Kaka brings more than 15 years of experience in homeless, mental health and social services to this

role, which is charged with leading the city's homelessness strategies, activities and partnerships while working toward Gloria's ultimate goal of ending chronic homelessness. An immigrant and woman of color, Kaka hopes to address homelessness through an equity lens and with a collaborative perspective.

Most recently, Kaka served as the homeless solutions officer for the City of Riverside where she designed and implemented a program that removed the city's largest encampment by placing individuals into housing through the collective work of multidisciplinary teams. She also worked on a regional approach to address homeless as homeless services manager for the City of Santa Ana.

Gloria created the Department of Homelessness Strategies and Solutions in June to expand the city's current capacity and expertise in prioritizing efforts to address homelessness.



Hafsa Kaka

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# Why Kearny Mesa will be San Diego's Next Hot Neighborhood

By Jennifer Whitelaw



Traffic-calming medians and landscaping along Spectrum Center Boulevard improve the pedestrian experience in Kearny Mesa. (Courtesy City of San Diego Planning Department)



As envisioned by the community plan update, Aero Drive Village is planned as a mixed-use neighborhood linked by multimodal connections and the Aero Promenade to the Convoy Corridor at the west end and StoneCrest neighborhood and retail center at the east end. (Courtesy City of San Diego Planning Department)

If you could wave a magic wand and make a big dent in San Diego's housing shortage by adding 26,000 new homes, where would you do it?

It may not be as fast as a magic wand, but the City of San Diego envisions this transformation for Kearny Mesa in its recently approved Kearny Mesa Community Plan Update. Over the next 30 years, the community will become a neighborhood with up to 26,000 new homes.

Already San Diego's second-largest employment center, Kearny Mesa will also add up to 25,000 more jobs over that span of time.

According to the San Diego Association of Governments, the mean annual salary in Kearny Mesa is approximately \$10,000 more than the regional average. Considering San Diegoans' declining appetites for commuting and the great jobs available in Kearny Mesa, the chance to live near work in this area will be very attractive.

Whether it's a short walk or a short drive, the 10,000 people already living in Kearny Mesa are currently within 10 miles of 1.1 million jobs – another reason that adding homes to this community makes so much sense.

Consider also that home builders aren't at risk of blocking ocean views in Kearny Mesa, and they're not riling established single-family neighborhoods when they propose apartment and condominium communities. Existing homes in Kearny Mesa are mostly in multifamily complexes.

Historically, Kearny Mesa has mostly served as a commercial and industrial area. Recently, though, its dining and entertainment district, now dubbed the Convoy Pan Asian Cultural and Business Innovation District, has become a favorite destination with something for everyone.

The explosion of hip restaurants, bars and breweries has already created a community character for Kearny Mesa, as well as a wide array of amenities to support the residents who will move into the area.

The Convoy District Partnership, a micro business improvement district (BID), has played a big role in supporting this growth. Similar to BIDs that have helped Little Italy and North Park rise and thrive, the Convoy District Partnership helps organize community events and public art projects, advocates for the collective interests of the area's business owners and helps keep the area clean and safe.

Strong BID organizations and emerging entertainment districts have been a secret-sauce combination for many areas that subsequently boomed with residential development, including San Diego's aforementioned Little Italy and North Park neighborhoods.

"The new community plan update definitely has the development community interested in transforming Kearny Mesa," said Jason Paguio, president and CEO of the Asian Business Association of San Diego, which houses the Convoy District Partnership. "Already, we know of three significant Kearny Mesa property parcels zoned for residential or mixed-



use development that have recently traded or are now on the market.”

If a developer’s mantra is location, location, location, it doesn’t get any more central or accessible than Kearny Mesa. Located in the bullseye of San Diego, the community has onramps to Interstates 805 and 15, as well as State Routes 163 and 52.

In addition to its Montgomery-Gibbs Executive Airport, Kearny Mesa’s future will also include trolley access with the planned purple line extension. While the trolley extension is decades away, planners envision SMART corridors, transit priority measures, mobility hubs and community circulators being available sooner.

Historically underserved with parks, the community plan also calls for “park and recreation facilities linked to employment areas and urban villages by transit, bicycle facilities and pedestrian facilities” in Kearny Mesa. It also calls for “attractive, interconnected streets, and pedestrian pathways that prioritize pedestrian and bicycle access.”

Kearny Mesa isn’t without its recreational activities currently. In addition to being Thrillist’s second-best neighborhood for eating and drinking, visitors and residents also enjoy karaoke bars, arcades and even axe throwing. Under a recently approved City of San Diego plan to upgrade Kearny Mesa’s executive airport to a world-class aviation center, people will have access to a small aviation museum in the future.

Kearny Mesa has all the components necessary to become one of San Diego’s biggest revitalization success stories. While its culturally diverse bars and restaurants already have lines out the door, expect to see people lining up for the opportunity to live there soon.



Conceptual mid-block paseo design along the Convoy Corridor incorporating pedestrian-oriented design features, active frontages and serving as a cultural gathering place for the community.



Taiko drummers Asayake Taiko entertain the crowd at the unveiling of the Cross Street Chicken & Beer mural in the Convoy District. (Photo by Alexander Nguyen)



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# **SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S** **2021 Men** **of Influence**



## **RONSON SHAMOUN**

Ronson Shamoun is the founder and CEO of RJS Law, San Diego's leading tax law firm. His practice involves federal and state taxation, with an emphasis on criminal tax defense, tax controversy, international tax and estate planning. In 2026, he co-founded the annual USD School of Law RJS Law Tax Controversy Institute, which brings together the entire tax community to discuss the latest changes in the law. He is a native San Diegan, a three-time graduate of the University of San Diego, receiving a B.A. in accountancy, his Juris Doctor and his Master of Law in taxation. He has supported many charitable organizations such as Girl Scouts, Susan G. Komen, United Way San Diego, American Diabetes Association, Rady's Children Hospital Foundation, St. Theresa Academy, St. Perter Chaldean Catholic Cathedral. He has been recognized as one of USD School of Law's Distinguished Alumni. He is also an adjunct professor at the USD School of Law, and the USD School of Business.



## **JOHN GOMEZ**

John Gomez, the founder of Gomez Trial Attorneys, is one of the nation's leading trial lawyers. Among his significant trial results are a \$106 million wrongful death jury verdict arising out of San Diego's infamous "American Beauty Murder," a \$16.5 million verdict against El Pollo Loco for a slip and fall, a \$10 million jury verdict against Pizza Hut for the conduct of one of its delivery drivers, an \$8.5 million verdict against DuPuy and Johnson & Johnson for a defective hip implant and a \$6.5 million verdict against Omni Hotels for a coffee burn. He also represented the surviving members of CHP Officer Mark Saylor in their wrongful death case against Toyota, and the parents of San Diego legend Junior Seau in their wrongful death case against the NFL. He is a graduate of the University of San Diego where he was an All-American football player, and the Yale University Law School.



**RICK DAHLSEID**

Rick Dahlseid is a consulting CFO at PBO Advisory Group. With over 20 years of experience, his personal mission is to leverage his talents and experience to serve nonprofit organizations that help people flourish. A CPA with a master’s in taxation, he is a financial expert by trade. His professional background includes serving in financial leadership role at national companies in a variety of industries including agriculture, manufacturing, health care, philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. His passion lies in advising leadership teams and boards of directors for high-functioning nonprofits on how to achieve greater sustainability and impact. His servant leadership perspective and warm personality give him an advantage in perfecting corporate vision and ensuring organizations efficiencies. In his unique role at PBO Advisory, he is currently serving many nonprofits including La Jolla Music Society, Regional Task Force on the Homeless, Nature and Culture International, Solutions for Change, Bayview Church and the Maritime Museum.

**NEIL SENTURIA**

Neil Senturia is the CEO of Blackbird Ventures that invests in and incubates early stage technology companies. He is the classic serial entrepreneur. He has had three careers from writing sitcoms in Hollywood to real estate



development and finally technology. Senturia has taught entrepreneurship at San Diego State’s MBA Program, UCSD, and the Donovan State Prison. He has won numerous journalism awards for his weekly business and entrepreneurship column in the San Diego Union Tribune. He is the author of three books about lessons learned from his entrepreneurial journey, “I’m There for You Baby, the Entrepreneur’s Guide to the Galaxy,” Volumes 1, 2, and 3. He is married to Barbara Bry, and their blended family includes four adult children, and seven grandchildren

Congratulations to our Consulting CFO **Rick Dahlseid** on being selected among San Diego’s **Men of Influence**.

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## **MATTHEW GEAMAN**

Matthew Geaman is a principal at JWDA Architects. He has developed a reputation as a top-notch architect and respected leader in the profession. His passion, expertise and commitment to design and client relations is first class. The firm has entrusted him with complete oversight of the design and construction of many of their most successful projects. He was the architect of record on the award-winning Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center in La Jolla. Currently, he is the firm's project executive for a 389-unit, 40-story, high rise residential tower that is under construction at Eighth Avenue and Broadway. He is concurrently managing the JWDA team's efforts on a 400-unit, affordable housing project in National City and a 422-unit 37-story high rise residential tower in downtown San Diego in Little Italy. He has been the recipient of numerous awards including 2016 AIA San Diego Young Architect of the Year and this magazine's SD METRO 40 Under 40 award. He is a licensed architect in both California and Illinois, LEED Accredited Professional, and National Council of Architectural Registration Boards Certification. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois .

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## **AARON J. BYZAK**

Since 2018, Aaron Byzak has served as the chief external affairs officer for Tri-City Medical Center In Oceanside where he is responsible for marketing, communications, government affairs, community engagement , and special events on behalf of the 386-bed general acute care medical center and a health care district serving more than 400,000 residents of Carlsbad, Oceanside and Vista. He is also the founder of Hazel's Army, a community advocacy and education group that in 2014 helped pass the most comprehensive assisted living reform agenda in California's history. In 2019, Hazel's Army expanded its mission to include support for other vulnerable populations, notably those suffering from mental illness. He also serves on a wide array of nonprofit boards and committees focused on business, health care, workforce development, education and public safety issues. He serves in leadership positions for the North Coastal Prevention Coalition, San Diego North Economic Development Council, Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce and the Palomar College Foundation. He holds an undergraduate degree from Chapman University and an MBA from UC Irvine.

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## **LEONID "LONNY" ZILBERMAN**

Leonid Zilberman is a partner in WilsonTurnerKosmo's Employment Law Practice Group who works closely with employers to achieve practical, cost-efficient strategies to their workplace problems and disputes. Alternative dispute resolution is often the answer, though he also has an active litigation practice, representing employers across industry sectors in all sorts of single-plaintiff and class action claims. He practices regularly in federal and state courts, in private mediation and arbitration proceedings , and before state administrative agencies. Recently, he has started leveraging his mediation skills to serve as a neutral mediator for various community agencies. He is a volunteer as a pro bono mediator for the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing. During the pandemic he volunteered with Resolve Law San Diego, a brainchild of local bar associations to provide free mediation and referee services to civil litigants. He received his B.A. in political science and international relations from UC Santa Barbara and his J.D. from Santa Clara University where he was in the Order of the Barristers.

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## AN AGENT FOR CHANGE

### Local San Diego Businessman Launches Travel Company in Heat of Pandemic



By Marlise Kast-Myers

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The past 18 months have deprived us of memories, experiences, and connections by turning hugs into waves, smiles into masks, and community into a distant six feet apart. This unparalleled season rocked the travel industry by grounding major airline carriers, by bankrupting car rental agencies, and by turning vacation destinations into ghost towns. In their wake were travel agents — refunding reservations, watching the trends, closing their businesses, and assuring clients that someday, sometime, life would go back to normal.

In the midst of the fear, risk, and uncertainty, a local San Diego businessman decided to launch his own agency, Travel Concierge by Jeff Lavender. His vision was to welcome back the masses to all the things they had put on hold; be it the embrace of a grandchild, a glass of wine with friends, or a long-awaited vacation with family. This precious gift of exploring new worlds was at his fingertips, and he wanted to help others unwrap their next adventure the moment borders reopened.

So, in September of 2020, Jeff assembled a team of five travel experts. Though all five shared his passion, each one brought different strengths to the table. On his roster were a seasoned marketing and business executive, a project-manager maven, a nomadic graphic designer, a well-recognized published travel writer, and a reservations and operations specialist. Together this team of resolute curators surrounded Jeff in this dream to lift people out of the uncertainty and into the extraordinary.

In just a few months, Travel Concierge launched a company, built a brand, designed a website, developed co-branded partnerships, gained loyal clients, hosted dozens of virtual and live travel events, and unveiled, among a range of travel experiences, its 2022 Travel Collection. A lineup of 12 extraordinary-themed trips, the Travel Collection is built on experiences that were missed during the lockdown. Curated specifically for each month, the team highlighted handpicked journeys including exploration, relaxation, romance, luxury, gastronomy, shopping, and culture. The result was mind blowing.



Jeff booked over \$1.5 million in travel under his own brand, and chose Cruise Planners as his host agency. With their systems and support, his business grew. He was frequently recognized as a top-sales producer, praised for his “encore career” by Cruise Planners. Travel partners like Silversea, AMAWaterways, Classic Journeys, and American Airlines provided extraordinary opportunities to collaborate. And this was just the beginning.

With hope on the horizon, those challenges of the past have many travelers now dreaming about the words, “Welcome Aboard.” Jeff knew that travel was on the brink of a major comeback.

With over 30 years of travel experience, he had never been so optimistic about the direction of the industry. Health protocols, coupled with an 18-month travel hiatus, were catapulting the world into a travel resurgence. He wanted Travel Concierge to be at the forefront of that comeback, by offering a new kind of travel that tapped into people’s desire to have more space, more luxury, more privacy, and more personalized experiences. He recognized that tourists were willing to travel farther and longer for an extended offseason trip, versus a quick getaway to a familiar destination. Jeff noticed that post-pandemic travelers regarded the unknown differently. It no longer triggered fear, but curiosity and intrigue for global awareness.

Jeff’s expertise quenched the pent-up thirst for outdoor travel, smaller cruise excursions, and active vacations to remote locations in the countryside or along the coast. In an era of global change, he knew there was never a better time for people to rely on a travel advisor like Travel Concierge by Jeff Lavender. He also knew that demand and vision without experience and execution would never lead to success.

What set Jeff apart from the travel advisory pack was hands-on action. His decades of travel experience began when, at the age of 12, he booked his Boy Scout Troop on a one-day adventure to the zoo. That passion never dwindled.

Fast forward to Jeff’s award-winning pedigree that encompasses a global career. His saga has taken him to senior and C-level positions at renowned travel companies including Travelocity, Amadeus, Sabre, Galileo France, Travel Impressions, Avoya Travel, and Key Travel. And now today, at Travel Concierge by Jeff Lavender, he has obtained the culmination of his success under one umbrella.

At Travel Concierge, thousands of clients can experience the world in a way that is enriching, fulfilling, and unparalleled. His company leverages years of experience, in-depth knowledge, and industry partnerships to develop a personalized approach to travel planning.

At Travel Concierge, clients start out as strangers and end up as friends who remain loyal because of the close connection, dedicated service, and curated experiences. Within this competitive industry, Jeff delivers a network of trade partners that make things happen; travel rewards and elevated experiences; flexibility to protect travel investment; up-to-date insight on travel requirements; curated trip planning that is customizable; and communication with a live person who guides from consultation to commitment. At Travel Concierge, clients will discover a behind-the-scenes team of travel curators; unique relationships with suppliers and clients; a genuine compassion to provide the best travel experience; an ability to problem solve, and above all, credibility, value, and perspective.

Jeff has also taken a unique view of client acquisition by partnering with wealth management firms, nonprofit organizations, affinity

groups, incentive partners, and a VIP invitation-only division that serves the affluent and privacy-seeking clientele.

Throughout the pandemic, Jeff reminded his team that “wise risk” would be rewarded. He knew that the lockdown was temporary and that travel was here to stay. For him, it was just a matter of time before the floodgates would open, and Travel Concierge would be there to capture the deluge. When that happened, it was the quality of each drop he focused on, making sure that every client had access to tailor-made adventures, elevated experiences, and customized travel to enjoy the trip of their dreams.

During the booking process, he discovered that picking up the phone was a critical success factor and one he could offer as a personalized service. Through face-to-face interaction, he built trust, listened carefully, mined opportunities, received referrals, and frequently turned consultations into intimate dinners with friends. For him, travel was not a transaction at the bank, but an investment in the soul.

Clients sent Jeff their one-, two-, and five-year travel plans, entrusting Travel Concierge with their long-term travel goals and million-dollar budgets. Others asked for guidance on the best ways to cruise at least 100 days a year. Under Jeff’s leadership, Travel Concierge has opened the world and the unique travel experiences available through outstanding suppliers.

This catapult into personalized travel guided people to a place of hope. With his guidance, they could awaken on the shores of pristine beaches and crystalline waters. Jeff helped travelers find their rhythm in culture-drenched cities during cooking classes, dance workshops, and starlit storytelling. He reintroduced a true “taste for travel” with wine tasting in Provence, elevated cocktails aboard a cruise, or wild salmon dinners in Alaska.

With great hope and anticipation, Travel Concierge is here to stay. At its core is a mission to not only become a leading travel company, but to become a significant seven-figure leisure business that impacts lives one destination at a time. The travel industry is on the cusp of a major travel resurgence, with 2022 and 2023 aiming to be two of the strongest years for travel sales.

The Travel Concierge team is committed to guiding seasoned travelers to unfamiliar destinations, to helping families start new traditions, and to curating personalized trips for elite travelers. No matter how near or far, each trip is about illuminating new worlds and fulfilling the desire to be immersed in enriched ways of life.

These past months have shown this fledgling business that most of all: Belief matters. Teamwork matters. Relationships matter. Tenacity matters. Hope matters. And Experience Matters . . . the mantra of Travel Concierge by Jeff Lavender.

“I’ve invested my life into this industry because I fundamentally believe that travel is the richest experience of our lives. I want to share that gift of travel by creating life-long journeys, by turning moments into memories, and by helping others discover the best version of themselves. Only travel has the power to do that . . . to cure complacency, connect cultures, renew energy, and revive souls. There’s no greater joy than seeing a life that has been impacted by a destination. If I can have my hand in that by turning the complex into something simple, then that’s enough for me.” — Jeff Lavender.

To learn more, visit [tc.jefflavender.com](http://tc.jefflavender.com).



# PASSION in BUSINESS:

*DNA Photo+Style*

By Molly Galliher



**D**ani Alger and Anna Clevenger are more than just business partners; they are best friends. Both women began taking photos of their children, a hobby that quickly turned into a passion, one they wanted to develop. Separately, each of these women ran their own photography businesses. After years, each knew they could do more. Both Dani and Anna wanted to expand their businesses but felt they couldn't do it alone. After a chance meeting, both came to the conclusion that they could build a great business together. Collaborating, Dani and Anna started DNA Photo+Style at the beginning of 2019. Utilizing their different styles, the women have successfully helped rebrand many San Diego-based businesses and continue to expand.

DNA Photo+Style is a labor of love. Both mothers, Dani and Anna have been able to create a successful business while simultaneously caring for their families by differentiating themselves. Through the past two years, the company has carved out its own place in the photography world as a source of branding for both businesses and individuals. Instead of focusing on weddings and events, DNA Photo+Style takes a different approach, working to build personalities for businesses and bring out the individuality in their clients.



**Q: Tell us about DNA Photo+Style. What made you both start this company?**

**Dani:** We were both photographers, with our own businesses. We got to know each other during the long hours on the sidelines of the soccer field watching our son's play. We naturally talked about photography and our goals of growing our businesses. We both wanted to get to the 'next level,' but felt intimidated working solo on the bigger jobs we were striving for. In October 2018 we started meeting up to learn, practice, and create our own unique style. We decided to officially partner and in January 2019 we launched dna photo+style!

**Anna:** We both had our own businesses, but each felt we had more potential. Initially, we discussed being each others'

"accountability partner". Through that process, we realized we made a great team. To this day, it is still a huge benefit to feel that you are responsible for another's success as well as your own. I know Dani is working hard for "us", and I want to do the same.

**Q: How difficult was it to start a business?**

**Dani:** We built major momentum in our first year of business, we were continuing to grow when COVID hit in March of 2020. Anna and I were doing so well and having a blast when it all came to a screeching halt, we didn't see each other for almost two months. By June we started doing outdoor practice sessions and slowly our business started coming back. Clients were reaching out to us again, and by August 2020 we were back at it!

## LOCAL BUSINESS

**Anna:** It's almost as if COVID gave people the push to put themselves out there again. It drove people to start fresh by rebranding themselves and their business.

**Dani:** People had to rethink how they were doing business. When almost all business interaction went virtual during quarantine, an up-to-date and sharp online presence became even more important.

### **Q: What is a typical day at work like?**

**Dani:** Everyday is different, which keeps it fun and interesting. We have a studio in Encinitas, but most of our shoots are on location- between Orange County and San Diego. Our actual shooting days are only part of the job, the other parts are: editing, pre and post shoot consultations and marketing. Mondays are always 'office day' at our own spaces (but we are constantly on the phone with each other!). Whether shooting in the studio or on-location, we always block time for the two of us to plan and organize the shoot (ok, sometimes we are talking about some crazy story usually involving our teenagers!!). When our clients arrive our head is already in the game, we're set up, music is playing, and it's ON!

### **Q: What is the best part about your job?**

**Anna:** I don't think I can choose just one part. I love the excitement of meeting new people and learning about their businesses. I love that my job allows me to be creative, and has a constant push for me to learn. Also, it doesn't get much better than having my kids taking an interest in what I do, and telling me they are proud of me!

**Dani:** There are so many things we love about our business and working together. How cool is it that we created a business from our passion? It's also extra fun when you get to work with your best friend. Anna and I are in the same stage of life, we're the same age, we've been with our husbands for over 25 years, we are both Mom's of lots of teenagers, and funny enough we each have a set of boy/girl twins! We definitely pick up each others slack when the craziness of life happens- and it does! Best of all, we're having fun. We love what we're doing and we love the people we get to work with. Anna and I are both high energy personalities and our clients have a blast right along with us!

**Anna:** Having a partner allows me to relax in situations where I previously would have had anxiety when working alone. It's beyond helpful to bounce ideas off one another! Together we double the creativity, perspectives, and images for our clients.

### **Q: What got you both interested in photography in the first place?**

**Anna:** I was living in Brooklyn, NY and I was knee deep in babies. To make the days at the park as interesting for me as it was for the kids I would take pictures of them. I enjoyed it so much that I started night school at Photo Manhattan. Learning

about photography at that time was essential in keeping my own identity in addition to being a mom.

**Dani:** I was raised with Entrepreneurs and also married one. I had my own coffee business before kids and knew I wanted to have some kind of venture of my own after. Like Anna, I enjoyed photographing my own kids, it gave me something to do that was fun and creative. Other people started asking me to photograph their families, and my business evolved from there.

### **Q: Do you have any advice for people looking to start a creativity-based business?**



**Anna:** There's no such thing as ready. If you keep waiting to be "ready" you may never start. You don't need to be an expert, and you'll always be learning and growing. Starting is the key to doing what you want.

**Dani:** I totally agree with Anna, most of the learning is in the doing. It's never going to be perfect and most of the things you need to know you cannot read or have someone tell you, you must jump in and fumble around a bit to find out what works! I also suggest not putting so much pressure on your passion by expecting to make money from it right away. Start by making it a side-hustle, it takes time- just keep going!



**Q: When a client comes to you, what can they expect from the experience?**

**Anna:** By the time a client comes to us, they really know what to expect. We make sure they are very clear on the type of images they will be getting. We walk them through the whole process from what they should wear to how they will be posed. The only thing that may come as a surprise is how much fun they will have!

**Dani:** The feedback we hear most from our clients is, "That was so much fun!" Most people do not look forward to 'Picture Day,' they feel nervous and awkward. Being in front of a camera is vulnerable and unnatural for most. We direct and guide our clients so they can get out of their own head, relax and let us take them through our fun process.

**Q: Has there been a particular project that has stood out to you?**

**Anna:** A lot of different jobs flash through my head from that question. Recently, we photographed 4 high school senior girls that are best friends. We did some individual shots of each of them & then captured their chemistry together. This was amazing for me to watch how much these girls mean to one another and how much they loved the process. We went to the studio, the beach, a trail, and the middle of a road! Their excitement increased mine!

**Dani:** Our dna Branding Sessions are definitely my favorite- they are the most creative. We really get to know our clients in the pre-shoot process. By asking the right questions we are able to make a specific plan for their photo session, making sure we curate and capture the right images for all the different areas of their life.

**Q: Where do you get your inspiration from?**

**Dani:** Thank goodness for Pinterest, endless inspiration! Also, there are a ton of great photographers (even locally!) who are collaborative and great sources of inspiration for us.

**Anna:** Through our experience, photography is such a kind industry. There's space for everyone and we all help each other.

**Q: What is your favorite part about working in the San Diego community?**

**Anna:** I feel so lucky that we live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. We have access to the beach and the mountains in the same day if we want! From my perspective the people here are focused on living life as their true selves. A flip flop lifestyle seems to make for a lot of happy people!

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