

Women in new Caltech class set record

Among incoming undergraduates, they will be majority at the school for first time.

By TERESA WATANABE

The auditorium was packed with hundreds of high school girls from across the nation fangirling a YouTube idol they dream to emulate.

There before them stood Katie Bouman, an associate professor of computing and mathematical sciences, electrical engineering and astronomy at Caltech in Pasadena, showing off images of a dark hole ringed by a fire-colored halo. In 2022, Bouman co-led a team of more than 300 researchers from 80 institutions to capture the world's first image of the supermassive black hole at the center of the Milky Way galaxy.

Bouman's lecture, part of the Caltech Women in STEM program, had a deeper motive: It showcased a leading woman scientist to help girls envision themselves attending one of the world's preeminent institutions of science and engineering — fields still dominated by men. And the efforts in this hard-fought, strategic campaign are paying off.

In a milestone breakthrough, more than half of Caltech's incoming undergraduate class in the fall will be women for the first time in its 133-year history. The class of 113 women and 109 men comes 50 years after Caltech graduated its first class of undergraduate women, who were admitted in 1970.

"What this means for young women is that we are a place that can be representative of them and their experiences ... where they can grow and thrive and excel and become really impressive, extraordinary scientists and engineers and go on to make a difference in this really research-heavy profession," said Ashley Pallie, dean of admissions.

Gloria L. Blackwell, chief executive of the American Assn. of University Women, lauded Caltech's achievement as crucial progress in reducing the substantial gap of women in science, technology, engineering and [See Caltech, A8]



Photographs by BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE David O. Carter takes a tour on Aug. 21 of the VA's West L.A. campus, where school sports facilities, a city park and oil wells sit on land that was set aside for veterans more than a century ago.

The land was for veterans. Should occupants get the boot?

Years of litigation now comes down to a brutal choice: To make room for shelter and housing to get thousands of veterans off the streets, should a judge tear up the lease that allows UCLA to operate its Jackie Robinson baseball stadium on VA land? And the sports complex of an exclusive private school in Brentwood? Or a Los Angeles city park with two baseball fields and a dog-free area?

As the plaintiffs' case neared its conclusion in the sprawling lawsuit against the Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. District Judge David O. Carter wrestled out loud over what to do about leases the federal government signed for land on the VA's West L.A. campus that was bequeathed more than a century ago for the use of veterans.

A judge faces 'a tough decision' in a lawsuit over a VA campus leased to UCLA, a private school and others

By Doug Smith



CARTER led lawyers and others on a nearly 10-mile trek, starting at Brentwood School's athletic facility.

"I'm going to make a tough decision in a while, and you're going to help me," Carter told one witness, a real estate expert for the plaintiffs.

To see exactly what his ultimate ruling could mean, the judge, an 80-year-old ex-Marine, led a gaggle of lawyers, law clerks and news media last week on a nearly 10-mile march exploring almost every corner of the 388-acre campus.

Starting an hour before daylight Aug. 21 on Brentwood School's gorgeously maintained athletic facility — symbolically named the Veterans Center for Recreation and Education — the group traipsed around a football field, a workout tent, covered basketball courts, a baseball field, six tennis courts and a 10-lane pool.

[See Veterans, A8]

Jail at risk of severe quake damage

A 2006 report found seismic issues at L.A. facility, but county has no plans to fix them.

By KERI BLAKINGER AND RONG-GONG LIN II

The decaying eyesore that is Men's Central Jail has sparked an impressively broad array of health and safety concerns in recent years. There were the fires,

the rats, the drugs, the mold and the persistent violence, both from staff and inmates.

But a newly resurfaced engineering study reveals another problem: Major structural deficiencies could turn the aging building into a deathtrap in the event of an earthquake.

Completed in 2006, the 72-page county-commissioned study found that the jail suffers from weak walls, inadequate reinforcements and concrete so brittle that it could crack or shatter

under pressure.

"These kinds of vulnerabilities would definitely lead to the potential for a fairly catastrophic failure," said engineer Ryan Wilkerson of Los Angeles-based Nabih Youssef Associates Structural Engineers. After reviewing the report, Wilkerson told The Times that a key concern would be a partial collapse of the jail that could "certainly" kill people. Without more advanced study, a total collapse can't be ruled out as a possibility,

he said.

Like much of downtown, the jail sits on top of the Puente Hills thrust fault system, which experts say is capable of producing a powerful magnitude 7.5 earthquake and is one of the region's most dangerous fault systems. It is the same system that rattled the region this month when a magnitude 4.4 quake hit hard enough to shake the inside of the jail.

Fixing the problem, the [See Jail, A9]

GIRARDI FOUND GUILTY OF WIRE FRAUD

Attorney is convicted of leading a scheme in which he embezzled tens of millions.

By BRITNY MEJIA

A federal court jury in Los Angeles found Tom Girardi, once a legal titan and now a disgraced former attorney, guilty Tuesday of wire fraud for leading a years-long scheme in which he embezzled tens of millions of dollars.

The verdict concluded a 13-day trial in which prosecutors elicited emotional testimony from former clients, including a burn victim and a widow whose husband died in a boating accident, employees of the now-closed law firm Girardi Keese and an outside attorney who struggled to get a woman the settlement money she'd been granted.

As clients went unpaid, prosecutors told the jury, Girardi spent money on private jets, country clubs and the entertainment career of his now-estranged wife, Erika Girardi, a star of "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills."

Girardi, 85, had been on trial on four counts of wire fraud; he was found guilty on all four.

The jury deliberated for roughly four hours before delivering a verdict. Girardi, in the same gray blazer he'd worn throughout the trial, swiveled back and forth in his chair as he waited to hear his fate.

He turned to watch Judge Josephine Staton as she read the verdict, face impassive. As she recited the final guilty verdict, he rubbed his forehead. He could be sentenced to up to 80 years in prison.

After the proceedings ended, Girardi was asked by a reporter if he wanted to comment. He chuckled and said, "No. No."

Kathleen Ruigomez, the mother of a teenager who had been injured in an explosion, sat in the front row of [See Girardi, A9]

Trump indicted again for Jan. 6

Special counsel keeps criminal charges but narrows allegations against the former president. **NATION, A5**

Three finalists for LAPD chief

Without publicly identifying them, the Police Commission forwards the names to Mayor Bass. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

A heightened athletic sense

Visually impaired parathletes rely on sound and touch to compete safely at a high level. **SPORTS, B10**

Weather

Mostly sunny. L.A. Basin: 85/63. **B6**

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As travel fuels surge in COVID, eyes on Labor Day

The rate of positive tests is rising in California, one of 26 states where the virus is growing or likely doing so.

By RONG-GONG LIN II AND SEEMA MEHTA

CHICAGO — Summer travel is helping fuel a COVID surge across California and other parts of the country.

There are growing reports of Democratic National Convention attendees getting COVID-19. At least a dozen people from California — delegates, political strategists and news reporters — have said they tested positive after the DNC ended last week in Chicago.

Democratic strategist Tracy Austin, who caught COVID while at-

tending the convention, told The Times: "It was an amazing time, but the DNCC last week stood for the Democratic National COVID Convention."

The next big test for the COVID spike is just around the corner.

Healthcare workers and public health officials will be closely watching to see whether the back-to-school season and the Labor Day holiday weekend worsen the surge.

Last week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said some data suggest a slowing of new coronavirus infections in parts of the country. But a dip in the summer surge won't be obvious until there are several weeks of sustained declines — which hasn't happened yet.

Packed airports and large indoor events have long been shown to increase the spread of the coronavirus, and this summer has broken travel [See COVID, A11]



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

THIS SUMMER has seen record numbers traveling by plane, which with large indoor events increases the chances of infection.



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