



AT ODESA'S Transfiguration Cathedral, struck in July, services in a basement space are lighted by candles when the electricity goes out.

On a cool spring morning, as water-washed light bathed pastel palaces in the old imperial city of Odesa, the thunder of yet another Russian missile strike filled the air.

That March 6 blast came within a few hundred yards of a convoy carrying Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, who was touring the country's principal shipyard with the visiting Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

It was a close call, but Ukrainian officials said that in all likelihood, the two leaders were not the target. Like so many other strikes during what Ukrainians call the "big war" — ignited by Russia's all-out invasion in February 2022 — the attack was aimed at Odesa's port, a strategic prize of centuries' standing.

The Black Sea harbor and its docklands — Ukraine's commercial lifeline and a prime military

# Palaces are in peril, yet black humor thrives

Ukraine's port of Odesa, a key Russian target, strives to keep its rich cultural heritage intact

By Laura King  
REPORTING FROM ODESA, UKRAINE

asset — have been the object of intensifying Russian drone and missile attacks in recent weeks, as Ukraine's dwindling air defenses leave critical infrastructure vulnerable.

In Odesa, the deadly campaign of airstrikes has brought sharply renewed peril to nearly a million inhabitants of one of Ukraine's most eclectic and cosmopolitan cities, known for, in equal measures, mordancy and joie de vivre. And it poses a heightened threat to a world-renowned cultural treasure: the jewel-box grid of streets making up Odesa's UNESCO-designated historic center, which abuts the port.

After a string of attacks on Odesa and its environs, those who watch over the city's landmark structures are braced for the worst. On many ornate facades in the city center, full

# County fires a top doctor over 'offensive' acts

Surgeon regularly gawked at patients' genitalia, staffers at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center say.

By Rebecca Ellis

A premier L.A. County teaching hospital has fired one of its highest-ranking doctors after a two-year investigation that found he regularly gawked at the genitalia of anesthetized patients and never disclosed that he was being paid by a medical device company whose products he used on patients.

Staff members at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, a public hospital run by the county, told investigators that Dr. Louis Kwong sometimes looked under the surgical covers of Black males who were under anesthesia and discussed the "genitals of the day," according to his discharge notice, which was obtained by The Times.

Kwong also discussed his favorite sex positions and his preference for "autoerotic asphyxiation," his colleagues told investigators.

Additionally, investigators found that Kwong, an

orthopedic surgeon, received more than \$700,000 from the medical device company Zimmer Biomet, which makes joint replacements, without reporting the conflict of interest to the county. He flew twice on the company's private plane to its Indiana headquarters with medical residents from the hospital, according to the Feb. 27 notice informing him of his firing.

The discharge notice makes no mention of the gun that Kwong, a volunteer sheriff's deputy, had allegedly carried in the operating room and other parts of the hospital, according to a lawsuit filed by colleagues in October. The notice does say that he violated county policy by bringing a personal knife into the operating room on at least one occasion.

"Your inappropriate, disparaging comments and actions were offensive, and created an uncomfortable, hostile, and demoralizing work environment for others," Griselda Gutierrez, the hospital's chief medical officer, wrote in the notice.

Much of the misconduct described in the notice had been reported years ago to the county, raising questions about the inaction of



DIANA GOETSCH spent last summer visiting libraries in red states including Arkansas, North Carolina and Iowa giving free talks on book bans.

COLUMN ONE

# Surprises in a trans author's red-state library tour

Supporting freedom to read was freeing to her

By Diana Goetsch

The small brick plaza in front of the Pella, Iowa, public library was teeming with people. A gray-haired woman in a T-shirt stood stoically beside a large banner bearing a Bible quote with chapter and verse notation. There were a handful of other signs in the crowd. I can't quote any of them because I kept my head down as I entered the plaza.

Inside the library, there were event posters with my face on them. I didn't know if I'd be recognized in the crowd —

or clocked as transgender. It occurred to me that in Iowa you don't need a permit to carry a gun — open or concealed. A current of people was funneling into the library, and I joined them. I sensed, eerily, that some who were entering alongside me were protesters. I didn't turn to look.

The event room was filling up fast, despite the fact that library director Mara Strickler held off on posting to social media about my visit until three

# Push to regulate herbal remedy grows

Amid concern over kratom's medicinal use, California seeks oversight of chemical content and sales.

By Emily Albert Reyes

It comes in greenish powders, capsules and extracts, and is readily found in smoke shops and online.

Some say they use it for an energy boost or as a mood lifter. Others seek relief from pain. It can act both as a stimulant and as a sedative. Doctors have warned that in some cases, it has spurred seizures or vomiting, and the Drug Enforcement Administration categorizes it among its "drugs of concern."

Yet "kratom is not regulated at all in California," said Assemblymember Matt Haney (D-San Francisco). Right now, there are "not even labeling requirements or age restrictions."

Kratom products are derived from the leaves of the *Mitragyna speciosa* tree in Southeast Asia, where the plant has long been chewed and brewed in teas. Its complex effects have been tied to mitragynine and other alkaloids — chemical compounds containing nitrogen — that act on systems in the brain and body.

The Food and Drug Administration has warned against using kratom for medical treatment, stressing that it has not approved any medications containing kratom and that it cannot be legally marketed in the U.S. as a dietary supplement.

Yet roughly 2 million people in the U.S. use kratom, according to estimates from a federal survey, and some researchers and advocates say usage is actually much higher. Among those who have turned to the herbal substance is Dijon Evans, a 61-year-old living in Sacramento, who has a medical condition that racks her with pain.

"My body feels like I'm being electrocuted from the inside out. I get these sharp electrical jolts that shoot

## 2 states lose case over trans care

Supreme Court appeal is likely after federal ruling against West Virginia and North Carolina. **NATION, A5**

## Call to boycott commencement

Two authors cancel talks at satellite USC events over treatment of on-campus protests. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

## TV, film studio CEO is ousted

Paramount Global's Bob Bakish is let go amid a takeover bid by Skydance Media. **BUSINESS, A8**

**Weather**  
Plenty of sunshine. L.A. Basin: 77/57. **B6**

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