

BRIBED COUNCIL MEMBERS • SHUTTING DOWN ALL AMERICAN ASPHALT • WOODBRIDGE HIGH DECATHLON

IRVINE

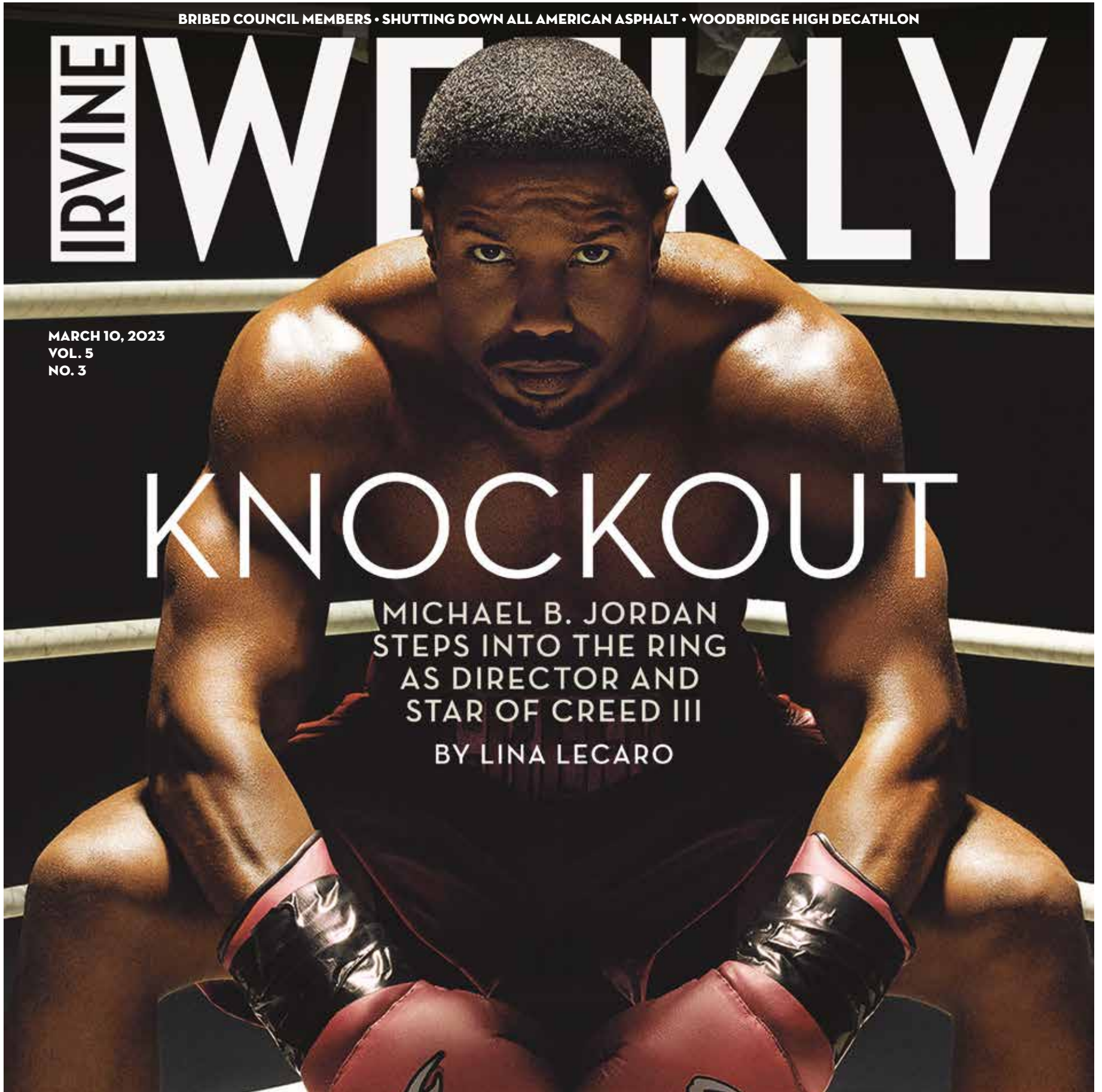
WEEKLY

MARCH 10, 2023
VOL. 5
NO. 3

KNOCKOUT

MICHAEL B. JORDAN
STEPS INTO THE RING
AS DIRECTOR AND
STAR OF CREED III

BY LINA LECARO



MARCH 10, 2023 VOL. 5 • NO. 3

CONTENTS

NEWS: 2

Names of Council Members allegedly bribed still not released.
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

NEWS: 3

Irvine will "shut down" All American Asphalt.
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

ENTERTAINMENT: 4

Michael B. Jordan directs and stars in *CREED III*.
BY LINA LECARO

FOOD: 7

Sootha Coffee, a local favorite, forced to close.
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

EDUCATION: 8

Woodbridge High School decathlon team seeks state title.
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

EMPLOYMENT

CONST. COST ESTIMATORS: Create, analyze, & evaluate cost estimates at all construction project phases utilizing estimating processes & software. Requires Master's degree in Civil Engineering, Construction Management, or closely related field. Worksite: Irvine, CA & unanticipated locations throughout the U.S. Travel to worksites may be required. Salary \$80,000 per year. Mail resumes to: Attn: Job Ref (MVT523), OCM Inc., 8851 Research Dr., Irvine, CA 92618.

Sr. Principal IC Design Engineer - Halo Microelectronics International Corporation (Irvine, CA) - Research & dvlp high power efficiency DC-DC converters & battery charger ICs; Model & architect charger IC products, design & verify the transistor-level circuit implementations, use AMS for chip top-level verifications; optimize IC chip-top layout floorplan & pin map, guide the circuit layout, & optimize power device layout design; evaluate charger IC reliability & lifetime, evaluate charger IC silicon performance; guide test plan development for mass production; analyze silicon characterization data; present the product design to customers; participate Patent apps for innovative ideas on the design of power converters & battery charger ICs. Reqs: Ph.D. in Computer Engineering/ Electronics engineering w/ 3 yrs of IC design exp. Special skills: Cadence Virtuoso, Cadence PVS/QRC, Simens EDA Calibre, Siemens EDA PADS, Silicon Frontline R3D or Magwel PTM, Cadence SKILL programming. Mail resume to 695 Technology Pkwy suite 200 Campbell, CA 95008

Elementary School Teacher (Mandarin Chinese). Instruct Chinese/other classes in a private school; prep syllabus & class materials, hold parent conf. & other duties. Req. Bachelor's in Linguistics or Education, fluency in Chinese, & 24 months exp. \$72,550/yr. Mail resume to Pacific Academy, HR, 4947 Alton Pkwy, Irvine, CA 92604

TO ADVERTISE CONTACT US AT
PUBLISHER@IRVINEWEEKLY.COM

IRVINEWEEKLY.COM

NO NAMES OR INVESTIGATION IN IRVINE FBI PROBE FALLOUT

THE NAMES OF TWO FORMER IRVINE CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS, ALLEGEDLY BRIBED BY MELAHAT REFIEI IN 2018 HAVE NOT BEEN RELEASED.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Questions still remain regarding the identities of two former 2018 Irvine City Council Members involved in the federal investigation surrounding Melahat Rafiei, a former political consultant for Irvine Council Members.

In a plea agreement signed with the FBI, Rafiei pleaded guilty to wire fraud. The FBI investigation confirmed that the funds – more than \$200,000 – were to be sent to two Irvine Council Members that have yet to be identified.

Irvine Weekly attempted to reach all five of the previously elected 2018 City Council officials in an effort to identify the unnamed members listed in the recent FBI plea agreement, signed by Rafiei last month.

Former Irvine Mayor Christina Shea spoke willingly with *Irvine Weekly*, adding that she had been contacted by the FBI regarding the matter, but said the agency only had questions, not answers nor explanations.

The allegations involving Rafiei stem from her attempt to bribe City Council Members into passing retail cannabis regulations in Irvine. In 2023, Irvine is still a city without a cannabis dispensary.

Shea said she does not support retail cannabis locations in Irvine, however, did vote in favor of a testing facility while on the Council.

"I was very clear that I was not a supporter of cannabis. I didn't smoke it or use it, and I didn't believe in retail cannabis,"

Shea said during a phone call with *Irvine Weekly*. "I've never met Melahat Rafiei. I know who she is, but I've never met her personally – she's never approached me, never called me."

Attempts to reach former councilwoman Melissa Fox via text and by phone went unanswered.

A list of questions sent to Supervisor Don Wagner's assistant regarding his involvement with Melahat Refiei and questions regarding his cooperation with the federal investigation were not returned.

Jeff Lalloway is listed as an active attorney on the State Bar Association's website. However, the phone number and website listed for his O.C. Divorce law firm is no longer active.

Lynn Schott could not be reached regarding comment on the federal investigation.

In 2016, Schott ran for Congress in California District 46, falling short of winner Lou Correa. In documents filed with the Federal Elections Commission, Schott's campaign brought in a total of \$96,584, according to the campaign tracking website *OpenSecrets.org*.

In a 3-2 vote on Tuesday, Jan. 24, the Irvine City Council opted to hold off on an internal investigation regarding Rafiei and her connections to Irvine City Hall. Rafiei, was also a consultant to Vice Mayor Tammy Kim.

While the Council ultimately voted to not pursue an investigation in the immediate future, it will wait for more information from the FBI.

IRVINE WILL “SHUT DOWN” ALL AMERICAN ASPHALT BEFORE YEAR’S END

THE CITY OF IRVINE HAS UNVEILED ITS MOST DETAILED EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE THE ASPHALT MANUFACTURING FACILITY IN ORCHARD HILLS. IN ADDITION TO THE FACILITY’S ACQUISITION, IRVINE WILL TRANSFORM THE REGION INTO HUNDREDS OF ACRES OF PRESERVED OPEN SPACE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The City of Irvine announced plans to acquire the All American Asphalt facility in North Irvine and is opting to cease its operations by the end of the year, according to Irvine City Manager Oliver Chi.

The news comes after years of frustration from Irvine residents who have voiced concern about the potentially toxic emissions associated with foul odor emanating from the facility.

During his presentation on Tuesday, Feb. 28, Chi unveiled the city’s most detailed plans to date to acquire and remove the asphalt manufacturing facility in Orchard Hills.

Chi explained that in addition to removal of the facility, a generous land donation from the Irvine Company will convert the area into hundreds of acres of open space. The project will be officially known as Gateway Preserve.

“What we’ve been able to do, to date, is enter a tentative agreement with AAA, to have the facility acquired by the city and shut down before the end of this calendar year – all of that will be done to advance a project that we’re calling Gateway Preserve,” he said.

Chi explained that the land donation from the Irvine Company will give the city the ability to generate funds to ac-

quire the asphalt facility.

“We’ve also been working with the Irvine Company on a land donation that will ultimately serve a couple purposes. First and foremost, the land donation will facilitate evaluation, that upon entitling that property for residential development will facilitate our ability to pay for the All American Asphalt site,” he said. “There’s additional property that we’ve negotiated with the Irvine Company that will allow us to create an overall preserve with public accessibility that will be more than 700 acres in size.”

In the months leading up to the announcement, Chi added that the Council formed the AAA Council Subcommittee, with Council Members Larry Agran and Mike Carroll as representatives in discussions, in an effort to expedite the acquisition process.

While Chi expressed optimism, he admitted the process was ongoing and complex, adding that both deals – the land donation from the Irvine Company, and the acquisition of the AAA facility – included “substantial risks.”

“I can say definitively today, thanks to the efforts of the Council subcommittee, and the City Council as a whole, we do have a pathway forward to shutting down the AAA plant and to create a

Gateway Preserve that all of us can be incredibly proud of.”

While the official price of the acquisition has not been released, Irvine City Council Member Larry Agran told Irvine Weekly that the figure will be north of \$100 million.

Agran, who is an environmental lawyer, said he worked with fellow Council Member Mike Carroll on the recently formed AAA City Council subcommittee to ensure this outcome. However, Agran added that he faced the inability to move items related to the removal of the facility due to the now-defunct Rule of Two, in the past.

“It was my position as early as 2019 that the only real answer to the incompatibility of the continuing operations at the asphalt plant and the quality of life that we aspire to here in Irvine – would be to see to it that the plant be shut down and removed from the site,” he said in a phone interview with *Irvine Weekly* on Wednesday, March 1. “As Carroll and I began to work together – it became clear to us that the other part of this deal would be to acquire land from the Irvine Company that would not only enhance our open space, but a portion of that land would be developable in a way that allowed for the city to sell off that

land, about 100 acres of the 500 acres we’re acquiring, and pay AAA.”

In recent months, the AAA facility has continued to be the source of odor violations in North Irvine. The facility was cited for odor violations twice in January and the South Coast Air Quality Management District has received more than 1,400 odor complaints for it since 2019.

Echoing Agran, Carroll expressed optimism regarding the progress.

“This is really one of those unbelievable, unthinkable things – when you’re at the beginning of it. It feels pretty darn good to be able to say that we’re on track – nothing’s closed until it’s closed – but we’re publicly talking about the likely permanent closure of All American Asphalt.”

Carroll added that despite public disapproval regarding the numerous closed session meetings surrounding this acquisition, the work beyond the dias seems to have paid off.

“The ability to do all this stuff was a series of closed sessions – a lot of people were rightfully upset,” he said. “Government can actually do good things, the proof is in the pudding. We have an amazing master plan – the five of us are basically here to protect and guard this master plan that was put together 50-something years ago – and we basically had an error on this plan, that’s the way I look at it.”

Once completed, the Gateway Preserve, will become an extension of the Jeffrey Open Space Trail, along with the North Irvine Open Space and will also include the addition of two new parks and a new residential village, according to a staff report.

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan said the city would continue to monitor the community’s concern regarding the facility and its impact on the quality of life in Irvine.

“As a city, we have and will continue to monitor, evaluate, and implement programs to improve residents’ quality of life and public health,” Khan said in a statement. “The purchase and revitalization of All American Asphalt is a major milestone in continuing this mission. This acquisition will not only address community concern, but it will also reaffirm Irvine’s commitment to being one of the best and safest cities in the world.”

ENTERTAINMENT

KNOCKOUT

MICHAEL B. JORDAN STEPS INTO THE RING AS DIRECTOR AND STAR OF CREED III.

BY LINA LECARO



If the *Rocky* franchise was the ultimate underdog tale that taught us about believing in yourself against all odds, then the *Creed* series attempts to take these ideas and add new nuances concerning social inequity and overcoming personal demons, which is sadly more relevant than ever. No matter where you come from or what your circumstances might have been growing up, with hard work and the support of others, you can do anything – from becoming the heavy-weight boxing champion of the world to directing a big Hollywood movie for the very first time.

With *Creed III*, Michael B. Jordan returns as Adonis Creed, the son of Rocky Balboa foe-turned-best friend Apollo Creed. With the help of the Italian Stallion in the first two *Creed* films, Adonis followed in his father's footsteps to become a sports legend in his own right, and his journey largely lived up to the classics it was inspired by. In the new film, the titular character retires a champion until he forges a comeback driven by his painful past.

Beyond fighting adversity as lead narrative, an additional parallel here is that with the third *Creed* film, Jordan himself is sort of following a path set by Sylvester Stallone, who wrote, starred in and directed himself in four of the six *Rocky* films. Jordan is known as both a serious actor and a heartthrob (he won *People* magazine's "Sexiest Man Alive" title in 2020), but in terms of behind the camerawork, directing seemed to come out of the blue. Apparently it wasn't, though. At *Creed III*'s press conference in West Hollywood last week, Jordan explained that the first *Creed* film's writer and director, Ryan Coogler, who also directed the actor in one of his early films, 2013's *Fruitvale Station* and in 2018's *Black Panther*, encouraged him to make this pivot

a long time ago.

"He definitely had a lot to do with it. You know, I think he first told me that I could direct...I was in awe of what he was doing, seeing a black man, my age, somebody I knew well, getting to command a set and show me what was possible," Jordan shared. "I think for me, him telling me, like, 'Mike, you can do this, too,' was kind of that first seed that got planted in my head, that maybe I could direct. I didn't know what it was gonna be. I didn't know what movie I was gonna step behind the camera [for]. But we did *Creed* and then *Creed II* came along and Steven [Capple, Jr.] jumped into the director's chair. And as we kind of grew, the third one just seemed like it was the perfect time for me to step behind the camera."

In addition to Coogler, Jordan says that he sought advice from others he respected in Hollywood, particularly actor-directors like Jon Favreau, Bradley Cooper and Denzel Washington. "People who had been behind and in front of the camera, simultaneously," he added. "Those people have had success at doing it, sometimes the first project as well. That really helped inform me on what to expect, even though there was nothing that anybody could really tell me to prepare me for what the journey was gonna be like. It was one of those things, you just have to live it and get through it. And it was the hardest thing I've had to do so far, but at the same time, I felt the most alive doing it. So it was rewarding."

Notably, Jordan does not mention Stallone. Last year, as the film was in production, Sly admitted to *Variety* that he didn't like the direction the third installment was taking and that it had a "different philosophy" than he would've featured. Though he wished the filmmakers well, he opted not to appear in it (he's still listed as a producer). The gist of his issues with *Creed III* seemed to be about its lack of "sentimentality" and the "darkness" that it sought to explore.

But the film isn't really all that dark. In fact, it's very much in the tradition of *I* and *II*, which of course, took cues from the original *Rocky* movies. Following the tried-and-true formula of spotlighting two opponents (one who has more to overcome than the other), both looking



MGM

for redemption for their own reasons, the spinoff packs the same basic emotional punches. And we're not spoiling anything to say that it ends exactly the way you think it will, with an uplifting message about transcending trauma and appreciating blessings like family and friends. With an 87% positive score among critics and a 96% with audiences on Rotten Tomatoes as of this writing, the consensus on Jordan as a director has been very good, and with lots of buzz (especially in L.A., where the movie is set) and strong box office numbers, it's a bona fide hit one week in.

A *Creed* refresher: Adonis was the product of an affair Apollo (played by Carl Weathers in the *Rocky* movies) had just before he died. His mother also passed away when he was a baby, so he ended up in an L.A. orphanage. Apollo's widow Mary Anne (Phylicia Rashad) found him and adopted him as a child, but never encouraged him to box due to the danger. But Adonis was a fighter like his father, and after quitting his safe desk

job, he goes to Philadelphia to look up his dad's old friend Rocky, convincing him to come out of retirement and train him, ultimately getting him a championship bout. Creed doesn't win the final fight in the first film, but he proves himself a world class opponent with a bright future. More importantly, he comes to terms with the legacy of his father, donning American flag shorts just like dad. In the second film, Adonis battles the son of Ivan Drago (Dolph Lundgren), the Russian boxer who killed his father in the ring. If that's not a dark setup, what is?

Coogler wrote and produced this time around and the new story centers around Adonis Creed's childhood friendship with up and coming boxer "Diamond" Damian Anderson (Jonathan Majors), whom he met while in the foster care system. Using flashbacks at the top of the film to illustrate the pair's bond, and slowly revisiting and unraveling an incident that ended up putting Anderson in prison, the third installment takes a turn around the second act that's decid-

edly different from previous films that focus more on the mentor/mentee relationship. We all know who to root for in *Rocky* films, and this one is no exception, but there is a more complex dynamic at play here, too. *Creed III* clearly aims to explore how opportunity (or lack thereof) can factor into one's success, how where we come from can shape who we are and how one terrible incident can change everything. For this installment, Los Angeles is central to the storyline. The climactic final fight of the film even takes place at Dodger Stadium, dubbed "the Battle of Los Angeles," which is not a Rage Against the Machine reference, but does seek to highlight how Creed (and Anderson's Angeleno pride is a big part of who they are.

We asked Jordan, who was born in Santa Ana, California, raised in New Jersey and currently lives in L.A., about the significance of Los Angeles as a backdrop for the film in terms of growing up in the city and how it shaped the main characters as people.

"Okay, there's a lot in that. I think for first and foremost, from a franchise perspective, you've seen Adonis start in L.A., and then end up in Philly in search of this teacher, this mentor, that's going to help him achieve the things that he needs to achieve," he tells *LA Weekly*. "Having the second film be mostly in Philly and then you know, a little bit in Los Angeles, and then we end up in Russia. We'd never really had a chance to really establish Adonis' home – what's his home base? What really shaped him?" And since we were treating this like an origin story and a sequel in a trilogy all in one, we thought it was important to make L.A. a character and make it a homecoming of sorts."

"Then you break it down further," he continues. "Okay, cool, what childhood trauma did [Adonis and Dameon] share? It was his first protector, and you know, we're products of our environments. So we leaned into the reality of those environments. Being from Crenshaw, and then living in Baldwin Hills, this Beverly Bel Air-ish type of area where Black families lived and thrived and had money. You know, where would Apollo Creed be? We talked to those things. And then we started thinking about what iconic environments do we want to put these two guys in – in the form of montages, or you know, when driving down the street. What familiar places can we show that aren't oversaturated, when you think of L.A. and Hollywood? Sometimes those can be a little bit cheesy when it comes to films. I mean, like, we're not going down to the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Certain areas are very familiar in L.A., but what hasn't been photographed before? What are the parts of L.A. that you don't really see on film and television? So that was a challenge to kind of find those places. Ultimately, we ended up at one of the more iconic places: the Hollywood sign. So there's certain things you can't get away from, and I think it served as a final kind of nail I felt that Adonis needed, that I think the audience needed. Hollywood was first the nickname they gave him when he went to Philly. So it felt very poetic to kind of come back around to that."

Jordan also says that they wanted to show new places in L.A., like Sixth Street

ENTERTAINMENT



MGM

Bridge. "It was a new place that was starting to become very, very popular. People were drag-racing down there and walking on the bridge," he notes. "It's very visual, and we wanted to kind of just take things to new places."

Speaking of the Walk of Fame, *Creed III* may have avoided a cliché stroll down Hollywood Boulevard, but Jordan didn't stay away from the street in real life. Timed to coincide with the third film's release, the actor got his own star there just last week. During the ceremony, Majors and Coogler paid tribute and clearly, there's a lot of love between all three.

"First, I love my brother," said Majors, who like Jordan, also stars in a Marvel movie (he's the villain in the latest *Ant Man*). "When I move around Mike – or Creed or Donnie or Michael B. Handsome or Sexiest Man Alive – Adonis, I'm reminded of the tale of Hercules. The story of a young man who was born as a mortal. Michael, to me, represents a mythical character. I don't think it's an act of luck or an act of chance that so

many people see him as Adonis. Today, brother, you go from man to god. You sit amongst Olympus and ... no man on the planet I know deserves it more."

Coogler also had heartfelt sentiments for Jordan at the induction. "It's been the ride of a lifetime, man – this decade working with this guy and watching him blossom into the phenomenal global talent that he is, the filmmaker that he is," he gushed. "And knowing that our relationship can maybe be a blueprint for more relationships for the next folks that's coming up, it's exhilarating. It's humbling."

It's obviously not a coincidence that *Creed III*'s promo blitz started during Black History Month. Jordan kicked off media appearances with a stint on *Saturday Night Live* in early February, proving his comic dexterity and his self-deprecating side (his high-profile relationship with model Lori Harvey had just ended months prior and he had no problem addressing it). From there, he started touting the technical aspects of

the project (it was the first sports movie to be shot on IMAX cameras) and did interviews that seemed to focus on inspiring others.

To this end, he also partnered with Hennessy – a brand that not surprisingly has an important product placement moment between the two leads in the movie – to champion emerging Black filmmakers, launching a program they call the Legacy Makers Initiative. MBJ, MGM and Hennessy handpicked three up-and-coming directors and provided resources for them to make film shorts celebrating prominent Black creators in Hollywood, tied to the film release. The launch party for the project took place at a pop-up modeled after Creed's gym in the movie last week. It had boxing exhibitions, and a screening room with appearances by the filmmakers themselves. Over some signature Henn-tails, we chatted with them.

"They reached out to me and it sounded like a cool project," says Diana Ali Chire, who made her film about *Creed III*

costume supervisor Ngina Bowen. "They allowed me to be as creative and go as weird as possible. A lot of my work is about Black female identity. This piece is eclectic and fun."

Bowen says that being a part of the new movie was a dream come true. "I manifested this job," she says. "To see Michael in both roles – we shot the boxing first, for like two weeks – so to see him be that fit, but also stepping back and directing at the same time, it was really amazing. I got to see the whole process, when you watch it and see what the boxers are wearing, the designers had a whole thought process behind it... it's all so great."

Walter Thompson-Hernandez, who says his films "deal with questions about longing, family and hope," covered Gavin "Mizzle" Matheiu, who was the creative director of YG's 4Hunnid label and heads his own clothing brand, called Supervsn Studios. As an MJB fan, he was excited to be part of the project, too. "Yeah I think we're all aligned here and I think we have a similar vision and it feels really good," he says. "And I've drank some Hennessy in my life – it tastes great and it's important for the culture."

Filmmaker Tevin J Tavares filmed Chad Easterling, CEO of Obsidianworks, a "culture-powered" marketing agency co-founded by Michael B. Jordan himself. Bowen says Obsidian reached out to her initially about being involved and giving others a chance to learn about what she does and sharing what she learned on set, was key. "They had laser focus on this project," she says of everyone involved. "You have to have that to be in that kind of physical and mental shape, and you kind of have to have that for life in general."

Clearly, *Creed III*'s success serves as inspiration in more ways than one. Beyond its star/director, a lot of Black talent was behind every aspect of the film, from production and execution to promotion. It's been a busy week for Michael B. Jordan (whom by the way, no one confuses with the basketball legend anymore). He's been involved in every aspect of this one, rolled with every punch, made every appearance and surely inspired others to take a swing and fight for their dreams in the process.

SOOTHA COFFEE LOSES LEASE TO LANDLORD IN IRVINE

THE SMALL BATCH COFFEE ROASTER IN IRVINE'S NORTHWOOD TOWN CENTER WAS FORCED TO CLOSE IN FEBRUARY. HOWEVER, OWNER U KIM REMAINS OPTIMISTIC FOR THE FUTURE, ADDING THAT YOU CANNOT MOVE BY LIVING IN THE PAST.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



Owner U Kim



Sootha Coffee

After a decade of serving freshly roasted coffee to the Irvine community from its shop inside the Northwood Town Center, Sootha Coffee officially closed its doors on February 22.

For owner U Kim, who opened the shop in 2012, the closure is not by choice, but a harsh reality faced by many small business owners.

Kim, who came to Irvine as a Marine stationed at the former Marine Corps El Toro, spoke with *Irvine Weekly* about the final days of Sootha's brick and mortar operation, and how he plans to carry on the Sootha legacy for local coffee lovers.

While the modest coffee shop was well-liked locally, Kim explained that in recent months he was unable to convince the building's property management to

allow him to continue business – even despite agreeing to more than a 50% increase in monthly rent.

As a small business owner in Orange County, Kim said he was familiar with year-to-year rent increases, but admitted he was blindsided by the double digit increase. In fact, Kim said he was also pushed to turn over the shop's financial records, but it did not make a difference.

"I was shocked out of my skin to receive a 67% increase to our base monthly rent," he said. "Basically the premise was that they had another tenant wanting to get into the space. Their reason was that we were paying under the area norm – and of course the prime spot in the entire shopping center."

Managed by ShopCore Properties, Kim said the management company took

over the lease in 2019, just before the pandemic. In terms of properties in Irvine, ShopCore Properties lists the entire Northwood Town Center on its website.

Kim said he tried to counter, adding that prior to Sootha's arrival, the building sat vacant for more than four years.

"The prime spot in the shopping center was left empty for four and a half years before we came in. We did the build out, we stayed for 10 years – now we're finally sustainable again after the pandemic," he said. "Don't you think some of the traction for this spot is due to us being here?"

Still, after many discussions with his wife, and chewing through some of his own denial, Kim said his options were limited. In the end, he chose to move forward, sharing the news with his loyal customers via the Sootha Coffee Blog in a post titled *Finishing Well*.

"We are closing shop," he wrote in January. "It took the entire holiday season to pry myself out from the state of denial. Yet, it has not completely sunk in that, come this March, I won't have to get to the shop wee early to open the front door while greeting the usual suspects by their names and scrambling to prepare their usual beverage anymore, less stressing over supply chain disruptions or cost increase, no more agonizing over asking one of my team members to fill in for me for whatever the reason."

On Instagram, Kim shared photos of his small collection of coffee roasting equip-

ment. He estimated his main roaster saw about 38,000 pounds of coffee beans in its decade of daily service.

For now, Sootha Coffee will maintain an online presence – *SoothaCoffee.com* – which Kim hopes can serve the community through mail-order coffee subscriptions. Another part of Kim's goal is to expand, as the subscription based model might bring coffee enthusiasts in from different regions.

"I want to get my coffee into the customer's hands, before the coffee pecks – it's a short window. A little less than a week," he said. "I've sampled several of these roasters, just to see what the market's like and I've been thoroughly disappointed."

Kim admits that things will be much different in the absence of his daily activities at the shop, but he is determined to remain optimistic, but has no plans to open another brick and mortar retail location for the time being.

The final days at the Northwood Town Center were bittersweet for Kim and his crew. But they were not lonely. In fact, Kim said it was the busiest the shop had ever been.

"We had about a week to clear everything out," he said. "They were the busiest days in the entire ten years we had been there. People came in to say goodbye – and I appreciate it."

For more information on Sootha Coffee, visit www.soothacoffee.com or follow them on Instagram via @soothacoffee.

EDUCATION

WOODBIDGE HIGH SCHOOL SEEKING STATE DECATHLON TITLE

WITH SIX TITLES IN SEVEN YEARS AT THE COUNTY LEVEL, WOODBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL DECATHLON TEAM IS LOOKING TO CLAIM ITS FIRST STATE CHAMPIONSHIP IN MARCH.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Students on Woodbridge High School's Decathlon team are celebrating the school's sixth Orange County Academic Decathlon title in seven years. Now, the Irvine-based decathlon team will look to outperform other Division I schools at the California Academic Decathlon in Santa Clara in March.

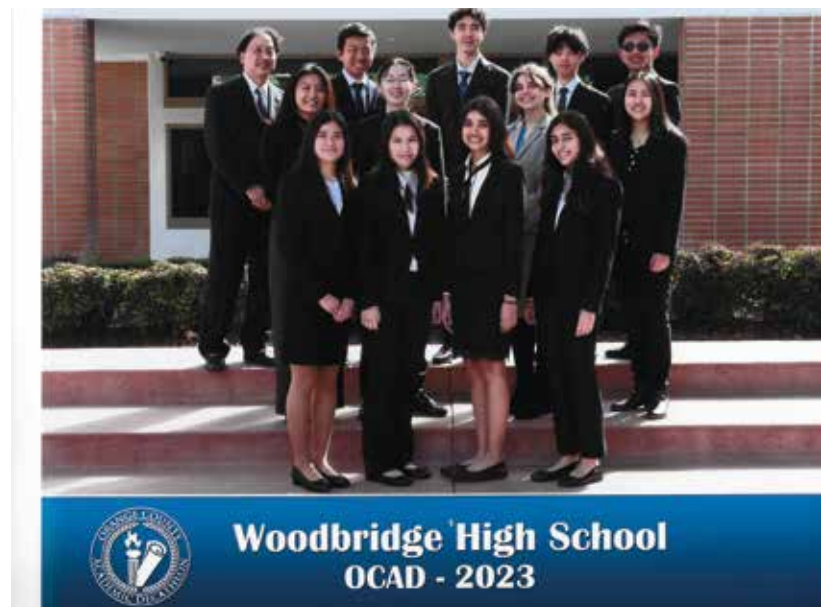
Having claimed previous California Academic Decathlon titles in Division 2, and Division 3, the Woodbridge team is searching to claim its first Division I title. Last year, Woodbridge finished in third place overall.

Mike Nakae, head coach of Woodbridge High School's Academic Decathlon Team spoke with Irvine Weekly about the team's most recent title, and how the team's "never enough" attitude is shaping its outstanding performance.

"Once you establish tradition, the legacy keeps going. We just make sure the kids know that there's responsibility put on them to perform, not just for themselves, but the school and all the alumni that have come through the program," he explained. "It's really comprehensive – it really stretches the students. They have to be well-rounded by the end of the competition."

In terms of competition, students participate in multiple choice competitions covering the topics of art, language and literature, economics, mathematics, music, science, and social science.

Other forms of competition include speech and interview, along with the highly popularized Super Quiz Relay competition. Hosted in front of a live audience of parents



and other decathlon teams, the Super Quiz Relay competition is a fast-paced collaborative team event.

In its most recent championship, Woodbridge scored a total of 45,208.8 points. For comparison, Valencia High, Orange County's second place winner scored 40,241.7 points.

As a coach, Nakae's goal is to educate.

"These are the things I teach them – humility goes a long way. No matter what happens – winning or losing – you're going to be good sports about it," he said. "We make no excuses, we just do the very best we can."

While Woodbridge decathletes have

earned bragging rights, Nakae also noted that students were compensated monetarily for their individual victories.

"Orange County gives out the most money when it comes to these competitions. My kids won \$7,100. On top of that, our team got a \$4,000 travel stipend for coming in first place," he said. "I had 12 students there – 11 of the 12 received some sort of monetary prize. If you come in first place individually you get \$1,000 – that's a lot for a high school kid."

Now retired, Nakae is a former science teacher at Woodbridge High School, and has been involved with the Woodbridge

Decathlon Team for 27 years. He admitted that there are semi-rigorous demands placed on decathletes, adding that training and preparation for winter completions begins in the summer.

"We start our program in June to get ready for the February county completion," he explained. "We explain to them what the program entails and what the commitment level is going to be. GPA's are slotted out, and then they have to compete for a spot."

With a roster of nine decathletes per team, decathletes are grouped in threes by GPA – Honors decathletes (GPA 3.8-4.0), Scholastic decathletes (GPA 3.2-3.79), and Varsity decathletes (GPA 00-3.19), per the rules listed on the Orange County Department of Education website.

In a statement congratulating the Woodbridge Decathlon Team, Kristin Rigby, Orange County Department of Education Coordinator, said the Academic Decathlon provides a great outlet for kids to showcase their passion for academics. Rigby added that she hopes to see competition at the Decathlon continues to inspire students.

"The Academic Decathlon is an opportunity for students to showcase their knowledge and skills across a wide range of academic subjects, from art and literature to economics and science," she said. "We are proud to see the high level of participation and competitiveness in this year's decathlon, and we offer our congratulations to Woodbridge High School on their victory."

Speaking on the transformation of his students, Nakae explained that while many students enter this journey blindly, they often mold lasting relationships with one another.

"Not just this year, but every year – a lot of them really don't know each other, but they begin to bond. You instill the idea that this is a team – that everyone has to contribute to the team and support each other, help each other along the way, because you have different levels of students there," Nakae explained. "A lot of the alumni become [academic decathlon] judges – they just keep supporting the county and state program."

As the California Academic Decathlon approaches, Nakae said his main focus is ensuring his students are engaged.

"I wouldn't say they're overly confident, but they know that they can maybe be in the top five in the state this year, going into competition."