

# Who You Gonna Call?

DEAN NELSON

**SAN DIEGO'S POWER BROKERS** aren't always as visible as those in other places — but they are there, exerting influence and (even if quietly) moving and shaking. Here's our list of local leaders who have a track record of getting the job done. And some who don't.

EVERY CITY HAS ITS GO-TO PEOPLE, right? If you want something done, if you need a person with some influence, if you need a power hitter to swing a big club, there's always someone you can call.

Really? In San Diego?

“If you would have asked me to name the heavy hitters in the '70s, I could have given you a few names, and everyone else would have given you the same names,” says Tom Shepard, the local political strategist who runs campaigns for individuals and issues. “But now, with the diversification of our economy, San Diego is no longer run by the savings and loan industry or by developers. And with few exceptions, the big-money people here have chosen not to insert themselves into the community as leaders.”

As the *Los Angeles Times* noted last year, San Diego has a civic tradition of the wealthy and powerful shunning the public spotlight. It's as if anonymity and disinterest are virtues. Economist Arthur Leavitt characterized San Diego's business and political leaders as the most apathetic people he had seen. Malin Burnham, still going strong as a business and civic force at 80, tells us, “Our elected officials were not leaders before they were elected, during the time they held office or after they left office. That means we're electing the wrong people.”

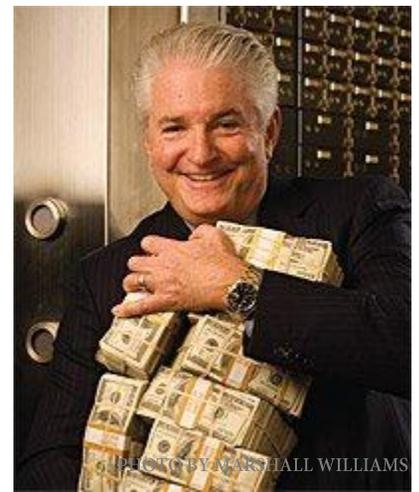
So if the business and political people aren't exerting their influence and shaping the culture, who is?

Any list is going to have drawbacks. As soon as this magazine hits the stands, the mail and the Internet, we'll get inundated with statements like “You should've included . . .” We know that. But we wanted to start somewhere.

To many in this city, it appears there is no leadership. It does seem that way much of the time. Like Linus on Halloween night waiting for the Great Pumpkin to appear, San Diegans wait for a leader. Of *anything*. Despite appearances to the contrary, though, we think there *are* some leaders. Not enough, but some. Let us know what you think. Let's get the conversation started.

## Business

**Who to Call: Robert Horsman.** Against the advice of his business associates, the president and CEO of San Diego National Bank took the chance on lending Irwin Jacobs the money for a startup company called Qualcomm. Anybody want to second-guess that decision? Horsman, the 2007



chairman of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, is one of the few San Diego CEOs who is consistently visible at both civic and charity events. He cochaired the San Diego Children's Initiative, is a director of the San Diego International Sports Council and president of the board of directors for the San Diego Opera. Bob Kelly of the San Diego Foundation says, "San Diego doesn't have a lot of top CEOs like you find in Boston, Pittsburgh or Minneapolis. And that's where Horsman stands out. He has chosen to be a leader in the community, to be involved in so many things." Horsman even gets double duty out of his 50-foot yacht—he auctions off cruises on the bay to raise money for charity.

**Honorable Mention: Julie Meier Wright.** For more than 10 years, she has been head of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation, with the task of attracting business to the area. Previously, she was California's secretary of trade and commerce. She knows how to put San Diego's best foot forward.

Honorable Mention II: Dan Shea. An investor, partner in Paradigm Investment Group and part owner of Donovan's Steak & Chop House, he is tireless in promotion of local business. If the Chargers stay in the region, it will be due in part to his work through the citizens' group Fans, Taxpayers & Business Alliance.

## Media

**Who to Call: Karin Winner.** As great-granddaughter of Colonel Milton McRae, who was cofounder of what became Scripps Howard Newspapers, Winner is in the newspaper business as vice president and editor of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. Circulation of the tree-killer edition of the paper has fallen below 300,000, and the company has recently bought out or laid off another big wave of employees—many of them veteran reporters for the print issue—but visits to the online site, SignOnSanDiego.com, are way up. And despite dropping circulation, despite offering buyouts to staffers, Winner and company often set the agenda for what the city talks about. It was the *Union-Tribune* and the Copley News Service that exposed felonious Congressman Randy Cunningham, earning the paper a Pulitzer in 2006. The watchdog role of the biggest newspaper in town still barks, although with each round of buyouts and a diminishing presence in Washington, D.C., and Mexico City, it seems to have lost a couple of teeth.



**Honorable Mention: Bill Geppert.** He runs one of the largest cable systems in the country as well as Cox Channel 4, was chair of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation and is involved in more local charities than most churches are. If he gets his way, he'll be taking over Time Warner Cable, which would give new definition to the word "domination."



## Law

**Who to Call: Bonnie Dumanis.** Our district attorney started out in the office as a junior clerk-typist. Now she *is* the law. She reorganized the office left to her by the Mike Aguirre-like Paul Pfingst, and she has the respect of law enforcement throughout the county with her staff of more than 300 attorneys and 150 investigators. She's kept the priorities she had when she was a prosecutor—jailing sex predators and reducing domestic violence. Dumanis also started a cold-case homicide unit that had success soon after it began. She serves on justice-related boards throughout the state and has been recognized by both the YWCA and the Salvation Army for her work to protect women.

She doesn't crave the spotlight like her predecessor, but when she speaks—even with that Massachusetts accent—people listen.

**Honorable Mention: William Lansdowne.** He tends to get his facts wrong when he speaks publicly about crime in San Diego, but the police chief does what he can to maintain a law-enforcement group that is shedding officers faster than *The Union-Tribune* is shedding reporters.

**Honorable Mention II: Mike Aguirre.** As city attorney, he strikes fear into those who oppose him. Even though few of his lawsuits stick, he may be the city's biggest deterrent to bad behavior. As one of his attorneys said, he has the same effect on people that a traffic cop does when pulling one driver over for speeding: For a while, everyone else goes the speed limit.



## Politics

**Who to Call: Jerry Sanders.** If you can get through to him, that is. He seems to have risen to the new powers that come with a strong-mayor form of government. During the wildfires, the landslide, the recycling debate and the gay-marriage turnaround, he appeared to be listening less to his political consultants—and less to Mike Aguirre—and he's acting like the CEO he was elected to be. He had the respect of his workers when he was police chief and the head of the Red Cross. Will he have the respect of voters this year when he runs for reelection? Probably.

**Honorable Mention: Donna Frye.** She almost became mayor, and she still carries influence as a member of the city council. She seems to speak for the voiceless and the environment—and isn't afraid to give her home phone number to constituents. It's old school, and it works.

**Honorable Mention II: Ron Roberts.** Chairman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, the longtime politician has recently focused on getting the emergency communications systems throughout the region all on the same frequency and on creating a reasonable development plan for San Diego Bay.

**Who to Avoid: Mike Aguirre.** Ask Mayor Jerry Sanders, City Council President Scott Peters, Police Chief William Lansdowne, District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis, any member of the city's pension board or any attorney in town what it's like to do battle with our city attorney. They'd rather walk barefoot across broken glass.

**Who to Avoid II: Congressman Bob Filner.** Especially if you're a baggage handler.

## Land/Development

**Who to Call: Doug Manchester.** Love him or hate him (and there are legions on both sides), you have to hand it to a guy who has the Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel near the Convention Center, the San Diego Marriott Hotel & Marina, the First National Bank building downtown, the Torrey Pines Business & Research Park in La Jolla and The Grand Del Mar resort and golf course. He also heads the Manchester Financial Group and started La Jolla Bank & Trust. His current project is the billion-dollar complex at the Broadway Pier, replacing the Navy facility. If it can be built in a high-profile area in San Diego, Manchester can figure out a way to do it. He did get turned down in Oceanside when he wanted to build an oceanfront complex, but his batting average for getting the deal on the playing field is better than Tony Gwynn's.

**Honorable Mention: Doug Wilson.** He developed Symphony Towers offices and Park Loft and threw a party for his new condo project, The Mark, that was so lavish it was illegal! Some Centre City Development Corporation staffers and a city councilmember can't vote on his projects until summer because they attended. *That's* influence.

**Who to Avoid: Doug Manchester.** His downside, according to those who have worked with him, is his ego. All his buildings become monuments to himself, critics say. “He is an example of how not to conduct oneself in public,” sniffs one influential San Diegan who doesn’t want to ruin a possible business relationship by being identified.

**Who to Avoid II: Aaron Feldman.** He built the controversial Sunroad building. Unless your tape measure can tell the difference between 160 and 180 feet, keep a giant crane handy.



## High-Tech/Biotech

**Who to Call: Paul Jacobs.** He may live in the shadow of his father, Irwin, but Paul now runs Qualcomm, the company his dad started, which “controls the underlying technology for the device that everyone has to have,” says CNN. Qualcomm, one of the few large companies with headquarters in San Diego, has 9,000 employees and is one of *Fortune* magazine’s “great places to work.” That would explain the 75,000 applicants for jobs there in the past year. Jacobs is on the board of the Museum of Contemporary Art, and his employees are part of virtually every local volunteer effort. Something is clearly going right at Qualcomm when its hires have included Dan Pegg,

former head of the Economic Development Corporation; Dan Novak, general manager of Cox Channel 4; and Carol Lam, former U.S. Attorney. Jacobs holds more than 25 patents in the wireless technology area. Can you imagine life without a cell phone? Or San Diego without Qualcomm?

**Honorable Mention: Duane Roth.** He’s resurrecting Connect, the catalyst organization that helps develop companies that spring from discoveries at the University of California, San Diego and other local research institutions. It was once known as the model for linking high-tech research and investors, but has languished in recent years. Roth’s credibility and knowledge are bringing those groups back together.

**Honorable Mention II: Hank Nordhoff.** Gen-Probe is not only one of the largest biotechnology companies in San Diego, it is also one of the few that turn a profit. As president and CEO, Nordhoff has been a positive force in shaping San Diego’s high-tech reputation.

## Casinos



**Who to Call: Danny Tucker.** It takes money to get anything done in San Diego, and the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation has plenty of it. Its chairman has overseen the purchase of the U.S. Grant Hotel downtown, bought property and financed a new hotel near Petco Park, started a mutual fund, partnered with National City to develop a hotel and marina and started a boxing promotion company. The Sycuan name is ubiquitous on buildings and at civic events, which means Tucker and his partners are investing throughout the county while they take care of their 4,000-employee gaming/resort empire. County Supervisor Dianne Jacob told one publication that “Sycuan has been a role model in working with the county. I can’t say enough good things about Chairman Tucker.”

**Honorable Mention: Rhonda Welch-Scalko.** The Barona Band also has a gaming and resort empire, and she is a fourth-generation tribal leader. After the 2003 wildfires destroyed much of the tribe’s reservation, she authorized donating a helicopter to the sheriff’s department. Most of her influence is now being utilized for finding water in the tribe’s parched area. Whether it is trucked or piped in, water is their missing jackpot.

## Faith

**Who to Call: Rabbi Laurie Coskey.** Soon after her arrival in San Diego 20 years ago as an assistant rabbi, one of the first things she did was start a meals program to feed the homeless on Sunday mornings. That commitment to connect faith and service has gathered significant steam. Now, as director of the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, Coskey has galvanized more than 100 religious leaders throughout the county to pressure employers to provide a living wage to the thousands of our region's "invisible" workers. "It's really black and white," she told one publication. "You're not supposed to work full-time and live in poverty—there is no religious structure that makes that okay." Her leadership has helped religious groups bring pressure against Westfield Shoppingtowns for underpaying their janitors, against La Costa Resort & Spa, Hotel del Coronado and *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. Religious leaders standing up for justice, fairness and right treatment of people—what a concept!

**Honorable Mention: The Reverend Scott Richardson.** His work as dean of St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral has put him on the front lines of social justice issues and conflict resolution. Like Rabbi Coskey, he has helped make the invisible people visible.

**Who to Avoid: Bishop Richard Brom.** Despite his being responsible for a parish of 1 million Catholics in San Diego and Imperial counties, he has served the flock by putting the diocese into bankruptcy to avoid bigger payouts to victims of sex abuse, by being lectured by a judge for his disingenuous financial explanations, and by barring the Catholic church funeral of a gay nightclub owner. Brom later apologized to the family and offered to pre side at a private funeral. Confession, anyone?

## Sports

**Who to Call: John Moores.** There's nothing one-dimensional about this guy. In addition to owning the San Diego Padres and developing several blocks around Petco Park downtown through his JMI real estate company, he is also chairman of the Carter Center in Atlanta, a human rights organization started by former president Jimmy Carter. Moores, one of the country's wealthiest individuals, has given millions to the San Diego Zoo, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and dozens of other charities. Until recently, he was an outspoken voice of conscience as a member of the University of California Board of Regents, but he abruptly quit last year. He dodged a bullet when he left the board of Peregrine Systems in 2003 just before a shareholder lawsuit hit the company. If the San Diego Chargers had a clue, they'd put Moores on retainer to help them get a new stadium. Of the \$450 million it cost to build Petco Park for his Padres, he got taxpayers to pony up two-thirds of it.

**Honorable Mention: Junior Seau.** Just because our North County native now plays for a team other than the Chargers doesn't mean he isn't still an impact player here. The Junior Seau Foundation helps kids afford Christmas shopping. His restaurant feeds the homeless and closed down on Thanksgiving to feed San Diegans displaced by last year's wildfires. His board carries more weight in town than most local companies do.

**Who to Avoid: Everybody else.** Let's see ... there used to be a San Diego Gulls hockey team, a San Diego Riptide arena-football team, a Surf Dawgs baseball team, San Diego Sockers and San Diego Spirit soccer teams, a San Diego Stingrays basketball team—and all of them are gone. The NBA team, the Clippers, still exists, but in Los Angeles. Will the Chargers football team follow them north?

## Food

**Who to Call: David and Leslie Cohn.** Years ago, if you were looking for great places to eat in San Diego, you could count them on about as many fingers as it took to number the few people who really ran the region. Mister A's, the Marine Room, Hob Nob, Mille Fleurs, George's on the Cove, that was about it. Those restaurants are still here and still good, with many renovated and under new management. But the Cohns have

taken good eating to a level that's accessible to virtually everyone—not just the wealthy. San Diego's anti-cookie-cutter restaurateurs make each of their businesses unique and successful. The Prado at Balboa Park is different from Corvette Diner in Hillcrest is different from Island Prime on Harbor Island is different from . . . well, you get the picture. David's background as a grocer and Leslie's as a high school English teacher in New York don't seem to point to restaurant success, but they are *the* food force in town. They also know when to quit—the T-Bird Diner didn't work, and neither did the Hang Ten Brewing Company. But everything else does, like Indigo Grill, Kemo Sabe, Dakota Grill & Spirits, the Gas lamp Strip Club and recent acquisition Thee Bungalow. The Cohns even have their own minor league for developing the next generation of chefs: They invest in Garfield High School, so students can develop their culinary skills.

**Honorable Mention: Ingrid Croce.** Many credit her with the modern success of the Gas lamp Quarter's restaurant row. She took the chance and invested in Fifth Avenue when every one else was afraid. They listen to her now.

**Honorable Mention II: Michael Mitchell.** He's the new president of the local chapter of the California Restaurant Association, as well as general manager of the Oceanaire Sea food Room. The guy who started out scrubbing floors at Thee Bungalow when he was 14 is now commanding his own ship, and others are following.

## Arts

**Who to Call: Lou Spisto.** For years, the Old Globe Theatre has been a destination for locals and tourists. For all of the good theater this town has to offer, traditional and experimental, the Old Globe is still the standard-bearer. Spisto was hired in 2002 as executive director, after leading New York's American Ballet Theatre, Orange County's Pacific Symphony Orchestra and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He was recently named the theater's CEO and executive producer. He knows the Old Globe has national and international notoriety and has moved the business side from a money-losing venture to putting money in the organization's endowment. The subscription base has risen 35 percent, and ticket sales have set records for the past three years. Recent shows that have debuted here and then moved to Broadway have only solidified the Globe's international reputation.

**Honorable Mention: Ian Campbell.** The Australian expatriate is the face of San Diego Opera. He's helmed it longer than anyone else and has shown arts organizations that it is possible to run an opera company in the black. He's one of few in the country to do so.

**Who to Avoid I: Surfer statue in Cardiff.** It doesn't have quite the inspirational value of the Duke Kahanamoku statue, the father of modern surfing, at Waikiki Beach.

**Who to Avoid II: *Unconditional Surrender* (sailor and nurse on the Embarcadero).** Can anyone look at this sculpted version of the photo taken at the end of World War II and not wonder if the kissers are the parents of the statue inside Ruby's Diners?

## Nightlife

**Who to Call: James Brennan.** The 34-year-old entrepreneur from New Jersey discovered San Diego when he was a student at the University of San Diego. Now he runs EnDev, a dining and entertainment empire with locations in downtown, Pacific Beach and Hillcrest. Stingaree, Ciro's Pizza, Side Bar, the Witherby and Margarita Rocks are all EnDev clubs. His upcoming Universal is billed as Hillcrest's first "omnisexual" nightclub. On any given night in San Diego, people are enjoying themselves under the influence of Brennan. He's involved in the Big Brothers program and also directs a Young Professionals Committee.

**Honorable Mention: Howard Berkson.** The CEO of Anthology jazz club/restaurant says he intends to "own jazz in this town." If what he did to transform Little Italy with his new club is an indicator, the keys will be his.

## Military

**Who to Call: Christopher O'Connor.** Even when the people who wanted to move the airport to Miramar raised millions of dollars to get the issue put on the ballot, and even when some of San Diego's biggest hitters said it simply must be done, one person kept saying, "Not on my watch." Colonel O'Connor, the commanding officer of the Marine Corps Air Station at Miramar, stuck to his guns and shook his head at the lengthy, expensive process of putting it to a vote. He said it by land, sea and air—Lindbergh Field was not coming to Miramar. The fact that voters eventually agreed with him was irrelevant. He proved the point that this is still a military town.

**Honorable Mention: Angela Salinas.** Head of the San Diego Marine Corps Recruit Depot, where 20,000 troops come each year for boot camp, she's the first woman in Corps history to run such a facility, and the first Latina to reach the rank of brigadier general. She'll need her leadership skills to keep a Lindbergh Field runway from being built through her camp, since her colleague at Miramar already gave the airport a thumbs-down.

## Education

**Who to Call: Steve Weber.** The president of San Diego State University runs the largest university in the entire Cal State system, with more than 30,000 students, and he's in the midst of trying to make it even bigger—maybe by 30 percent or more. Weber's school is training much of the region's workforce. His strength has been in building partnerships with people and groups outside the university. Through an agreement he reached with Sol and Robert Price, San Diego State faculty and students help run schools in multiethnic City Heights. Weber brokered a deal with the Sweetwater School District to guarantee admission to students who complete its high school program. The university receives so many applications from students around the country that it can only accept one in five. The challenge for Weber now is where SDSU should expand. Neighbors are already exasperated by overrun rentals and streets in the area. Neighborhood and government groups are suing the school faster than you can say "Mike Aguirre." Weber's most intense partnership-building days are just around the corner.

**Honorable Mention: Constance Carroll.** Maybe we should have said that Weber, above, is training *part* of the region's workforce. As chancellor for the San Diego Community College district, which has more than 100,000 students, Carroll may be training *most* of the workforce. She runs the sixth-largest community college district in the country.

## Civic Life

**Who to Call: Malin Burnham.** His legacy might be in real estate, development and insurance, and he did play a significant role in bringing the America's Cup yachting trophy to town, but his influence now is in philanthropy. He chairs the Burnham Institute (formerly La Jolla Cancer Research Institute) and helps it financially. He has his own foundation that supports local civic efforts. He co chairs UCSD's \$1 billion capital campaign. He has become involved in local politics as one of the leaders in the strong-mayor initiative, in the Regional Airport Authority, in the Metropolitan Water District and in promoting trustees in the San Diego Unified School District. Through his support of the Kyoto Laureate Symposium, he assists San Diego's effort to be known internationally. "Everyone wants his advice," says Robert Horsman of San Diego National Bank. "He holds the Golden Key."

**Honorable Mention: Robert Price.** Imagine a business owner and a university putting their heads together to address a social problem, and then imagine that it helped a significant number of people. As Ricky Bobby said in the movie *Talladega Nights*, "That just happened!" The City Heights redevelopment is a collaboration between Price and San Diego State University. His other social effort, the Aaron Price Fellows Program, connects high school students with business, government and cultural leaders.

**Honorable Mention II: Herb Klein.** The former Copley Newspapers boss still has it. The mayor still consults him, as do most business and political leaders in town. Need the governor at your event? Don't call Sacramento. Call Herb Klein.