

Joseph Collins



Joe Collins is a San Diego native who spent his childhood in Poway. He attended St. Michael's Catholic School and then graduated from Rancho Bernardo High School where he was an active athlete. Joe's college career began at Palomar College where he worked on his general education credits before transferring to Cal State San Marcos where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration. During College he met his future wife Teresa and moved from Rancho Bernardo to Escondido where he has resided for the past 14 years.

Joe has made a name for himself as the "go-to" marketer for all things insurance. Joe is the Marketing Specialist for Wawanesa Insurance at their United States headquarters here in sunny San Diego.

He is the most recent past president of the San Diego ALS Association, and currently serves on the board playing an active role in fundraising events and patient outreach. In

2009, Joe was recognized alongside his wife as the Combined Health Agencies volunteer of the year for their work with the San Diego ALS Association.

In his spare time Joe enjoys fantasy football, spending time with his family and hanging out at local wineries. Joe is a longtime supporter of the Center and thrilled to be a part of this amazing event.

Leon Brooks, Jr.

Leon Brooks was born in Dallas, Texas. He relocated to San Diego, California in 1963. He has two (2) children: Alycia and Leon, III. He also has five (5) grandchildren and two (2) great-grandchildren. Leon was married to the late Jennifer Adams-Brooks.

Leon earned a B.S. from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA. He retired in 1983 as Sr. Architect with The Pacific Bell Company [AT&T]. He is the Owner/Principal of LEON BROOKS & Associates.

Leon currently serves as a County Planning Commissioner on the San Diego County Planning Commission. He also is a Board Member on The Urban Corps of San Diego County and The YMCA of San Diego County. He is an active member of the Christian Fellowship Congregational Church of San Diego (UCC).

Leon's activities include: Tennis, Bicycling, Basketball, Snow-Skiing, Surfing, & Beach Volleyball. Lots of folks say that he is pretty smooth on the dance floor, too!



Dr. Christy Fortney

Dr. Christy Fortney is the owner of Hidden Valley Orthodontics and an enthusiastic supporter of the Escondido community. While growing up in San Diego and being mostly drawn towards athletics, she has always loved to dance when the opportunity presents itself.

She was a high school sports star in Poway playing basketball, volleyball and softball for Poway High School. In 1990, she was fortunate enough to be awarded "Female Athlete of the Year" and earn an athletic scholarship to Loyola Marymount University to play Division I college basketball.

After an injury playing basketball, she turned to her true passion of becoming an orthodontist. Once done with dental school in Chicago at Northwestern and the completion of her specialty training in Orthodontics at Children's National Medical Center in Washington DC she returned to San Diego to practice her craft.

Dr. Fortney has now been practicing in Escondido for over 15 years and hopes that someday one of her boys will take a liking to her profession and join her in her practice. She could not be more proud to be a small business owner and a part of the Escondido community. She values family and has been happily married for over 20 years to her husband Jeff Ciccarella. They have two energetic young boys at home, Jake (11) and James (8) and as you can imagine, life is pretty busy but all said, Dr. Fortney would not change a thing!

Dr. Fortney has always dedicated herself to being the best at anything she decides to take on. As example of that is that she and Hidden Valley Orthodontics recently achieved the top 1% designation, for providers of Invisalign (clear aligners) nationwide. This comes through hard work, dedication and the attention to detail that is the standard she has always held herself to. As you can imagine, she and all of the other participants have spent much of their free time preparing for this exciting and nerve racking event and she wishes all of them the best!



Priti Gandhi

A native of Mumbai, India, Priti Gandhi began her singing career in the chorus of San Diego Opera while studying theatre and journalism at UCSD. She has since been praised by the New York Times for her “creamy sound and agile coloratura”, while Opera Pulse recently described her voice as a “sparkling soprano.” Mexico City’s Revista Pro Opera has hailed her as “an ascending presence in American theatres,” while the American Record Guide calls her “excellent.”



Ms. Gandhi’s career includes performances at home and overseas, with companies such as the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, New York City Opera, the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Opera, the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, the Caramoor International Music Festival, UNAM in Mexico City, San Diego Opera, the Estates Theatre in Prague, Opera Pacific, the Memphis Symphony, and Michigan Opera Theatre.

As a young artist at San Diego Opera, Ms. Gandhi was the subject of a documentary co-produced by SDO and UCSD-TV, entitled “The Education of an Opera Singer.” In 2010, she wrote a popular weekly column for the San Diego Union-Tribune about operatic life backstage. Her recordings include Anthony Davis’ contemporary opera *Tania*, based on the abduction of Patty Hearst (available on Koch International Classics), and the Grammy Award winning PBS broadcast/DVD release of Los Angeles Opera’s *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, with Audra McDonald and Patti LuPone. Her many operatic roles include Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Countess (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Rosina (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Cio-cio-san (*Madama Butterfly*), Musetta (*La Bohème*), and Mallika (*Lakmé*).

Recently named San Diego Opera’s Artistic Administrator, Ms. Gandhi continues her performing career, most recently with ion theatre in Terrence McNally’s *MASTER CLASS* (for which she received a Craig Noel nomination), a cabaret evening with the CabaretCaccia performance series, the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus in Jonathan Dove’s cantata *There was a Child*, a concert at the famed Spreckles Organ Pavilion as part of their International Summer Music Festival, a chamber music concert with the Art of Élan, and a series of recitals sponsored by the California Center for Cultural Arts in Escondido, the University of San Diego, and the Musical Merit Foundation. This past summer, she returned to ion theatre as part of the cast of Sondheim’s *SUNDAY IN THEPARK WITH GEORGE*, in its San Diego premiere.

Ms. Gandhi also lends her vocal talents to voiceover work in radio and television commercials, as well as appearing in various television and film projects (extras/background work).

Upcoming engagements include a series of concerts with the MusiKamar Chamber Music Project and a recital with Bodhi Tree Concerts in May. An avid flamenco dancer, she performs in flamenco and art festivals throughout the year with her dance troupe.

Jay Petrek



Jay Petrek is Escondido's Assistant City Manager. Employed by the City for 32 years, Jay originally *Tap Danced* as an entry level city planner. He *Boogie Woogied* through the ranks to become the Community Development Director prior to his recent *Quickstep* to Assistant City Manager in 2016. Over his career, Jay has *Tangoed* with a wide variety of complex municipal and private sector developments for the City. As Assistant City Manager, Jay is the City Hall staff *Partner* for the Center for the Arts, Escondido, and *Swings* with their Finance Committee.

Jay managed Escondido's General Plan Update that will *choreograph* the City's growth for the next 25-30 years. The General Plan *Twists* smart growth planning principles and policies to expand Escondido's employment opportunities, invigorate the community's central core, and enhance community appeal while ensuring that required infrastructure is in place to serve anticipated growth. Because of his *Can Can* do attitude, and knowledge of the community, Jay was tasked with writing Escondido's General Plan in an effort to

conserve city resources, which he *Hustled* ahead of schedule and under budget. This effort involved over 50 meetings with various community groups. The plan was ultimately approved by Escondido voters in 2012, but was no *Cakewalk*.

Jay, and his wife Heather, *Rock-n-Roll* in San Marcos and have three grown children, Aaron, Zachary, and Brooke. Jay also *Two Stepped* for 10 years as an elected San Marcos Unified School District board member and retired in 2016. Jay's hobbies and interests include off-roading on his quad, hiking, reading, culinary arts, landscaping, construction projects, movies and music.

Captain Eric Skaja

Captain Eric Skaja is a 20 year employee of the Escondido Police Department. He is currently the Patrol and traffic Bureau Commander. Eric's 20 year career has been focused on Community Policing and Training. Eric is an Escondido native and Escondido High School graduate. Eric received his degree from Cal State San Marcos and is currently a student in POST Command College.

Eric and his wife Shannon have been married for 13 years and they have two boys, Ryan and Connor. Eric spends his spare time coaching his boys' soccer and baseball teams.



Rorie L. Johnston

Though California native, Rorie spent most of her youth in Oklahoma and Arizona. She moved back to San Diego with her husband in 2005. Since her first job in San Diego as a sixteen year old working in a retail shop at Sea World, she has always worn many hats from associate to district manager. She was the first female in the history of Kelly Paper to attain the role of a District Manager where she oversaw six locations in San Diego. Her experience with business management for large corporations and small family owned operation has prepared her for the role of CEO and President of the Escondido Chamber of Commerce.

The best part of working for the chamber is the opportunity to collaborate with business leaders and visionaries. The chamber is able to bring key people together and create opportunities and influence change. North County is her home and she has a lot to be proud of! Involvement in the community is of high importance. This is where she lives, shops, plays and worships.



Jean Larsen

Jean was appointed Palomar Health Foundation's President and Chief Philanthropic Officer in December, 2014. With almost 32 years of development experience within the healthcare industry, primarily in San Diego, her extensive development background and leadership skillset was sought by Palomar Health to lead its Foundation. Accredited in 2009 as a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE), a top distinction in within the development field, and having served in various roles including Honorary Co-Chair for National Philanthropy Day (2012) on the Association of Fundraising Professionals -San Diego Chapter Board of Directors, she is a seasoned professional committed to advancing the professionalism, integrity and ethics of healthcare fundraising.



Robbie Peralta



Robbie has been involved in the Martial Arts most of his life making his professional Mixed Martial Arts debut in 2007 quickly amassing a record of 13 wins and 3 losses. In September 2011 Robbie signed with the UFC winning his first fight via a unanimous decision. Robbie holds a Black Belt in Taekwondo and Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and holds two titles in Gladiator Challenge at 135 & 145 lbs. Robbie works out every day and trains to uphold his commitment to being a good role model for his family to better himself. His hero is his Mom!

Rosa Ruiz

Rosa is a REALTOR® associated with RE/MAX UNITED since 1990. Rosa emigrated from Peru, 32 years ago. She says that one of her proudest moments was becoming an American citizen. She is a member of the Escondido Chamber of Commerce and serves on the board of directors, member of the Escondido Rotary Club, a service organization and other business organization.

In addition to helping families buy and sell homes, Rosa believes in giving back to her community. Through the years she has volunteered with non-profit organizations such as Interfaith, The Salvation Army, Rose Elementary School, Thousand Smiles Foundation, Escondido Shines, The Elizabeth Hospice, The Escondido Community Child Development Center, The Angel Depot, etc.

Rosa accepted the CCAE's invitation to participate in "Dancing with our Stars" because she enjoys dancing but most importantly the money raised will help children & families participate in the Center's education and community outreach programs. She hopes her friends, business associates and people she knows will donate to this worthwhile effort also buy tickets to the show. Everyone will have a great time!

