

ORANGE SLICES



Gina Williams throws her arms around Cesar Rojas and leans in for a kiss during their ceremony in Laguna Beach in July.

LAST-MINUTE BLISS

Anaheim woman has final wish granted – marrying her longtime love

Story and photos by Matt Masin

Gina Williams was fighting congestive heart failure – her lungs filling with fluid and her breathing heavy. Oxygen tubes were attached to her nose, keeping her breathing steady and as comfortable as possible. “It feels like drowning,” Williams said.

She didn’t have long to live.

When doctors told her she had six months, Gina knew exactly what she wanted to do: Marry Cesar Rojas, her partner of nearly 13 years.

Cesar entered Gina’s life while she was in a difficult relationship. He promised he’d take care of her, get her out of the trouble she was in. He kept his word. The two lived together in Anaheim for more than a decade.



Cesar Rojas rubs Williams’ feet and whispers to her continually. “I got you, mama, you ain’t gonna lose a foot on my watch,” he said. Along with congestive heart failure, Williams suffers from diabetes and skin cancer and 30 other separate conditions. “I don’t even remember the names of all of them,” she said.

SLICES » PAGE 11

REAL ESTATE

Low-income family housing communities open at Irvine’s Great Park

Apartment units are available to households making less than half of area’s median income

By Tomoya Shimura
tshimura@scng.com
@OCRTomoya on Twitter

IRVINE » The first two all-affordable housing communities for low-income families in the developing Great Park Neighborhoods are open, featuring clubhouses, a pool and a dog park.

The rent prices at the Luminaire and Espaira apartment communities range from \$657 to \$943 for two-bedroom and \$742 to \$1,029 for three-bedroom, compared with the average asking rent of about \$1,800 for apartments in Orange County. Two-bedroom units are 809-842 square feet, and three-bedroom units 1,076-1,129 square feet.

The units are available only to households that make less than 50 percent of the area’s median income adjusted for household size. For example, the income limit for a family of three is \$43,900.

“It’s important to have affordable housing because it gives an opportunity to folks to come to Irvine and realize a dream they might not otherwise be able to realize and that strengthens our

HOUSING » PAGE 2



KYUSUNG GONG — CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The 84-unit Espaira Apartments opened in Irvine Friday.

THINGS TO DO

Deep inside the Bowers, an ancient world comes alive



David Whiting
Columnist

Walk with me into a hidden world of ancient artifacts, where few humans are allowed.

Beyond rooms with treasures displayed in secure translucent “jewel boxes” at the Bowers Museum in

Santa Ana, my guide enters a deserted hallway and turns right, then left, then right again.

We come to a pair of thick, heavy and very wide double doors that are locked tight. But my guide has a key card.

She swipes and a tiny light flashes. In the silence, there is the muffled click of locks unlatched. We walk down a long, dimly lit beige hallway and pause.

WHITING » PAGE 17



MINDY SCHAUER — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Bowers Museum registrar Katy Hess, left, and curator Victoria Gerard carefully unwrap a makeup box from China’s Summer Palace Museum in Beijing. It is part of the Empress Dowager Cixi exhibit opening Nov. 12. The pieces arrive in wooden crates and are carefully unpacked, assessed for any damage and then stored before the exhibit is set up.

BEACHES



PAUL RODRIGUEZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Martin Diaz glides through the water in Newport Beach on Saturday.

Sharks in the water? Nope, they’re surfers in costumes

By Laylan Connelly
lconnelly@scng.com
@ocbeaches on Twitter

Several sharks lurked in the ocean, but none of the surfers seemed spooked.

Some 100 surfers adorned in wacky costumes, including

sharks, hit the water in Newport Beach just north of the pier early Saturday morning.

The spectacle is a quasi-holiday for locals, some of whom spend months thinking up creative get-ups that can withstand waves and salt water.

COSTUMES » PAGE 14



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God First Since 1899



PHOTOS: MATT MASIN — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Gina Williams, who suffers from a variety of ailments, including congestive heart failure, is excited about her dream wedding dress at a bridal shop in Brea in June.

Slices

FROM PAGE 1

It was clear to Gina what her last wish would be — marrying Cesar and making their relationship “right with God.” The wedding would clear her conscious and allow her to die without regret, she said. “I’m going to marry the best man in the whole world. The kindest, the most humble, the most loving and giving. We’re best friends, and it’s time to give back to him. He’s given me his whole life.”

Michelle Wulfestieg, executive director of the Southern California Hospice Foundation, granted Gina her last-wish wedding.

A week before the scheduled Laguna Beach ceremony, no one was sure if Gina would be able to stand for it. But she was adamant — she not only stood, but danced at her wedding.

She and Cesar danced to their wedding song, “A Thousand Years” by Christina Perri, a song from a movie Gina loved to watch with Cesar on days she was too sick to do much else. They danced for three minutes.

“Sometimes that’s all it takes, just that three minutes of hope and that will last her through eternity,” Wulfestieg said. “And it will last Cesar the rest of his life because he knows



Joana Ortiz plays with Williams’ hair during a touching moment between the two.

that she died happy. It gives him that sense of peace for the remainder of his days knowing he did the right thing and she was taken care of.”

A month after her dream wedding, Gina was back home in her one-bed-

room northwest Anaheim apartment. She sat on a recliner with a blanket, a box of Kleenex and her dog Gigi on her lap. Cesar was next to her.

Gina’s health declined quickly, and she could no longer walk on her own

or speak. She wanted to watch her wedding video.

As the DVD started, Gina’s hands moved to the box of tissues and tears started to fall. Cesar held her, rubbed her arms and whispered, “It’s all gonna be OK, baby.”

Eight days pass and so does Gina. Before sunrise on Aug. 12, with Cesar, Gina’s son Kevin and Kevin’s fiance Joana holding on to Gina, she dies.

Framed photographs from her wedding hang on the walls, leaving Gina

with the faces and memories she was proud of — proud to be “right with God” and proud of her family.

*mmasin@scng.com
@matthewmasin on Twitter.*



Cesar Rojas smiles as he sees Williams in her wedding dress for the first time before their ceremony on July 7.

“I’m going to marry the best man in the whole world. The kindest, the most humble, the most loving and giving. We’re best friends, and it’s time to give back to him. He’s given me his whole life.”

— Gina Williams



In the last days of July and the beginning of August, Williams’ health rapidly declined. Gina could no longer get up without assistance and her speech was rendered to mumbles and groans. Rojas kept Williams feelings safe, with reassuring words and Gigi remained close, always perched nearby.