

# Tijuana

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who speaks English’ or I could come over here and make a difference.”

## Only the Beginning

Luken’s significant binational business experience includes working for the **Otay Mesa Chamber of Commerce** from 2000-05 with longtime Executive Director **Alejandra Mier y Teran**.

At the chamber, he was involved in some of the earliest stages of various border-related developments including the **Cross Border Xpress** airport terminal connecting San Diego with the Tijuana International Airport which opened in 2015,

and California state Route 905 becoming a freeway connecting Interstates 5 and 805 in San Ysidro to the Mexico border around 2010.

He was part of focus groups for the growth and expansion of the **Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI)** pass, including when SENTRI moved from being under the direction of the Department of Justice’s **Immigration and Naturalization Service** to the Department of Homeland Security’s **Customs and Border Protection** in 2003.

SENTRI allows pre-approved, low-risk travelers to re-enter the

U.S. from Mexico as pedestrians or in vehicles by using special lanes at the border.

Luken also previously was a partner in **Alternative Media Revista Tu Casa**, a real estate and home improvement guide for Tijuana and the South Bay, and owned **JL Venture Group, Inc.**, an e-commerce business.

Luken said board members and stakeholders are SBC’s biggest strengths and that his first order of business will be to meet with the SBC’s 25 board members and listen to what they have to say.

“We’re a proven concept, this group,” Luken said. “We’ve created great things. I think going to every



**Steve Williams**  
Co-chair  
San Diego-Tijuana  
Border Coalition  
selection committee

board member and listening... we’ll have a new route being taken for the SBC. We just want to try to focus on a few things we can really, really accomplish, instead of being so dispersed and moving on so many things at the same time. We really want a few slam dunks made soon.”

One of those may include one of the spots where people cross over by foot.

He said while he was heartened by the recent re-opening of San Ysidro Port of Entry’s Pedestrian West – after three years of closures related to the pandemic – an important connection for the thousands of travelers who use it, many have expressed disappointment with its current limited hours of 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., a far cry from its former 24-hour operation, and the fact that it is only open going northbound from Tijuana to San Diego. ■

# Bonds

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**Betty Mohlenbrock** founded UTR in San Diego in 1989 to fill a local need – so deployed military service members could create video recordings of bedtime stories and provide connections for their families at home. Since then, UTR has continued to keep military families reading together – no matter the distance between them – connecting families, says UTR CEO **Tim Farrell**.

## Major Milestone Hit at End of 2022

And recently the organization hit a major milestone. At the end of 2022, UTR

reported that it had connected more than 3 million military family members through the bonding experience of shared story time.

“We’ve seen through outreach back to us that of the families we serve, 93% say (the video stories) make the family bonds stronger,” he said.

Additionally, 97% of the families they serve say UTR makes deployments easier – and 98% view UTR’s service as contributing to their children’s literacy and well-being.

“We think of it in terms of what we offer and what we make available to the military,” he said. “This is not something they can do on an iPhone or Face Time or

Skype. There is something to be said for that military child being able to see their absent parent, whatever the case may be, and to have that video available on demand.”

While he lives in Texas and is the first UTR CEO to live outside of San Diego, Farrell said it is a focus of his to make sure the organization remembers that although it has grown nationwide and worldwide, “San Diego is where the roots are, San Diego is where the heart is and San Diego is where such strong investment comes from. That’s not going to change on my watch.”

Farrell said **Northrop Grumman, BAE Systems, San Diego Foundation, the U.S. Midway Foundation, the Armed Services**

**YMCA in San Diego** and the **Coronado Library Foundation** are among UTR’s longtime partners, grantors and backers, who “put their investment and energy into supporting us.”

Farrell served in the U.S. Air Force for more than 23 years and is a veteran of Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. Retired since 2011, he was also a client of UTR with his own family, long before taking on the role of CEO.

“It is a big difference maker,” Farrell said. “To be able to enjoy the time when I could see my family live or by internet was great but there’s something to be said for having that recording that my wife could show our kids, on demand.” ■

# PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

HIRINGS, PROMOTIONS, BOARD MEMBERS AND SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS IN SAN DIEGO



## CONSTRUCTION

New Hire



**Daphne Magdaleno**

JGD & Associates LLP, a leading CPA accounting firm in San Diego, is proud to announce its newest partner Daphne Magdaleno. A public accounting veteran, Magdaleno has almost 20 years of experience working with both private and publicly held companies in a variety of industries including technology, not-for-profit, hospitality, and manufacturing and distribution. Since joining JGD in 2022, Magdaleno has been instrumental in generating key new clients and developing a strong team of associates within JGD’s Assurance practice. In addition to her duties at JGD, Magdaleno has served on a number of boards, including her current role on the board at Kids Included Together, Inc, a nonprofit organization focused on teaching disability inclusive practices to people and organizations that serve kids.



## ACCOUNTING

Promotion



**Beatrice Baciu**

Beatrice Baciu has been promoted to Partner, Technology Consulting, at RSM US LLP – the nation’s leading provider of audit, tax and consulting services focused on the middle market.

During her more than 17 years of experience in consulting, software development, and project management, Beatrice has served as a Solutions Architect and Technology Evangelist on a wide range of projects built around Microsoft and other technologies.

Beatrice built a successful Content and Collaboration practice at RSM, helping their clients become more productive, secure and collaborate better within and outside their organizations.

Beatrice owns several technical certifications and is known in the Microsoft community as a contributor and speaker.

- College attended: Master in Computer Science, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania



## CONSTRUCTION

New Hire



**Steve Evanco**

Nationally ranked California construction firm Bernards welcomes the addition of Steve Evanco. Steve has joined Bernards’ Special Projects team as Project Executive and will be working with our K-14 Business Unit in our new San Diego office.

Steve will be overseeing Special Projects for the greater San Diego region and responsible for project acquisition and operations. He is a native of San Diego with over 16 years of experience in commercial general contracting in So Cal in both the public and private sectors. Steve’s experience in managing fast-paced, high-quality projects that require a nimble and resourceful workforce makes him a perfect fit for our Special Projects team. Steve Evanco can be reached at SEvanco@bernards.com.

The Special Projects Business Unit focuses on complex, fast-paced projects for a variety of clients, including aerospace/defense, commercial office & retail, science & technology, theme parks, institutional and education sectors.