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Long Beach convention center blending real and virtual worlds with new event concept



Remote production studio at the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center on October 4, 2020. Photograph courtesy of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Large groups of people coming together for corporate meetings or conferences may still be a thing of the distant future, but that doesn't mean staff at the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau have been twiddling their thumbs, waiting for the pandemic to end.

The bureau, which is responsible for marketing the city to event planners and visitors, is now offering an event solution for the pandemic era, and beyond.

As part of the new Long Beach Live concept, the cen-

ter and bureau collaborate in planning "blended events" for clients who are hoping to host some of their guests and presenters in person, but broadcast meetings to a larger, remote audience.

"We believe that this effort will continue to save our clients money, but also help them with a technology they're unfamiliar with," Steve Goodling, the bureau's president and CEO, said.

Large events, including conventions and concerts, have been effectively shut down for the last eight months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, putting an array of people—from caterers to event planners—out

of work. It will likely be mid to late 2021 until some form of large gatherings can occur, and even then officials say precautions will still be in place.

Officials at the CVB say the pandemic is likely to permanently change the way people think about large gatherings—and they want to be on the cutting edge.

Clients will now be able to use cameras and other equipment provided by the center, and take their pick of either pre-selected software solutions or programs they may already be familiar with, like the omnipresent Zoom meeting platform.

Moreover, Goodling said,

"we view this as growing the actual attendance for the conventions." While there will be fewer attendees in person during the pandemic, he expects that more people will likely participate online than would be able to physically travel to the events.

Adding a virtual component has other benefits too, like easing interaction with the audience during presentations and panels, said Jeff Forney, the bureau's vice president of marketing, membership and special projects.

Using meeting software and social media plugins, as well as

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Winners and losers in this year's historic election

Staff Report

A record number of voters turned out Tuesday, Nov. 3, to cast ballots for City Council, Long Beach Unified School District Board of Education, the Long Beach City College Board of Trustees and a citywide ballot measure.

County officials were still tabulating thousands of ballots—and ballots will still be accepted through Nov. 20 as long as they are postmarked by Election Day.

Most of the local races, however, were all but settled late Tuesday, with some races still in play. Here's recap of what we know as of Friday, Nov. 13:

District 2 City Council

Cindy Allen, a businesswoman and former police officer, bested Realtor Robert Fox in the race to represent the city's Downtown waterfront and Alamitos Beach.

After a bruising campaign on both sides, Allen claimed 53.5% of the vote, and Fox won 46.5% of the vote.

Allen would replace Jeannine Pearce, who did not seek a second term.

District 6 City Council

Suely Saro, a professor at Cal State Los Angeles, handily defeated the incumbent Dee Andrews in District 6, which includes much of Central Long Beach.

Saro earned about 60% of the vote to become the first Cambodian elected to office in Long Beach, a significant milestone for a community that has rallied for more say in local government.

Andrews was seeking his fourth term on the council after winning as a write-in candidate in 2016. He earned about 40% of the vote.

District 8 City Council

Incumbent councilman Al Austin retained his seat representing North Long Beach and Bixby Knolls, earning a third term by defeating challenger

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk. Austin earned about 57% of the vote. Thrash-Ntuk, executive director of a housing agency, earned about 43% of the vote.

Unions poured massive amounts of money into this race, including political action committees supporting or opposing the candidates.

LBUSD Board of Education, District 2

Erik Miller, director of a nonprofit and a relative newcomer to politics, was the likely winner of this seat representing West and Central Long Beach on the school board.

Miller won 51.7% of the vote, and Tonia Reyes Uranga, a consultant and former two-term councilwoman, earned 48.3% of the vote.

It is unclear how many votes are left to count, but Miller's lead held through Nov. 10.

LBCC Board of Trustees, Area 4

Herlinda Chico, a field deputy for Supervisor Janice Hahn, is leading a three-candidate race to represent southeast Long Beach, Signal Hill and Catalina Island on the LBCC trustees.

Chico had earned roughly 41% of the vote. Richard Gaylord, a local Realtor, was in second place with about 40% of the vote, and professor Lee Loveridge had about 19% of the vote.

This race is a winner-take-all to replace Doug Otto, who won a seat on the LBUSD board earlier in March.

Measure US

Long Beach voters also voted in favor of a ballot measure that will raise the tax on oil production in the city's coastal Tideland areas by 30 cents.

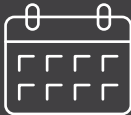
The tax is expected to generate up to \$1.6 million annually, which the city has pledged to use for equity programs in underserved areas and to address climate change.

Measure US is passing comfortably with 57% of the vote.

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Love at first slice: Thunderbolt Pizza now serving New York-style pies in Bixby Knolls



Thunderbolt Pizza owner Jay Stebbins removes a pizza from the oven. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Colpo di fulmine is Italian for “the thunderbolt.”

But it’s not a reference to the environmental phenomena of lightning flashing as thunder crashes. The Italian phrase describes the moment when love strikes—so powerful and intense it cannot be denied—without warning. In other words, love at first sight.

And this is where Jay Stebbins got the name for his restaurant—Thunderbolt Pizza—which opened its doors in Bixby Knolls on Oct. 31.

“It’s a Brooklyn-style, date-night pizzeria,” Stebbins said. “The kind of place you can go for a nice salad, a pizza, and a bottle of wine on a date, or with your family, or to hang with a bunch of friends. The type of pizzeria I’ve always gravitated to.”

Originally from New York, Stebbins moved to the Bay Area for about four years. He then moved back to New York but said it just wasn’t the same. So he packed up again and moved to Southern California to join his brother Brandt, who owns and operates Stoney’s Pizza in Huntington Beach.

Throughout his 20s and 30s, Jay said he gained tons of restaurant experience—from serving to bartending to managing

to opening. But this is the first time he has opened his own restaurant with his own money, he said.

“I always said the only restaurant I

would ever do myself would be a pizzeria,” Stebbins said, adding that opening up any other type of restaurant during a pandemic would be much more difficult.

“Obviously, pizza delivers really well,” he said.

Stebbins has always loved eating pizza. (Please Continue to Page 4)



Thunderbolt Pizza opened in Bixby Knolls on Oct. 31. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



Thunderbolt Pizza owner Jay Stebbins prepares dough by hand. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

(Continued from Page 3)

za and over the years has developed an affinity for making it himself. He even went as far as building a wood-fired oven in the backyard of his Huntington Beach

home. (But he is planning to move to Bixby Knolls as soon as possible, he added.)

As a self-taught pizzaiolo pulling from his New York roots, Stebbins' pizzas have a thin crust made with hand-stretched

dough. He said he tries to put his own twists on his pizzas, including drizzling honey on his pepperoni pies and his own combination of herbs in the sauce for his white pizza.

One lesson Stebbins learned from Brooklyn is the importance of collaboration within a community.

"You reach out to the other businesses that have great products," Stebbins said. "I'm going to reach out to Cheese Addiction, Gusto Bread is doing nice stuff, there's a smoked meat place. I'll start looking at what they're doing and bringing some of their products into my pizza."

Stebbins even hinted at a potential collaboration with nearby Bixby's Brooklyn Deli for a pastrami pizza.

But the most crucial collaboration is the partnership Stebbins already has with his neighbors: Ambitious Ales. When he began the search for the perfect location, Stebbins said he was specifically looking at breweries.

"Pizza and beer is a fantastic combination," he said. "You don't really need to sell anyone on that."

In the midst of the pandemic, the partnership is particularly beneficial for the brewery because they are now open for business, serving up beers on their outdoor patio. To open with outdoor service, local and state law requires bars and breweries to team up with restaurants to incorporate food.

The partnership has mutual benefits. Stebbins said his team will constantly be aware of Ambitious Ale's flavor profiles and work to craft pizzas, salads and other dishes that complement them.

Ambitious Ales has been closed since mid-March, with the four owners pivoting business to a focus on distribution, including canning their beers, a product type the brewery did not offer pre-pandemic. Prior to opening, Stebbins would fire up his brick oven and dish out some test pizzas and other menu items to the Ambitious team.

"The pizza is really good. He's got some cool options and he's using high-quality ingredients," said Garrett Carroll, co-owner and master brewer of Ambitious Ales. "We're definitely excited to be working with him."

"He focuses pretty heavily on the dough—he's really big on fermentation," Carroll added, noting that the two companies have that in common.

While the partnership is particularly beneficial during the pandemic for Ambitious Ales, Carroll said the brewery owners don't foresee any lapse in the collaboration when business mandates begin to lax and ultimately lift.

Thunderbolt is the fourth pizzeria to call 4085 Atlantic Ave. home. Red Brick Pizza, Bella Pizza and, most recently, PowWow Pizza, which closed in January after about a year, previously operated out of the storefront. But Blair Cohn, executive director of the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association, has high hopes for the new venture.

"This is music to our ears. [Stebbins] wants to be part of the community, a fixture," Cohn said. "He created a nice space. I'm happy he chose this neighborhood and I'm happy Ambitious Ales has the opportunity to reopen."

"This is a fantastic community," Stebbins said. "This is a pretty big dream come true." ■

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‘It’s a real drag’: After more than two decades, Planet Books owners forced to vacate store’s long-time home



Co-owners James Rappaport and Michael Munns opened Planet Books in Long Beach nearly 22 years ago. The business is being forced out of its long-time home by the properties new owner. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Planet Books staff celebrated the store’s 22nd anniversary by boxing up 50,000 books, following a 30-day notice to vacate its long-time home by mid-November.

“We’re pretty frantic,” said co-owner James Rappaport, adding that he and his business partner, Michael Munns, are looking for a new space in Long Beach but have thus far had no luck.

“There were a couple of places that would have worked but we missed them by days,” Rappaport said. “If we’d have been told a week or two before, we could have made a good decision quickly.”

The pair were walking together years ago when Munns expressed a desire to have a large library, Rappaport said. The conversation ended with them settling on opening a bookstore. They opened up shop on Nov. 12, 1998, with no knowledge of how to operate a bookstore.

Today, with tens of thousands of used ti-

tles, Planet Books has something for everyone. And Rappaport and Munns have been known to come across high-end, rare books over the years. Rappaport recalled one book that was signed by 22 of the Founding Fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence. Other notable volumes in their inventory include first editions signed by the likes of George Orwell, Charles Bukowski, Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Brautigan, Albert Einstein and Paramahansa Yogananda.

“I love coming to work every day,” Rappaport said. “Something amazing always comes through the door, whether it’s a book or a person.”

The store used to host events such as book signings and other appearances. Rappaport recounted an appearance by Linda Blair, who played the demon-possessed child Regan in “The Exorcist.”

“I’ve got some signed cans of split pea soup in the back,” Rappaport said, alluding to the iconic scene in which Blair’s character vomits on a priest as he attempts an exorcism. Andersen’s split pea soup was used to replicate vomit during the filming of the scene.

Over the years, Planet Books has overcome myriad hurdles, Rappaport said: the Great Recession, extensive street work that kept sales at \$0 for days at a time and, most recently, COVID-19.

After being forced to shutter for about 10 weeks, Rappaport said the store had bounced back strongly upon reopening. The recent addition of comic book store Pulp Fiction next door was a nice boost for Planet Book business. So it looked like clear skies and smooth sailing for the bookstore, that is until their landlord served them their 30-day notice.

When the bookstore owners first learned the building was being sold, they fully expected their rent to go up, maybe even double, Rappaport said. But that would have been OK, he added. “We’ve been here for a long time and had a great deal,” he said.

But the partners never expected they would be forced out. However, the new property owner plans to occupy the building themselves.

“It’s a real drag. I don’t want to leave Long Beach,” Rappaport said. “But if we can’t find something in a decent neighborhood at a good price, I don’t know.” ■



Customers exit Planet Books after making purchases. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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Gulfstream announces departure from Long Beach; city working to backfill dozens of acres



Gulfstream is leaving Long Beach over the next six months. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

noting that COVID-19 has spread the city thin and caused many businesses to reposition and rethink operations. “So the fact that we may not have heard much from any company during these times is not a surprise.”

Jeremy Harris, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, released a terse statement placing the blame for the company’s decision squarely on city and state officials.

“[The Chamber] is dismayed by the recent Gulfstream announcement to close its Long Beach operation and the impact the decision will have on 700 area employees,” Harris wrote. “Although Gulfstream put forth the effort to maintain its presence in the city—at least through 2024—city and state officials lacked the motivation and fortitude to secure their future after 34 years in Long Beach.”

The move marks a drastic decrease in Gulfstream’s presence in California. The company currently occupies 22.5 acres in Long Beach with multiple hangars and administrative offices. The company also was awarded 20 additional acres in 2018 for redevelopment, which never occurred. The Van Nuys facility is a mere 1.5 acres and the company’s only other California presence is a 1.2-acre facility in Lincoln.

Long Beach Airport officials are working with Gulfstream to develop an exit plan, while simultaneously preparing a request for proposals, or RFP, for aerospace-related uses. The RFP is expected to be released in early 2021 to solicit leasing interest and development for the various spaces.

“This is a unique opportunity for a large area of land that will complement ongoing developments within the ... complex,” stated airport Director Cynthia Guidry.

Gulfstream has made significant investments in new facilities in Florida, Texas and England as well as expanding its facilities in Georgia—where it is headquartered—Wisconsin and Van Nuys.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Gulfstream Aerospace Corp. announced in October that it will wind down Long Beach operations in phases over the next six months, ultimately moving nearly 700 jobs to other facilities around the country.

The move blindsided city officials, who said they did not receive notice until hours before the announcement was made public.

While Mayor Robert Garcia said the city has always had “good and open lines of communication” with Gulfstream, Economic Development Director John Keisler admitted that communication has suffered recently as a direct result of the pandemic.

“Over the last few months we haven’t necessarily had the same communication with some of our companies,” Keisler said,



Four Gulfstream aircraft parked outside one of the company’s Long Beach Airport hangars. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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A white surgical mask with blue ear loops, shown against a blue background.

The Aquarium of the Pacific will host a five-week course on the coronavirus and global pandemic.

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Gulfstream officials said they will leverage these more modern facilities to enhance the overall experience of customers.

Long Beach employees will be given the opportunity to apply for positions at the three facilities. The Pacific Gateway Innovation Network has already connected with Gulfstream and will provide “virtual rapid response services,” including connections to local and regional job opportunities, for impacted employees, airport spokesperson Kate Kuykendall said in an email.

Curt Castagna, president and CEO of Aeroplex and Aerolease Group, said the announcement is a major blow to Long Beach as a whole, not just the airport and aviation economy.

“It’s very disappointing news for the city and the state,” Castagna said. “It’s a tremendous loss and will have a trickle-down effect on ... families, the hotel industry, the rental car industry and other support services.”

The company first set up shop in Long Beach in 1986. Last year, it enacted a five-

year lease extension to 2024, according to airport staff.

City officials, while shocked, are pointing to one silver lining: over the last five years, Long Beach has gradually become a hub for small satellite launch firms, with the city now home to five such companies—Virgin Orbit, SpinLaunch, Rocket Lab and Relativity Space. Over the last several months, Keisler said more than one of the companies have inquired about additional space for expansion. Outside aerospace manufacturers have also inquired

about space in Long Beach this year, Keisler added.

“We have one of the best space ecosystems in the country,” Garcia said.

Whether existing companies expand or new firms come to the city, Keisler said the goal is to funnel current Gulfstream employees into those new positions, thereby maintaining the area’s skilled workforce.

“We hate to see a longtime company leave but we want to move quickly,” Keisler said. “These are valuable, sought-after spaces.” ■

City council passes tenant harassment ordinance

■ By KELLY PUENTE
Staff Reporter

Tenants who have faced harassment from landlords in the pandemic will now have some protection under a new city ordinance passed Monday, Nov. 2.

In a special meeting the day before the election, the Long Beach City Council voted 5-0 to approve an ordinance that would bar local landlords from actions including shutting off utilities, failing to perform repairs, illegally entering for inspections and pushing a tenant to vacate through fraud or threats. The council members representing districts 3, 4, 5 and 8 were absent due to the meeting’s timing during the day.

The ordinance comes as many residents say they’ve been harassed by landlords as they’ve struggled to pay full rent in the coronavirus pandemic, even though they legally have protection under eviction moratoriums, which the state has extended to Feb. 1. The local ordinance went into effect on Tuesday, Nov. 3.

Councilman Dee Andrews proposed the item, which outlines 13 protections. A similar ordinance was proposed by Councilwoman Mary Zendejas in August but was scrapped from the council’s September agenda.

Andrews said the law is meant to target bad landlords who are taking advantage of vulnerable tenants.

“We know who the good ones are and

I hope we find out the bad ones so we will pay attention to these individuals,” he said.

Andrew Mandujano with Long Beach Forward, a local renters rights group, said unscrupulous landlords had refused to address water leaks, mold and rats and have distributed false flyers stating that tenants must pay full rent or face eviction.

“Vulnerable residents have been facing harassment from slumlords throughout the city,” he said.

Several landlords who spoke out against the ordinance expressed concern that it doesn’t contain any “bad faith” language that would apply to both landlords and tenants who make false claims.

They noted that California already has tenant protection laws, adding a city ordinance would cause confusion and would punish good landlords, they said.

“We’re responsible and caring owners,” said landlord Elaine Hutchison. “All owners will be harmed going forward.”

The ordinance does not block landlords from carrying out lawful evictions. Under the new local law, tenants will have to take their landlords to civil court to settle the matter.

Landlords found to be in violation could be subject to civil penalties of between \$2,000 and \$5,000. If the tenant is over the age of 65 or disabled a judge could award an additional \$5,000 per violation in addition to attorney fees. ■



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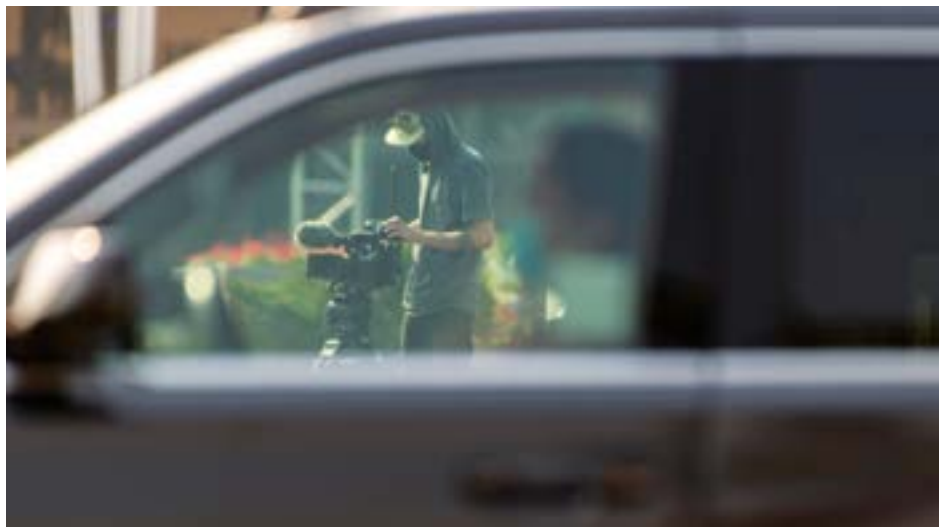
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Filming, a critical business in Long Beach, is slowly coming back



A cameraman is seen through a car window as a driver passes a film crew preparing to shoot a commercial for Polaris off-road vehicles in front of the Terrace Theatre. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

For eight seasons, the macabre Showtime series “Dexter” brought regular and dependable film-permit money to Long Beach. The city was the stand-in for Miami and other Floridian environments for the show about a professional blood-splatter expert and a hobbyist blood-splatter producer.

Long Beach appeared so frequently in the show that it was distracting for locals. That’s not a house in Florida; it’s over on San Anselme Avenue by St. Cornelius. Those aren’t the Everglades; that’s the El Dorado Nature Center.

“Dexter” ended after its eighth season in 2013, but Showtime recently announced it would bring the show back with eight new episodes and for a moment it looked like an opportunity for Long Beach to rack up some more sweet, sweet cash from Hollywood.

But viewers of the show’s final episode will recall that the show’s eponymous main character wound up as a lumberjack in Alaska, and while it may be interesting to see what Dexter Morgan can do with a professional-grade chainsaw and ax, the setting is too much of a stretch for Long Beach to play.

But the city has been a film-location hot spot long before “Dexter,” and it will continue to be one long after. No TV series is indispensable to a city that’s hosted hundreds of TV series episodes and hundreds of feature films and thousands of television commercials.

Like virtually every facet of the human experience, filming in Long Beach, or any other city that’s come to rely on the occasional check from showbiz to supplement its budget, has been hit hard and shut down by the coronavirus. Location filming in Long Beach went dim, if not dark, for a bit of February, and continued through March, April, May, and half of June, before cameras slowly started rolling again. About a quarter of the year was tossed onto the cutting room floor.

And while some quick ads were shot in Long Beach in early summer,

things are slowly returning to, if not pre-COVID level, then at least to bringing a bit of walking-around money to the department in charge of bringing in money from film work and special events in the city, which has been further crippled by the ongoing cancellation of any sort of event that involves a gathering of more than a handful of people.

“Things are starting back up now in terms of filming,” said Tasha Day, manager of Special Events and Filming in Long Beach. “We’ve had a bunch of commercials since the governor eased restrictions in June.”

Among the companies using Long Beach as a backdrop since June, according to Day, are Hyundai and Honda, both on West Broadway and Maine Avenue by the 710 Freeway, and at the nearby courthouse; Volkswagen at some residences on First Street in Bluff Park and on Broadway at Linden Avenue; McDonald’s at Drake Park and Junipero Beach; a Ford commercial on The Promenade; and Infiniti at the Civic Center Plaza.

And TV shows are inching back into town as well. “Bosch,” a longtime local staple, was at Community Hospital. The AppleTV+ sci-fi series “For All Mankind,” based on the idea that the space race between Russia and the U.S. had never ended, spent some time at the Boeing hangar, Day said. Also filming here in the post-COVID era was the sports drama “All American” taking advantage of the currently vacant Community Hospital, and the USA network’s “Straight Up With Steve Austin,” in which the WWE legend chats with other sports stars, filmed at Alamitos and Granada beaches.

And “Goliath” is coming back for a fourth season, Day said. The Amazon Prime series featuring Billy Bob Thornton makes use of Long Beach in several shots for the show, set mainly in Santa Monica. Also coming back to town soon will be the cast and crew for the 12th season of CBS’s “NCIS: Los Angeles,” a series that’s spent a lot of money in Long Beach over its run. Most recently, “Lucifer,” the urban fantasy crime series that was dumped by Fox and renewed by Net-

flix, filmed at Downtown’s Hamburger Mary’s on Oct. 21.

With the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center still virtually shut down, the complex has been cashing in on Hollywood as well. In happier times, the place was generally pretty busy with filming, and now it’s picked up a couple of projects that remain under wraps with non-disclosure agreements signed, said the facility’s general manager Charlie Beirne. One thing that’s known is that one of the projects is a Netflix comedy special filmed at the Terrace Theater plaza, though the talent’s names are being kept quiet.

Additionally, the center’s acres of unused parking areas have been getting work as a site for filmers’ base camps, which, because of COVID restrictions, can no longer be set up in public areas.

All film crews now bring along their own COVID compliance officer to make sure that everything is done safely.

“When they were filming the comedy special we all got tested for COVID twice a day,” said Beirne. “Anyone who came near the place was tested. The compliance officers are extremely safe and proactive in how everything is handled.”

Day, of the special events department, said when film companies apply for a permit, they have to submit COVID prevention plans that go to the city’s Health Department for approval. Companies also must sign a COVID form, which includes the usual precautions as well as such things as setting up hand-washing facilities with running water, soap and paper towels, strategically placing hand-sanitizer stations around the work area and sanitizing locations with EPA-registered disinfectant methods after film work is completed.

Filming fees begin with a \$368 application and a permit fee of \$525 per day, and there are other expenses for staff monitoring and revisions. Location fees depend on the site. Private businesses and homeowners can negotiate with the production companies, while renting public areas vary. It’s \$815 per day for Marina Green, the Rainbow Lagoon or Shoreline Park, to \$5,100 a day for

Shoreline Drive, a popular and rare spot for freeway sequences.

Although filming in Long Beach goes back to the silent-picture days of 1913 when Balboa Studios opened a mammoth lot at Alamitos Avenue and Sixth Street, the city’s popularity with Hollywood really took off in the mid 1970s with frequent visits by the cast and crew from ABC’s “Matt Huston” and NBC’s “CHiPs.” The latter show made extensive use of the long and scenic stretches of Shoreline and Queensway drives, according to John Robinson, who had worked in the city’s filming office before starting his own Long Beach Locations business, which pairs residences and businesses in Long Beach with the needs of TV, movie and commercial production companies.

Long Beach is a favorite location for movies, TV and commercials for a variety of reasons. “The city can look like so many different places,” said Robinson. “Its homes and neighborhoods go from traditional to beach, to mid-America to palm trees. So many homes here could be in Indiana or Ohio.”

Long Beach also has the advantage of being within Los Angeles’ TMZ, or Thirty Mile Zone. Film-related unions use this zone to determine their workers’ pay scale and whether hotel lodging is required for workers. Expenses balloon outside the TMZ, which radiates from the intersection of Beverly and La Cienega boulevards—about where the Beverly Center is located.

Most importantly, filming experts agree, is the cooperation and film-friendliness of the city and Tasha Day and her Long Beach’s Filming and Special Events office.

“The infrastructure for filming in Long Beach is unparalleled, from the film office to the fire and police departments,” said Robinson. “They all try to make each shoot a successful one.”

Also, from the time a location manager makes a call to [Day] and says where they want to shoot, it takes about three days to get permitted, while other cities it can take up to 10 days, and time is money.” ■



Film crews keep a Polaris off-road vehicle under raps as they prepare to film a commercial for the motor company in front of the Terrace Theatre. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



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Hotel operators see big losses, don't expect business to return until mid to late 2021



With vehicle entrances blocked, the Hyatt Regency in Downtown Long Beach has been closed since mid-March, with no plans to reopen until 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

The COVID-19 pandemic has been, in no uncertain terms, devastating to the hotel industry, with local facilities anticipating millions of dollars in losses this year due to nearly nonexistent tourism and business travel.

“This year started out a blockbuster—we were beating last year by 3-5% in January and February,” said Imran Ahmed, general manager of Long Beach Marriott. “March was on track to beat last March but then everything went down and we haven’t been able to recover.”

The Marriott facility usually grosses between \$18 million and \$20 million annually, Ahmed said. However, due to excessively low occupancy rates—at one point plummeting as low as 9%—Ahmed only expects the hotel to bring in around \$5 million.

Adjacent to the airport, JetBlue’s departure from Long Beach in October was another blow to the Marriott’s bottom line. The airline contract for pilots and crew to stay at the hotel during layovers was Marriott’s largest. Additionally, Ahmed said he discounted rates up to 40% to attract more business.

To break even, the hotel needs a consistent monthly occupancy around 50-55%, Ahmed said. As it is, occupancy has been consistently around the 37% mark since summer.

While no Marriott employees have been let go, Ahmed said layoffs are likely soon to come. For months, staff—including Ahmed—had reduced schedules, working three to four days per week, which allowed the hotel to save on payroll expenses.

The one silverlining: the Marriott used this downtime to complete a massive \$18 million renovation of the hotel, including rooms, meeting space, restaurants, banquet halls and public areas.

“We didn’t get any guest complaints filed during the renovation,” Ahmed said with a chuckle.

The Marriott was not the only hotel to undergo renovations during the pandemic. The 138-room Hyatt Centric The Pike Long Beach in Downtown began renovations in December that were completed in July, four months after the pandemic began. The hotel has since reopened.

The city’s second Hyatt property, the Regency in Downtown, ceased operations in mid-March and has yet to reopen. With 522 rooms, the Regency is the city’s largest hotel, usually filled with convention goers. However, the pandemic has prevented all in-person conventions and has kept the hotel shuttered.

“[We] have a small team working to upkeep the maintenance and security of the building during this period,” Regency and Centric General Manager Sid Ramani said in an email. “We anticipate

resuming Hyatt Regency in early 2021.”

Ramani said Hyatt’s top priority is caring for its “hotel family,” which led to the development of the Hyatt Care Fund. The fund was developed through the Hyatt Hotels Foundation and provides relief to those financially impacted by the pandemic.

For all the hotels are open, operations aren’t expected to hit pre-COVID levels until summer 2021 at the earliest. Mooyon Kim, general manager of Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport and the new Staybridge Suites, said he fully ex-

pects a soft first half of the year, which could extend into September if current trends continue.

“It really depends on how people gain confidence to travel and overcome the fear of coronavirus,” said Kim, adding that a vaccine would likely boost business.

Despite the challenges, Kim said no layoffs have occurred and none are planned. Some employees were furloughed early in the pandemic but almost all have returned to work, he said. Those who did not return either found other jobs or chose not to.

The Holiday Inn was selected to take part in the California Healthcare Workers Program, which was created to keep the state’s healthcare workers safe and healthy and reduce the spread of COVID-19 by providing them with hotel rooms. Kim said the program has been key in keeping the hotel afloat in lieu of nonexistent government and business travel, but noted that health worker room nights began decreasing around July.

The Staybridge hotel, adjacent to the Holiday Inn tower, opened in August just in time to host Food Network crews in town for the filming of an unidentified show. Because of the TV crew support, the Staybridge opened with about 30% occupancy, while the Holiday Inn dipped down to the low 20% range.

Staybridge occupancy has worked its way up to the high 40% range and the Holiday Inn closed out October around 70%. While the increases are a good sign, Kim noted that October is usually a strong month with occupancy around 90%.

“The projections are so fluid right now. Having been in the industry for 35 years, I have never seen anything like this ever,” Ahmed said. “Nobody can forecast anything—there are no trends, there is no pace.” ■



Furniture in the common areas of Long Beach Marriott have been covered with plastic to keep guests from using it during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pool area is currently being renovated. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

From offering movies to workspaces, local hotels have gotten creative in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic



Hilton Long Beach's outdoor movie nights proved so popular during the summer that the program was extended through the end of the year. Photo by Cheantay Jensen.

■ By **STEVE LOWERY**
Arts and Culture Editor

When Long Beach schools closed in spring, the Hotel Maya began offering harried parents day rate rooms complete with desks, Wi-Fi, pool privileges (i.e. P.E.), boxed lunches and a “recess” that gave kids cookies and milk and moms/dads chips, guac and margaritas.

Last month, with the Dodgers in the World Series but many fans unable to watch the games at their favorite sports bars, Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport converted, for the first time, its outdoor pool and courtyard into a viewing area offering not only big screen TVs, but bacon wrapped hot dogs, street tacos and full bar.

Over the past six months, area hotels, decimated by the near-standstill in business and leisure travel, have offered special rates on accommodations, food packages and converted rooms to “offices” for those suffering work-at-home cabin fever.

All businesses in that broad swath called hospitality have had to approach the challenges of the pandemic with equal parts creativity and desperation. Countless restaurants have gone alfresco and retail centers such as 2nd & PCH are offering outdoor movie nights. Cultural organizations ranging from the Aquarium of the Pacific to the Museum of Latin American Art to venues such as Alex's Bar have quickly had to package content online ranging from academic to artistic to EDM.

But while the aforementioned have had to shift how they do business, local hotels have also had to shift who they do business with, and that who is you.

“We’ve totally shifted from corporate travel from other areas, travelers from other places to being completely local, everything coming within a drive distance,” said Allison Lesser, Hotel Maya’s director of sales and marketing. “We’ve had to come up with creative ways to sell our

rooms: day rates, the packages, leisure, it’s all become completely locally focused and we’ve become more creative about how we go after that market.”

The reason for the shift in focus is simple. While local restaurants, bars and museums do have their share of tourist business, the large chunk of their revenue comes from local residents. But big, corporate hotels are beholden to customers who come from out of the city, state or country, business and leisure travelers, two segments that basically have not existed for the past six months.

“Never in Hilton’s 101-year history has our industry faced a global crisis that brings travel to a virtual standstill,” said Christopher Nassetta, Hilton’s chief executive during the summer.

Hilton owns the Maya as well as the Hilton Downtown, which reacted to hard times by hosting an outdoor summer movie series that was met with such enthusiasm, the weekly event has been extended through the holiday season. Now, you’ll not only be able to see how the “Grinch stole Christmas,” Dec. 1, but do it while enjoying apple cider, hot cocoa, S’mores and, yes, a full bar. (It is the happiest time of the year.)

Imran Ahmed, general manager of the Long Beach Marriott near the airport and chair of the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, said talk about shifting focus to locals began among his colleagues almost immediately. At his own hotel, he and his sales staff soon began targeting locals aggressively on social media.

“We started offering special deals and once we saw the needle going north, we decided to expand our efforts in neighboring cities, Orange County and LA,” Ahmed said.

He found that the most likely to react were young families; moms and dads either desperately looking for something to do with the kids or desperately looking

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(Continued from Page 11)

to escape the little darlings, if only for a night.

“We did get people who just wanted to get out and not cook, not clean, because that’s all some of them were doing: cooking, cleaning and going back to cook the next meal,” Ahmed said.

While offering people a respite from a redundant existence, local hotel managers say that offering those people something to do, something unique outside of the usual, daily routine, is key. Simply dropping room rates has proven ineffective, they say, because if someone’s concern about being in a hotel is about safety, taking \$20 off their daily bill isn’t going to change their mind.

“Everyone started panicking in the beginning and lowering the rate,” said Holiday Inn general manager Mooyon Kim. “But actually, it’s never been about the rate. It’s about giving people a level of confidence, about offering them something they can’t get elsewhere.”

Lesser says the Maya’s “Minimony” package that allows for up to 40 people, socially distanced, to celebrate weddings,

anniversaries, etc., has met with success.

“Any opportunity we have, we want to figure out how we create something that will attract people to us.”

How many more things they will have to come up with remains to be seen and could very well be determined by forces outside their control. Given the success of his World Series event, Kim said he was considering hosting weekly football games on Thursday and Monday nights, but gave up on the idea when he heard of a possible new wave of COVID.

“We thought it could be a good, consistent social event for us, but we decided not to execute it for now,” he said. “We don’t want to cause any trouble in the city.”

While all hotel management are looking for ways to ride things out, however long that takes, Kim has turned some of his thinking to what comes after. Convinced that his hotel will never fully get back all the business travel it lost—it made up about 80% of revenue—Kim made the decision to embrace the telecommuting that will make much of it unnecessary.

“We are going to invest in technology so we can offer local people the ability to



Looking to attract locals to its property, Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport offered viewing parties of the 2020 World Series around its pool and courtyard. Photo courtesy of Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport.

have virtual meetings and conferences here,” he said. “We have to keep finding new reasons, new ways to give people a reason to keep using us.”

Though finding what those things are could prove challenging, seeing as how this is all rather uncharted territory. Ahmed, who’s been in the business nearly 40 years, said he and his colleagues would

like to follow the trends but, “here we have no trends, no time frame. We have no idea.”

Asked if there was anything, anyone, any agency could do to help his industry and his colleagues, ultimately get back on their feet, he nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “A vaccine.” ■

On the Job: Keeping a hotel’s engines running during the pandemic

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Wearing steel toe boots and black cargo pants, from which hangs a set of keys that jingles like a wind chime at every step, Joe Perez looks like he’s ready to get down to business.

Every day, Perez works on myriad maintenance tasks necessary to keep two hotels of nearly 300 rooms up and running—from balancing the pool chemicals to fixing a sink—in a place that, currently, can feel a little lifeless.

“I’m used to seeing guests walking around, having meetings,” he said. “Now, it’s a bit of a ghost town.”

Servicing both the Staybridge Suites and the adjacent Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport still leaves Chief Engineer Perez with plenty of work on his hands, despite a significant slowdown in guest traffic brought on by the pandemic.

Adding the new Staybridge Suites, a hotel that caters primarily to guests seeking longer-term accommodation and that opened earlier this year, has been a challenge. “I’m still getting used to managing two facilities,” Perez noted. “It’s a lot tougher.”

The pandemic has opened up some opportunities for maintenance at the Holiday Inn, one of 40 iconic tower-shaped hotels built by the chain in the 1960s, but the reduced staffing levels have forced Perez and his team to crank up the efficiency.

“There’s always something going on; it’s always keeping me busy,” he said.

On a recent day his team of six has snaked its way up the tower, one level at a time, refreshing the paint and

checking light fixtures in five to six rooms per day.

But training new arrivals to the team has been more difficult as well during the current public health crisis. “There’s so many things on your mind because of this that you’re not really yourself. You can’t talk to people like you used to,” Perez said.

Especially in a hands-on job like building maintenance, the chief engineer had to adapt his teaching meth-

ods to allow for proper distancing. “It’s been a learning experience for me too,” he added.

Every morning, Perez meets with his workers on shift to discuss the tasks of the day, before checking in with the contractor who built the Staybridge Suites and is still on site to help smooth out any remaining kinks.

Throughout the day, Perez switches from speaking English to Spanish without missing a beat, a skill that has

helped him connect more easily with the people on his team as well as outside contractors. “However they talk to me, I talk to them,” he explained. “I think it makes them feel more comfortable.”

While it’s great to have some time to catch up on work that is much harder to accomplish with more guests present, Perez said he misses the hustle and bustle they bring. “I think everyone does, right?” he asked. ■



Joe Perez, chief engineer, turns off the water to a room as he works on a valve in the bathroom at the Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova

Virtual Conventions

(Continued from Page 1)

technology from the realm of gaming and esports, the bureau and center can facilitate Q&A sessions, polling and live chats.

Over the past few months, the Downtown facility has been bolstered with new bandwidth capabilities, increased installation of lighting in all venues, a stand-alone studio, an array of remote-controlled robotic cameras and production and editing space.

“It lets the audience know that their participation is important, they’re being heard and that they’re being seen,” Forney said.

To help make the various parts blend together seamlessly, a new position was created, which also provided the bureau with a welcome opportunity to rehire a former employee who was laid off as a result of the pandemic.

Travon Jones, a former sales manager at ASM Global, who rose to the position of food and beverage operations director during his seven years with the company, will be leading the concept’s implementation as the new director of creative initiatives.

Jones said his experience in the food and beverage department has equipped him with an organizational skill set that will serve him well in his new position. “There’s a lot of logistics that go into



Charlie Beirne, general manager of the Long Beach convention center and Joseph Jenci, senior vice president of sales & administration of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, sit onstage inside the center’s Pacific Ballroom. Photo courtesy of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

that, so I think it’s a perfectly smooth transition,” he noted.

And to hear Goodling tell it, a transition is on the horizon, not just for Jones but for the convention business at large. With gatherings likely to be limited for a while to come, Goodling said he ex-

pects the blend of virtual and in-person programming to stick around.

It’s unclear when the center will be able to host any portion of events in person again, but a poll of clients who already booked events for the coming years found that 55% are interested in

using the new “blended” concept. Until then, the focus will be on facilitating virtual gatherings.

“COVID really accelerated the use of technology,” he said. “We know that the people really like the autonomy that it’s given them.” ■

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Granny flats galore: Long Beach property owners seek to add hundreds of accessory dwelling units



A small crew constructs an accessory dwelling unit in the backyard of a Lakewood Village home. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Residents in some Long Beach neighborhoods might want to get used to circling the block a few more times as they search for a parking spot after work.

In September of last year, state legislators approved a number of bills that made it easier for landowners to add residential units to their properties without the burden of providing additional parking spaces on site.

Since then, the city of Long Beach

has received 360 applications for such units, often referred to as granny flats or ADUs—accessory dwelling units—records obtained by the Long Beach Business Journal show. Currently, 220 are still under review for possible approval by the Long Beach Development Services Department.

ADUs are residential units that are added to an existing structure or property, like a studio with a kitchen and bathroom built atop an existing garage. But while some owners seek to build or renovate rental units for one or two residents on their properties, others are planning massive expansions.

A project approved in the Bluff Park Historic District, for example, would add eight bedrooms to an existing property, without providing any additional parking outside of a two-car garage already located on the property.

Projects like these have caused an uproar in some neighborhoods due to potential impacts on parking and the increase in population density they entail.

“We’re going to lose that identity of neighborhood and community,” said Dan Pressburg, president of the DeForest Park Neighborhood Association.

North Long Beach, and the DeForest Park neighborhood in particular, is among the most densely populated neighborhoods to receive a significant number of ADU applications.

Pressburg said he was concerned about the impact the additional units would have on parking, the neighborhood’s architectural integrity and overall quality of life.

“You’ve got people stacked up on people and you have no parking,” he said. “That’s a big deal; it’s a really big deal.”

Because of its big lot sizes and proximity to the Cal State Long Beach campus, the Los Altos area is primed for ADUs to provide housing for students, a prospect that has some residents worried about over-crowded living arrangements and late night partying in the otherwise quiet residential neighborhood.

“Everybody in this neighborhood is hot about it,” said Michele Kreinheder, a local real estate agent and co-chair of the Los Altos Village Group.

The biggest challenge, she said, was that most of her neighbors didn’t realize the significant changes on the horizon when state legislators passed new regulations around ADUs last year.

“People were just not keyed into it,” Kreinheder said. Now, however, “everybody’s tongues are wagging about ADUs.”

AB-68, a bill passed in September 2019, prohibits cities from requiring on-site parking if the proposed site is within half a mile of public transportation, such as a bus or metrorail stop. ADUs in historic districts are also exempt from any parking requirements.

The new law was necessary because some cities refused to do their part in supplying more much-needed housing across the state, said Assemblyman Phil Ting, the author of the bill.

“When the first number of ADU bills was passed, cities started putting [in] really artificial and onerous barriers to continue to block ADUs. One of those was unrealistic parking requirements,” Ting said. “Many of which basically banned ADUs in those jurisdictions.”

The Bay Area assemblyman and others felt the need to act. “As state legislators, we’re trying to solve a problem for the state,” he explained. “If you talk to most city councils, they all support housing, they just don’t support housing in their city. They all expect some other city to build the housing; they want to create the jobs.”

But creating housing is a crucial step toward enabling economic growth, Ting said. “If any city, like Long Beach, wants to grow their economy, they’re going to need to be able to provide housing for their workforce.”

As for parking, Ting said the issue isn’t a lack of space for cars, it’s a lack of convenient alternatives to a personal vehicle. “The parking issue is not exacerbated by housing, the parking issue is exacerbated by a lack of transportation options,” Ting said.

Because of the number of bus stops in the city, combined with other exemptions provided by state law, the development services department has since assumed a no-parking-required policy for ADUs.

But public transit ridership outside of a few transit centers has remained low, with some bus stops seeing less than 50 boardings per day, and numbers have further dwindled as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

“Public transit is catching up, I think, but there’s still a lot of work to do,” said Scott Kinsey, a planner with the city’s development services department. “With ADUs in the picture, that becomes even more important.”

Kinsey said the addition of ADUs to existing properties was a “good housing strategy,” but that there are cases of property owners going overboard.

“There’s going to be a few cases where you will get a perfect storm,” Kinsey said, pointing to high-occupancy projects in neighborhoods already struggling with parking issues. “We look very closely to make sure they’re not doing more than allowed by state law.”

But given the blanket no-parking-required regulations signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom last year, there’s little the city can do.

“I think that the legislature was trying to add a lot of flexibility. They definitely did that,” Kinsey said. But, he added, “It’s always a balancing act.” ■

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Bixby Knolls' Petroleum Club gets a reprieve from the wrecking ball and will reopen



The entranceway of Long Beach Petroleum Club, a social club established in 1954, for people in the oil business and later opened membership to the public. The club closed its doors March 31, 2019, but is now set to reopen. Photo by Stephen Carr.

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

The once-doomed and sadly shuttered Petroleum Club that has operated since 1958 has received a surprising reprieve and is on the verge of a reopening and, perhaps, a renaissance.

In March 2019, the Petroleum Club of Long Beach, located at 3636 Linden Ave., was helplessly standing before the wrecking ball. It was, in effect, blindfolded and enjoying its last cigarette before it would be razed to make room for a tower of condominiums.

It had been sold and officially closed on March 31, 2019.

And at that point, Long Beachers had, apparently too late, suddenly fallen in love with the place—its kitsch, its “Mad Men”/Palm Springs vibe, its retro opulence, its kool kat Rat Pack nostalgia, its still-palpable memories of when its Linden Lounge circular bar and its Red Room restaurant were packed with filthy rich oil tycoons and their trophy wives drinking highballs and dining on prime rib while their kids frolicked and splashed in the pool by the patio.

Longtime members and third-generation young residents wanted to rescue the club from ruin and ignoble condo development. A month after it closed, the preservationist group Long Beach Heritage hosted a wake of sorts as part of “This Place Matters,” a national event showcasing important and historic buildings throughout the country.

It was too late. The deal was done.

But the deal was no match for the troubling year of 2020. The coronavirus brought construction to a whip-lashing halt and the would-be developers

had to send the wrecking ball packing and try to figure out what to do with the J. Richard Shelley-designed club, long admired for its mid-century design and its use of rough-cut stone facade.

The solution: Turn back the clock and let the Petroleum Club get back to what it was born to do.

Its owners, who include Long Beach Realtor Bill Larson and his partners, have teamed with local events and catering company, The Grand, to offer the space for special events and, eventually, open it up to a club and/or pool memberships, as well as for public and community events, such as those that were offered before the club's closure last year.

Right now, the club is being restored to its former glory, says Dan D'Sa, vice president of The Grand. “We pulled carpet, painted it; we're doing a hard deep cleaning. I wanted to preserve the integrity of the club and not change things. It would be like taking over Joe Jost's and changing it. It would be horrible. So we're trying to preserve its history.”

So, yes. The circular bar will still be a circular bar. The Red Room will still be red.

It won't reopen with a gala grand opening, said D'Sa.

“It won't be suddenly the new hot place in Long Beach,” he said. “We're going to slowly let it grow, just let it mature by itself.”

D'Sa said the club would initially do some social events, then do first or last Thursdays prime rib luncheons in the Red Room, limited to 75 meals, “and let that build.”

No date has been set yet for even a soft opening, said D'Sa. “I think we're probably a month and a half to two months

from opening the doors and sharing it

with people,” he said. “We're taking our time and doing it right. But, if a vaccine came out we could be open within two to three weeks.”

The Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association had been availing itself of the Petroleum Club in its waning days, sort of re-discovering the place for its mid-century look and feel. BKBIA executive director Blair Cohn held several regular events there before it closed, and he's anxious to fire up his events at the space.

“We're thrilled to death that the club and its building are being saved and given a second life,” said Cohn. “When it was sold we talked to the new owners and we really tried our best to get them to reconsider, but they were going to develop the space. Then COVID hit and that changed their plans.”

Now, he said, the plan is to work with the club and The Grand to work on various ways to use the facility, including a community pool membership in the summer and whatever else they can do, most particularly the tried and true events the association held at the Petroleum before it closed, including the Good Spirits Club, dinner nights, the Literary Society and Knights of the Round (Turn) Table.

“We're poised,” said Cohn. “We want to go back and help activate the club.” ■

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Pricey property sales are doing just fine, despite COVID-19

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

If your life is filled with worry these days—and whose isn’t? (Answer to that shortly)—do yourself a favor and take fretting about the wealthy and super wealthy off your list of things keeping you awake at night.

While the rise in unemployment is higher than it was in the Great Depression and people dropping into poverty are in-

creasing in number, Wealth-X, a research firm that tracks the lives and holdings of the wealthy and the super wealthy (the latter group is made up of those with a net worth of more than \$30 million) has found that the super wealthy’s collective net worth grew 37% between the end of March and the end of August, proving that one of the best ways to make a lot of money is to start with \$30 million.

Wealth-X also reported that the number of members in the \$30-million club

rose 28% to 104,440 in North America during the same COVID period.

The diminished amount of human activity brought on by COVID closures and safe-distancing restrictions, though, has had an affect on everyone. Even the rich get bored sometimes. And, as Realtor Nate Cole, of Unique California Property, notes, “All people can do is buy houses.”

And so, that’s what people are doing. The upper end of the market in Long Beach remains strong after a brief slump during the COVID lockdown in March when the virus killed St. Patrick’s Day in its first volley of shots in a campaign to destroy holidays that has stretched all the way to Christmas so far.

But after that initial lull, the market has gone apace.

“I’d planned on taking a vacation,” said Cole, “That’s not gonna happen.”

Cole sells homes of architectural note all over Southern California. Locally, he’s sold a Paul Tay home in Park Estates for \$2.34 million and the mid-modern Hastings Residence on Tehachapi Drive in Bixby Knolls for \$1.4 million.

During COVID, he’s scored offers on a \$1.321 million home in Beachwood Canyon and a \$2.098 million residence in Ladera Heights.

Long Beach remains a bit different from most of LA and Orange counties.

Realtors have long said that the city has the best buys for people looking to live on the water, and it’s true. You can buy homes in Laguna and Newport beaches and Corona Del Mar and Dana Point for \$10-\$20 million all day long. And don’t even get started with Malibu, with its current listings topping out with a \$125-million seven-bedroom, 10-bath beach shack.

So when you’re talking about expensive homes in Long Beach, it’s all relative. But there are expensive homes here in the \$4-\$5-million range, and they’re not being bought by poor people.

Realtor Keith Muirhead, who’s specialized in the pricey homes in Naples and on the Peninsula, is having another good year after scoring the No. 1 slot in selling the most expensive home in Long Beach last year with the sale of a \$4.45-million three-level home at 6036 Lido Lane.

Muirhead said he’s just closed on a home at 215 Rivo Alto Canal for \$3.35 million, which he said is the highest price paid for a home across the Neapolitan Bridge from Naples Island proper. He also had a promising showing of a home at 220 Rivo Alto Canal on the ritzier side of the bridge. It’s listed at \$4.2 million. What a difference a bridge makes.

That property is next to a vacant lot, the last buildable lot in the neighborhood,

(Please Continue to Page 18)



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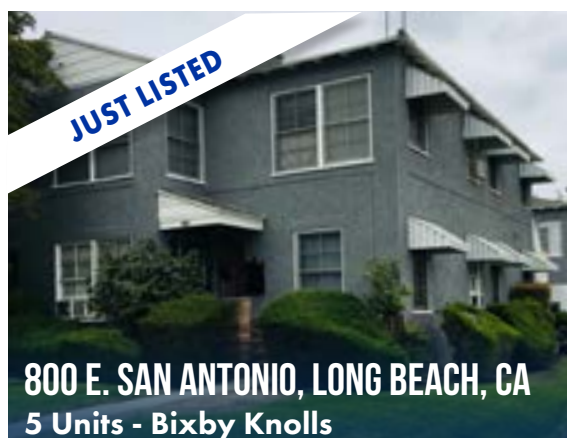
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Realtor Nate Cole sold this Paul Tay home in Park Estates for \$2.34 million. Listing photo.

(Continued from Page 16)

at 224 Rivo Alto Canal, that’s been listed for more than two years at \$4 million. The seller, who owns other properties in Naples, does not appear to be motivated.

“There’s a big wealth gap for sure,” Muirhead acknowledges. But the people at the top of the gap are snapping up expensive properties in the seven-figure range in Long Beach at a good clip, and Muirhead and others who specialize in high-dollar properties are running low on inventory. The wealthy may enjoy home-buying to cut through the COVID boredom, but it seems sellers aren’t as anxious to energize their ennui through real estate.

“What’s curious is that people who

are buying high-end properties are getting mortgages,” said Muirhead. “It used to be if a home was selling for more than \$2 million, people would just write a check. We called them ‘check-writers.’ But with interest rates so low, they’re borrowing cheap money,” otherwise known as OPM—Other People’s Money. “It’s the first thing they teach you when buying a house,” said Muirhead. “Use other people’s money.”

As October draws to a close, Muirhead said he was down to just a few listings. “It’s amazing,” he said, referring to how quickly his high-end listings are being snapped up. Among the few he has left are a three-story Mediterranean palace off the

water at 6424 Ocean Blvd. on the Peninsula listed for a buck under \$2 million, and a beautiful contemporary, if architecturally out of place, home at 240 The Toledo, listed at \$1.895 million.

Natasha Schultheis, of Coldwell Banker Coastal Alliance, says COVID has had an effect, though not on the wealthy. It’s just one more reason the rich are different from you and me.

“People who are above the upper threshold aren’t affected by the coronavirus,” she said. “They have the luxury of taking their job and working at home, they have the luxury of having a big savings account, they have the luxury of taking time off. When you’re rich you have a lot of dif-

ferent options.”

The wealthy also have the luxury of not being terribly concerned about the aspect of rising sea levels washing their \$4-million beach houses out into the Pacific someday. Even if that day comes during their lifetime, or the lifetime of their mortgages if they didn’t pay cash on the spot.

“Nah, people don’t care,” said Schultheis. “If you have a lot of money, yeah, your home will be wiped out, but people are willing to buy those houses anyhow. If they’re destroyed, they’ll just buy another one somewhere. My broker just closed a big one on Seaside Walk, all cash, for \$3 million. That’s when you don’t even care.” ■

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Park or parking lot: What should become of a former oil dumping ground near Los Cerritos?

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

An empty plot of land adjacent to the Los Angeles River is slated to become the new location for a self-storage facility and a RV storage lot—but a group of neighborhood residents has vowed to fight the project.

The 3701 North Pacific Place Project, currently under development by the Artesia Acquisition Company, encompasses a 38-foot-tall building with a footprint of 150,000 square feet. The RV lot would provide space to store up to 578 vehicles.

The parcel in question is wedged between the river to the west, the 405 Freeway to the south and Los Cerritos Park to the east. Formerly used as an oil brine water treatment facility, the property was covered in a thick oil sludge for decades, before it was partially cleaned up and covered with clean soil in the 1970s and 80s.

But local activists Juan and Carlos Ovalle say residents, especially those who grew up around the site in its previous condition, are worried about the toxic compounds that might be dredged up in the construction process.

“A lot of the people who have historical

knowledge of that property, they’re really concerned about it,” Juan Ovalle said.

In order to start construction, the developer will have to submit a remediation action plan to the state’s Department of Toxic Substances Control to show how they will prevent negative environmental impacts on the surrounding community. Once published, the action plan will undergo a 30-day public comment period before a permit can be issued.

Doused by emissions from port traffic and the adjacent freeways, the western side of Long Beach has long suffered high rates of respiratory illnesses. For the Ovalles and others, the current project once again brings into question the city’s commitment to improving the living conditions of some of its most vulnerable residents, many of them people of color.

Instead of a storage facility and an RV lot that would bring additional traffic to the area, they would like to see the property purchased by the city and turned into green space.

“Our side of Long Beach could really benefit greatly from having additional parks and open space,” Carlos Ovalle said.

Undeveloped land is becoming increas-

ingly scarce, he said.

“If the city is able to purchase it, at least we know that it’s there for eventual development,” Carlos Ovalle said. “We just don’t want to see that opportunity slip out of our reach.”

The Ovalles and others have begun to

raise funds to research options and oppose the project.

The project is currently in the middle of its public comment period, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act. Residents can submit comments on the project via email to lbs-cir-comments@long-beach.gov until Nov. 16. ■



The location slated to become a storage facility and RV lot, wedged between the Los Angeles River, the 405 Freeway and the Los Cerritos neighborhood in northwest Long Beach. (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies. Sanborn, U.S. Geological Survey, USDA Farm Service Agency).

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Here are the three major retail and housing

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Staff Reporter

Over the last few years, developers and real estate firms have had a bullish approach to North Long Beach. Three companies in particular, Frontier Real Estate Investments, LAB Holding and Westland Real Estate Group, have all shown interest in bringing amenities and housing to North Long Beach.

Councilman Rex Richardson, who oversees parts of the city where the projects are being built, said that when he took office, the community lacked public libraries, banks and walkable retail corridors. Richardson saw the construction of the Michelle Obama Library and upgrades to the Houghton Park community center and Fire Station 12 as success stories for the local community, but what was still lacking

was interest from developers to invest in the northern part of the city.

“People have been wanting to see the private sector get involved,” Richardson said.

The establishment of Uptown Commons by Frontier has opened the door for the other developments—The Uptown and The Beat seek to enhance walkable retail corridors in the region, something North Long Beach has been

primed for, Richardson said.

Uptown Commons

Frontier’s Uptown Commons, located at Atlantic Avenue and Artesia Boulevard, hosted a partial opening in June, bringing the first bank to the 9th District.

Uptown Commons’ exterior patio design has allowed newcomers Main Chick fried chicken restaurant and Oi Asian Fusion to successfully host grand-opening celebrations in September, and they continue to serve hungry local residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted restaurants to resort to outdoor seating, which is still allowed under the county’s current health orders—making exterior dining areas that much more valuable for new retail developments.

“Uptown Commons has been a hit,” Richardson said. “There’s more diversity in what it offers.”

Tom Carpenter, Frontier Real Estate Investments president, said that Portside Fish Co. and Shomi Noods Ramen Bar are also scheduled to join Main Chick and Oi at the Uptown Commons. The two newest locations hosted soft openings last week.

“It has been years in the making, and seeing it completed is meaningful,” Carpenter said. “We were able to deliver the tenants that the city desired and create gathering spaces for residents to enjoy.”

Carpenter said Uptown Commons’ varied slate of tenants—Portside Fish Co., Shomi Noods Ramen Bar, Main Chick, Oi Asian Fusion, Starbucks, Wendy’s and Chase—were secured before the pandemic struck.

The Uptown

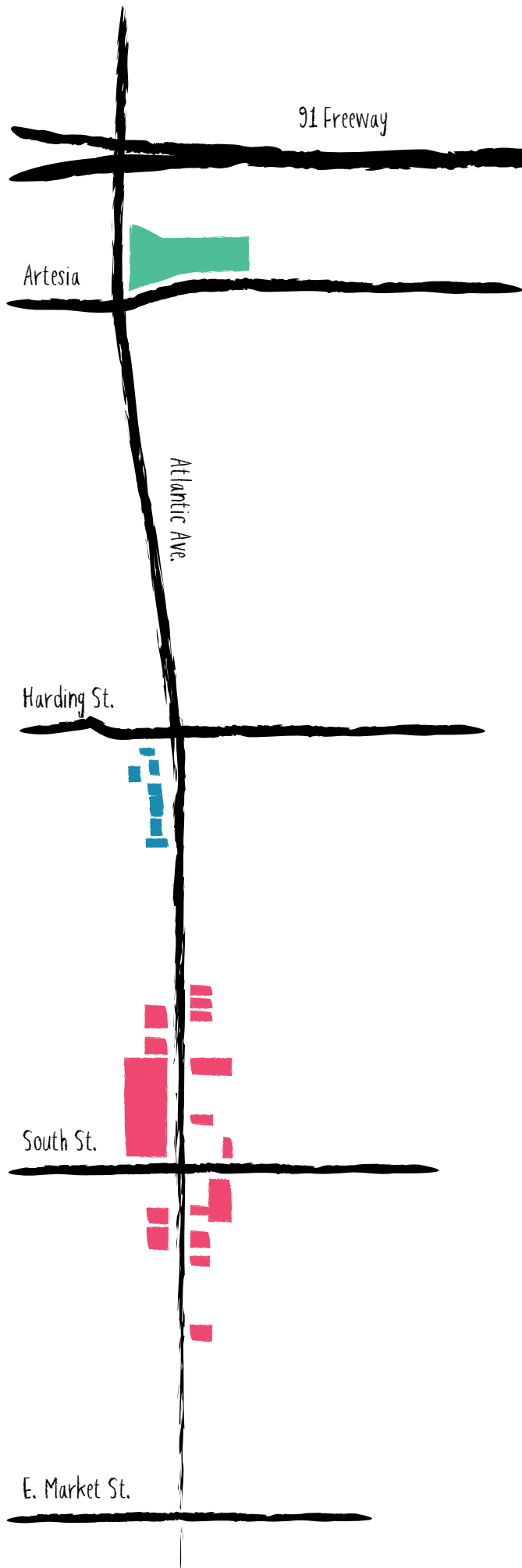
Just south of Uptown Commons at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue and 61st Street lies a 112,000 acre plot of land where Westland developers are seeking to build The Uptown: a mixed-use retail center with an industrial aesthetic across the street from Houghton Park.

The team at Westland has been in negotiations with The Blink Fitness to open a gym at The Uptown, making it the centerpoint of the project. Service businesses and retail shops such as a barbershop and a cafe will surround the gym. There will also be office space. The Uptown will connect with the Harding Plaza, which is currently open to the public.

Yanki Greenspan, president of Westland Real Estate Group, said his team is in project negotiations with the city and are seeking to break ground in early 2021.

With no end in sight to the pandemic, restaurants with outdoor seating have momentarily braved the wave of full-blown closures.

“Our project is perfect for a post-COVID world,” Greenspan said. “The



UPTOWN COMMONS

The Uptown Commons is the northernmost retail center recently developed in North Long Beach that sits at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue and Artesia Boulevard.

The shopping center brought small-name, yet ambitious restaurants such as Main Chick fried chicken and Oi Asian fusion—alongside more corporate names such as Wendy’s and Starbucks.

The space offers outdoor seating at its exterior patio, which restaurants have resorted to as the pandemic prompted closures of indoor dining.

THE UPTOWN

More information has been recently made available about this development, which has been planned to connect with Harding Plaza across the street from Houghton Park. Developers Westland Real Estate Group stated they want this project to be built for the community.

Early designs showed that shipping containers would be used to create a rugged industrial look, and while that’s still the preferred aesthetic, they are doing away with the containers. Developers have been in negotiations with Blink Fitness to bring a gym, as well as Tierra Mia coffee shop and the Long Beach Beer Lab.

Developers are hoping to break ground in early 2021.

THE BEAT

What sets this project apart from other North Long Beach retail centers is this development is made up of multiple smaller projects each with their own name and aesthetic.

The developers at LAB Holding are attempting to retrofit vacant properties as parklets and shopping corridors along Atlantic Avenue around the Michelle Obama Library. Little is known about the retail side of this project, but LAB Holding is trying to build 14 cottage-style apartments and 86 townhouses at two of the four smaller projects that make up The Beat.

While designs are mostly finished, LAB Holding is anticipating construction could begin between a year to a year and a half.

Graphic by Dennis Dean.

projects happening in North Long Beach



Customers eat at the Uptown Commons outdoor dining area. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

buildings all surround central courtyards with plenty of outdoor seating opportunities.”

Greenspan said he’s optimistic that tenants will be able to open their businesses by the time the project is completed late next year. So far, the restaurants showing interest in The Uptown are content with outdoor dining options, Greenspan said.

After hopefully breaking ground early next year, Greenspan said tenants will most likely have the keys to their spaces in late 2021.

“I’m not going to lie to you and say I’m not nervous,” Greenspan said. “But we’re optimistic.”

The Beat

The creative minds at LAB Holding, responsible for the LAB Anti-Mall in Costa Mesa, are retrofitting separate parcels of land around Atlantic Avenue

in one of the larger developments in the north called The Beat.

What sets this project apart from the other two developments in North Long Beach is that it’s not contained to one location, but rather dotted along Atlantic Avenue—surrounding the Michelle Obama Library. The Beat is the umbrella term that covers four sub-projects.

These projects range from retail space to housing and residential. For one of the residential projects, LAB Holding will construct 14 cottage-style units on Lime and Atlantic avenues.

Another sub-development project is called the ARTery, which is located at South Street and Atlantic Avenue. The ARTery is a micro residential project that will include a community art gallery as well as 14 cottage-style housing units.

The largest of the four sub-projects will introduce a massive, mixed-use,

office and retail space across the street from the Michelle Obama Library. Known as Spring: The Gardens of Long Beach, LAB Holding’s design models for this project seem to take inspiration from The Anaheim Packing District in Orange County. Roman Ciuni with

LAB Holding said they are planning to build 86 townhomes at this location with about 7,000 square feet of retail space.

Shaheen Sadeghi, chief executive officer of LAB Holding, said the designs of the proposed projects are mostly complete. He said his team is negotiating with the city to finalize entitlements and permits.

Sadeghi added that it would take between a year to two and a half years to complete construction depending on the project.

This year has been especially difficult for LAB Holding’s retail developments, Sadeghi said, as COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in LAB Holding’s commercial projects.

“2020 is a bit of a write off,” Sadeghi said, “Everybody is on a hold pattern. From a leasing standpoint, there is a certain uncertainty.”

The residential projects are steadily advancing, despite COVID-19 dampening LAB Holding’s more commercial-focused endeavours.

“We are moving forward with the residential development,” Sadeghi said. “We are redoing the current retail segment and will continue our leasing efforts.” ■

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Design-Build Services for City of Long Beach Curb Ramps	RFP PW20-084	11/20/2020
Intelligence Analyst Services	RFP PD20-073	11/24/2020
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Anaheim Corridor Zoning Implementation Plan	RFP DV20-088	12/02/2020
Professional Accounting Services (REBID)	RFP HE20-045	12/02/2020
Treatment Plant Facility Improvement Master Plan Project	RFP	12/02/2020
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On the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Artesia Boulevard, portions of Uptown Commons opened earlier this year. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

More funding flexibility, more virtual access: How the coronavirus has changed fundraising

■ **BY ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

No galas, no luncheons, no schmoozing donors—the pandemic has made this an especially difficult year for nonprofits and the foundations that help fund them. Without in-person events, which are still largely prohibited in California, organizations have had to find creative ways to drum up support.

Take, for example, the Historical Society of Long Beach. Normally, the month of October is high season for the nonprofit, which holds a cemetery tour every year that brings in anywhere between a quarter and a third of its annual contributions. This year, with such gatherings off the table, that effort appeared dead in the water.

“It’s a huge hit not being able to hold it,” said Julie Bartolotto, the historical society’s executive director. “It’s how we cultivate donors, volunteers and members.”

But instead of holding an in-person tour, Bartolotto said the organization

worked with the Jewel Box Children’s Theater to produce a series of videos cut together from archival materials that were made available online, with contribution tiers ranging from \$40 to \$250 per household purchasing access.

“It’s not a substitute, but at least it keeps us in people’s minds,” Bartolotto said. Further, “it also reminded us that we have a treasure trove of video that we haven’t used yet.”

In future years, she said the nonprofit is planning to maintain a virtual component to the event, making it more accessible to the elderly and disabled, and anyone else who might have trouble trekking across the uneven cemetery grounds for an in-person tour.

While it can be difficult to find new funders during the partial lockdown spurred by the pandemic, there have been glimmers of hope. Long Beach Gives, an annual online fundraising event benefiting Long Beach nonprofits that was launched last year, brought in more than double the amount of funds it did in 2019, raising \$1.78 million.

“Long Beach Gives was a great example,” said Michelle Byerly, executive director of The Nonprofit Partnership, which helps facilitate the event. “The community is interested in supporting the community.”

Contributions to local philanthropic institutions also provide some reason for optimism.

“It appears that the giving has definitely increased—we have a lot of people who are new donors,” said Marcelle Epley, president and CEO of the Long Beach Community Foundation.

Those who are still able to give are particularly interested in assisting with coronavirus-related efforts, Epley added. “The majority of contributions that have come into the Community Foundation have been into the coronavirus relief fund.”

In order to better support nonprofits during this difficult time, some philanthropic organizations have become more flexible in their spending priorities.

According to a new report by Long Beach-based Community Works Con-

sulting, 38% of respondents were planning to make future grants available for general operating expenses, rather than restricting funds to be used exclusively for programming.

“General operating [money] allows leaders to turn on a dime to respond to opportunity as well as to turn on a dime to respond to a crisis,” said Carol Hass, president and CEO of Community Works Consulting. “To have to go out and get funding to respond to that crisis means the response is delayed.”

Especially at a time when fundraising opportunities are slim and the return of investment on virtual events is still somewhat unknown, contributions to nonprofits’ operating budget can help them maintain staff through the crisis.

“I know of foundations who have never done general operating, who are considering it for their next round of funding,” Hass said. “I’m hoping that’s one of the trends that comes out of this. It’s definitely one of the trends we’ve seen early on.” ■



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How nonprofits are weathering the pandemic

■ *The Long Beach Business Journal spoke with 10 nonprofits about how they're navigating the coronavirus pandemic and economic slowdown, and how you can reach them to help.*

Ground Education: Connecting with nature is more important than ever

After being asked to stay away from restaurants, movie theaters and most other free-time activities, many have taken to the comfort of soil and foliage by setting up gardens or tending to their backyards. Ground Education, a Long Beach nonprofit whose mission is to teach kids how nature works by showing them how to grow produce has had to get creative to provide students with the same opportunity—at a distance.

“We’re nature educators and we feel that connecting to nature is more important now than possibly ever,” said Holland Brown, one of the nonprofit’s founders. To do so, Brown and her team have developed a virtual curriculum, supplemented by at-home activities like growing carrots from seeds.

Ground Education serves 10 schools in Long Beach, most of them elementary schools, as well as the Boys & Girls Clubs in Bixby Knolls. The nonprofit’s five educators continue to tend to gardens at these campuses—although students aren’t able to visit most of them. Still, Brown said, “the kids are just so excited to see the garden and see parts of their school that they haven’t been to in a while.”

While many nonprofits have struggled immensely without the fundraising opportunities of in-person events, Brown said Ground Education has been able to remain financially stable with the help of a federal PPP loan and the 140 additional donations the nonprofit received when it participated in the Long Beach Gives virtual fundraiser for the first time this year.

“It gave us permission to reach out to the Long Beach community, tell our story and ask for support,” Brown said. “That was really big for us.”

With the additional funding, Ground Education is poised to make it through the year and prosper in post-pandemic times, Brown noted. “I think we’re going to be OK and back to growing next year—growing our sites.”

Ground Education is located at 6475 E. Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 294. For information, call 562-682-4703 or visit groundeducation.com/.

— ALENA MASCHKE

New Hope: Helping residents process loss

If there’s ever a time for grief support, it’s in the middle of a pandemic. New Hope Grief Support Community, or New Hope for short, has helped Long Beach residents process loss since 2007, and this year has been the organization’s busiest, according to Executive Director David Leonard.

Grief has taken on many forms this year: from families losing loved ones to COVID-19, to those suffering after the loss of a job, a relationship or because of the imposed isolation the pandemic has brought



Family members light candles at a pre-pandemic event for grieving families hosted by New Hope Grief Support Community. Courtesy photo.

with it.

Additionally, “not being able to not do some of the ritual stuff that people are accustomed to, that’s making it harder,” Leonard said. Many have had to forgo funerals or were unable to stand by their family member’s deathbed, sharing their last moments.

“What that’s doing is prolonging the grieving process,” Leonard said.

New Hope has started a number of new groups this year, even as the organization moved its programming online, which was not a small feat. “First, we had to accept our limitations, and that was hard,” Leonard said.

Working through grief is a deeply personal process, he added, and “to be doing that, now, through a screen—people were at first unreceptive, not sure if it would work.”

But the videoconferencing model also brought a new sense of intimacy to the group sessions, which have been significantly reduced in size to ensure everyone could be heard and seen, within the confines of a computer screen.

Working from home has also allowed Leonard and his team to focus more on the core activities of the organization, he said. “We had more time to spend with people and our stakeholders, asking: How can we support you?”

While fundraising opportunities have been limited this year, New Hope’s executive director said the organization has been fortunate to receive support through the federal PPP program, volunteers and donors fundraising among their peers, and a large donor lifting restrictions on their contribution.

“When asked, our donors, our stakeholders and businesses will step up,” Leonard said.

New Hope Grief Support Community is located at 3505 Long Beach Blvd., Suite 2C. For information, visit newhopegrief.org or call 562-429-0075.

— ALENA MASCHKE

The Guidance Center: A scramble to provide remote services

The bright green building that houses the Guidance Center is a scramble to provide remote services.

(Please Continue to Page 24)

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(Continued from Page 23)

es The Guidance Center in Central Long Beach isn't as busy as it used to be since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, but the center's staff has figured out a way to serve its 3,000-plus clients with mental health services remotely.

The Guidance Center provides mental health treatment to disadvantaged children and their families, but when stay-at-home orders hit Long Beach, they were worried about how they would be able to provide services.

"So much of our therapy is interactive," said Patricia Costales, the center's CEO. "We were not certain if we would be able to engage kids."

Like many organizations, the center had to rush to get Zoom licenses and laptops for their staff members who didn't already have them so they could conduct therapy remotely.

And even then, they realized that many of their clients' families didn't have access to laptops or internet access at home. In one case, a client had to do a session from their phone in a Starbucks parking lot where they could get free Wi-Fi, she said. Then they had to make sure kids had access to toys and art supplies for play therapy and art therapy.

"It was a lot of pressure up front for sure," Costales said.

The center has been able to get by with local support, including a grant from the city for play therapy kits, a grant from the Long Beach Foundation and a PPP loan. They were also able to raise money for families who needed laptops and Wi-Fi at home.

"Without all that support, we would've been in trouble," she said.

There was also the issue of children's lower attention spans for video conferences: Costales said the clinical staff has pivoted to shorter, but more frequent sessions for their clients.

For some of their clients, like children who are suicidal or on the autism spectrum, in-person therapy is still provided with masks and protective equipment.

Costales said she's worried about kids in general now, citing articles about child abuse hotlines seeing a dip in calls since third-party people aren't in the children's lives to report abuse.

She said that after an initial dip at the beginning of the pandemic, the center is now able to offer good service levels "because the need is there."

The Guidance Center is located at 1301 Pine Ave. Visit tgclb.org or call 562-595-1159.

— VALERIE OSIER

Long Beach Blues Society: 'We knew we had to do something'

For the last four years, the Long Beach Blues Society has brought music to schools, hospitals, veterans and the community at large.

For youngsters, the organization used to bring in-person music education and performances to schools. The society also would provide musical performances and workshops for seniors, vets and hospitalized children year round. The group is also a co-producer of the annual Labor Day New Blues Festival.

But the COVID-19 pandemic put the kibosh on all the organization's usual efforts.

"It's been crazy," said Steve Proctor, head of operations for the nonprofit. "To get to this point has been a lot of head scratching and working with various people in the community."

In the early days of the pandemic, the society quickly pivoted operations and launched "Give A Gig," a fundraising effort to support out-of-work musicians and community members. Ultimately, the group raised \$10,000, which was split between 40 people and their families.

"It blew us away because ... everyone was losing their jobs and there was all that uncertainty," Proctor said. "We didn't know how people would respond."

The group then took part in Long Beach Gives, an annual 24-hour fundraising event for local nonprofits, and exceeded its \$7,500 goal by raising \$8,227. During the fundraiser, the Blues Society hosted a 10-hour livestream music event featuring the likes of five-time Grammy Award winners Keb' Mo' and Robert Cray as well as various Long Beach artists. About 20,000 people tuned into the free livestream.

With the new funds, the group hired an out-of-work Disneyland show producer to restart its "Bedside Beats" program at Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach. In the past, the organization would set up in-person visits during which performers would play for hospitalized children one-on-one. Today, the team hosts interactive Zoom calls with up to 100 children at a time.

"They love it. It's turned into the most successful program," Proctor said. "Thinking of those kids with nothing, with no one



Able ARTS Work students show their drawings during a Zoom class. Screenshot.

going in there, was just heartbreaking. We knew we had to do something."

The Long Beach Blues Society is located at 2601 E. Ocean Blvd., Suite 201. For information visit longbeachbluessociety.org or call 562-762-8317.

— BRANDON RICHARDSON

Able ARTS Work: Learning to adapt to the times

Nimble is an understatement when describing how quickly Able ARTS Work, formerly Arts & Services for Disabled, Inc., adjusted its arts and music-centric day programming at the start of the pandemic. After only a week of discussions, organizers began transitioning those in-person services, vital to the mental health of its clients who primarily consist of adults with developmental disabilities, online.

Despite a drop in attendance in March as students adjusted to online learning, as of September they've had an increase not only in attendance but their number of clients, from 99 adult day clients with 72% attendance in January, to 104 adult day clients with 81% attendance as of September.

But the puzzle of how to drop off art supplies, as well as keep clients and instructors working collaboratively, though often remotely, was a challenge that has led to new opportunities. The nonprofit's transportation service, previously used to give students a ride to class pre-COVID-19, became a way to say hello, or what came to be known as a "Drive Hi."

"Some of our students really need that visual connection," said Kristy Glass, Director of Community Advancement for Able ARTS Work. "We turned one of our buses into a spirit bus, and we have staff that made signs, and they'll go in front of a student's house and wave, sing some songs, students will be on their porch."

Other elements of a "Drive Hi" may include dropping off supplies for class or setting up a table outside for students to create art and socialize with staff at a distance.

The transportation service, while a small part of the nonprofit's offerings, has recently enabled the moving of drums and guitars to students' homes for them to paint, the instruments-turned-collaborative art pieces to be shown starting Nov. 7, in "Can't Stop the Beat" at Able ARTS Work's temporary gallery space at 2nd & PCH, the gallery's opening in September has been a boon to the organization's sustained pivot during the pandemic.

"It has been a place where students have a purpose for what they're working on," said Glass. "New projects have come about so that they can get them to the gallery and earn their commission. Whereas before, without

that we'd be relying solely on our online gallery and our online Etsy shop. Here, we can still connect and share our mission, and share our students' artwork."

Able ARTS Work is located at 3626 Pacific Coast Highway. For information visit ablearts-work.org or call 562-982-0247.

— ASIA MORRIS

Friends of Long Beach Animals: 'Comforting each other'

Friends of Long Beach Animals, or FOLBA, the city's most venerable animal-welfare organization, has definitely been living up to its name during the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing its efforts beyond spay/neuter and humane education to help Long Beach residents care for their pets.

"We haven't had a problem with finances during the pandemic," FOLBA board president Lauren Campbell said. "There's a feel-good element in dealing with animals—more than you'd think."

Through social media, FOLBA raises funds to pay for pet food, supplies and medical care.

"We've helped people who've stumbled upon animals during the pandemic and animals we've stumbled on ourselves," she said.

Gandalf, a beautiful gray cat with three legs, is one beneficiary. A resident found him dumped in a park, with a bone protruding from a back leg. Surgery removed the leg, which had become infected, and Gandalf is now living with his rescuer-turned-foster (and likely permanent) human.

"She has some medical issues as well, and they're comforting each other," Campbell said.

In June, FOLBA contacted the ASPCA, Centinela Feed & Pet Supplies and the community at large to organize a food drive for financially impacted pet owners—9 tons of food made its way to dishes of waiting pets. Veterans and homeless people are also receiving support.

"We're all making the best of it—the board is driven, and we're getting a lot of joy out of helping all these animals," Campbell said. "We're meeting a lot now, and we're brainstorming new ways to engage our community. We have a lot of ideas."

Friends of Long Beach Animals is located at 3815 Atlantic Ave. For information, visit folba.org/.

— KATE KARP

Westside Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach: Meeting the immediate need

When the pandemic forced thousands of Long Beach Unified School District students to attend class virtually, the Boys & Girls Club Westside Center at Admiral Kidd



The Long Beach Blues Society hosted an all-day livestream during the Long Beach Gives nonprofit fundraising event in September. Screenshot.



A young person speaks via laptop as board and community members gathered virtually for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach's annual Youth of the Year judging in October. Photo courtesy of the Boys & Girls Clubs.

Park in West Long Beach couldn't support new bandwidth of students needing Wi-Fi, said the club Executive Director Don Rodriguez.

"It was not sufficient to cover the number of students we had online at the same time," he said.

In response, the club needed to upgrade internet serves, as well as extending hours of operations since many parents who enrolled their kids need a place to leave them while they go to work, Rodriguez said.

Before COVID, he added, they ran programming with over 125 students daily—a number that has now dwindled to 35 kids at the westside center, mostly due to maintaining proper physical distance at the facility. The capacity now is 50 students, he said.

Seeing other hardships in the neighborhood, the club has also been partnering with local companies to provide giveaways, such as school supplies and shoes, and free dinners for member students every night.

Keeping these resources up has become a nonstop job in itself, too.

"We're constantly raising money," Rodriguez said.

The nonprofit's budget has yet to see deficits, but he said, their financial future is still uncertain.

The Boys & Girls Clubs Westside Center is located at 1835 W. Willard St. and operates from 7:45 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. For information, call 562-435-1621.

—CRYSTAL NIEBLA

Puente Latino Association: Creating 'puentes' for families struggling during pandemic

Based in North Long Beach, the Puente Latino Association—or Puente LA for short—answered the call to feed families struck hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hilda Gaytan, the group's founder, orchestrated multiple food giveaways for residents who live in the most populous part of the city.

They've carried out nine food giveaways every other week since June 27. About 150 families attended each one, with about five to 10 members in each family.

Originally an arts and culture promoter, Puente LA has had to make a humanitarian transition to distribute everything from diapers to meals to families during the pandemic, says Gaytan.

While taking on such a role seemed her-

culean for a relatively small group, Gaytan is happy she and the volunteers are helping the community.

"Whether that's the mission or not, we're engaging with our community," Gaytan said.

Puente LA's economic strength comes from living up to the group's name, building bridges with government establishments and other groups to carry out its services.

Grants have helped the group garner funds before the pandemic. It would apply for funding from Port of Long Beach and Long Beach Art Council grants. The most recent Census 2020 grant provided Puente LA with over \$10,000 for outreach services. However, Gaytan said seeking contracts is the group's main monetary source.

Puente LA recently hosted a Dia de Los Muertos drive-through event to celebrate the holiday with local families. A contract with the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services allowed the group to distribute nutrition kits to families at the event.

"They know we are in the community," Gaytan said. "We reach out to people that need help."

Puente Latino Association is located at 6691 Myrtle Ave. For information, visit puentela.org/.

—SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY

Long Beach Forward: From public demonstrations to car caravans

Organizing and advocating for tenant rights, equity in Long Beach schools and for city funding to be diverted to overlooked communities has always been a tough job. But the degree of difficulty increased when social distancing measures were mandated to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Leaders at Long Beach Forward, a nonprofit that has fought for racial and economic justice in the city for years, had to pivot quickly after it closed its doors to the public and many of its in-person organizing was forced into remote settings.

Outgoing Executive Director Christine Petit said the closure was initially only expected to last through the end of March, but as the pandemic dragged on, the organization adapted.

In-person community meetings, marches and public testimony before the City Council has morphed into car caravans and Zoom meetings and digital teach-ins to educate the community about ballot measures.

Its parking lot has even been transformed into a staging area for local food deliveries.

"We still had major projects underway, such as getting Long Beach counted in the Census and seeing a participatory budgeting process through, but now we were also faced with the emerging needs of the community members we work with, including meeting basic needs, getting the technology and support to navigate an increasingly online world, and advocating for policies to help keep people in their homes," Petit said.

Nonprofits have missed out on most of the relief money that has gone to small businesses, but much of the funding for Long Beach Forward was locked in before the pandemic. The hurt could come in future years, especially if the pandemic leads to a recession that could see fewer grants and private donations.

Despite the challenges it's faced and could likely face going forward, Petit said she was proud of her team's dedication to ensuring that its work continued to reach the communities it serves.

"This crisis has been a strain on all of us, yet our team and partners were unwavering in their commitment to the communities experiencing the brunt of it," Petit said.

Long Beach Forward is located 425 Atlantic Ave. For information, visit lbforward.org or call 562-436-4800.

— JASON RUIZ

Alamitos Heights woman starts nonprofit helping homeless

As a longtime substance abuse counselor, Alamitos Heights resident Christine Barry understood the connection between drugs and homelessness.

But Barry, 69, said she saw the homeless in a different light when she went on a ride-along in 2018 with Long Beach Police Officer Rich Armond, who serves on the department's Quality of Life team.

"So many of them want help but they can't or won't access it," she said. "Their self-esteem is so low they don't believe they're worthy of being helped."

Barry said she was in a dark place herself at the time, struggling with the loss of her 33-year-old son Michael, who was a liver transplant patient. She decided to spend more time helping others.

According to numbers from the city's annual point-in-time homeless count in January, an estimated 2,000 were experiencing homelessness in the city this year, up 7% from the previous year.

In addition to a multitude of other city services, Long Beach's Quality of Life team helps with resources and other issues for the homeless. Barry thought the team's \$250 monthly stipend for hotel vouchers, bus tickets and other goods wasn't nearly enough, so she launched her own fundraiser for donations.

She named it Ashlee's Homeless Fund in honor of Armond's 20-year-old daughter Ashlee, who died in an accident in 2014.

The fundraising and outreach has been so successful that Barry this year launched

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www.newhopegrief.org



Puente Latino Association hosted a Día de Los Muertos drive-thru event. The group hosts community events to conduct outreach services and community engagement. Courtesy photo.

(Continued from Page 25)
her own nonprofit with the same name. Word has spread about her efforts, and residents now regularly reach out to Barry for help if they see someone in need.
Barry gets many of her referrals through

the social networking site Nextdoor.
With funds for her nonprofit, Barry is a one-woman action team, reaching out to individuals in the streets to help them get bus tickets home, emergency hotel vouchers or connections to rehab facilities.

She often deals with tough cases of people struggling with drug addiction and/or mental illness and don't necessarily want help. In one case, she and Armond worked for months to convince a 32-year-old man living in riverbed to reach out to his family. The man eventually went to rehab and is now living in a home with his fiancée and their dog.
"He later told me he didn't want the help at first because he didn't want to fail one more time and disappoint another person who seemed to care," she said. "And now he's well on the path to having a wonderful life."
She recently helped find housing for a 90-year-old woman named Lorraine who had been living in Bixby Park for years, and helped a man in his 40s vote for the first time.
Barry said most people will never understand the struggles homeless face on the

streets.
"A big part of Ashlee's Homeless Fund is helping people begin to see that the homeless are not just a bunch of criminal drug addicts," she said. "They are in fact people who are in pain and are struggling."
She said she has seen fewer donations of goods like diapers and food in the pandemic, and getting immediate help for those in need has been an extra struggle since many buildings are closed.
Her ultimate goal is to start her own multi-service center and have help from volunteers. For now, Barry said she's continuing to do as much as she can.
"It's all about thinking outside the box," she said.

To donate to Ashlee's Homeless Fund, go to gofundme.com/f/qsvqt-ashlee039s-homeless-fund/.
— KELLY PUENTE ■

New Ten Thousand Villages store opens in San Pedro, selling fair trade artisan wares



Tom Hoffarth, a director on the board of Ten Thousand Villages South Bay, standing in front of the nonprofit's new stall at San Pedro's Crafted. Photo by Alena Maschke.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Before the Crafted weekend marketplace in San Pedro opens its doors on an unseasonably hot Sunday afternoon, a number of patrons have already gathered on the spaced out patio furniture outside, anxiously waiting to be allowed in.
The old 1950s navy warehouse is now home to the first Ten Thousand Villages store in the Long Beach area. The nonprofit, which is headquartered in Akron, Pennsylvania, sells fair trade products sourced from over a hundred artisan groups worldwide, in an effort to provide sustainable income for disadvantaged communities.
"Part of the process of fair trade is educating people and expanding into new markets," said Thomas Hoffarth, a member of the local outpost's board of directors.
The new Crafted stall is a satellite location of the Ten Thousand Villages store in Redondo Beach, which Hoffarth and his wife founded together with other members of their church, in 2012.
At the new location, the group is hoping

to attract shoppers from Long Beach who might not be willing to drive all the way to Redondo Beach, but are happy to hop across the San Pedro Bay for a leisurely weekend shopping trip.
"I always got a great vibe from Long Beach, how it's an artistic community that would really get the value," Hoffarth explained.
The value of fair trade comes from the support it provides to vendors, who are able to make a living wage from selling their wares, Hoffarth's wife Rhonda said.
Based on her background in sales, Rhonda Hoffarth said the procurement process for items sold by Ten Thousand Villages is completely different from that of traditional retailers, who are always out to negotiate the lowest price.
Instead, Ten Thousand Villages asks vendors to name their price based on the cost of materials and labor, with the goal of selling to a customer base that understands that fairly sourced products come with a higher price point.
"You might see the same product at a Pier 1 Imports at a lower price, but that



Items made from recycled sari fabrics are among the store's best sellers. Photo by Alena Maschke.

probably means that they didn't pay them the same value," she said.
Still, there's bills to pay and rent to cover for Thousand Villages as well. In addition to revenue from sales, the nonprofit relies on donations and volunteers to make the numbers work.
"It's a balance between being a nonprofit that's just trying to fundraise and being a business," Thomas Hoffarth said.
At first the couple tried to make it work on their own, with Thomas Hoffarth managing the Redondo Beach store. But Hoffarth quickly realized that he was in over his head, leading them to hire a store manager.
Michelle Ryan, the store's only full-time employee, is a San Pedro native and pushed for the new location this year. The nonprofit's board was supportive at first, but got cold feet when the pandemic brought retail to a screeching halt in the spring.
"I had to win some people over," Ryan said. But with off-site sales at church meets and holiday events likely off the table this year, the satellite location offered a much-needed opportunity to generate sales

revenues. So far, Ryan noted, the stand has far exceeded her conservative revenue estimates.
The vendors have been understanding as well, Ryan noted, as Ten Thousand Villages had to slow down purchases during the nationwide lockdowns. "It really is a great symbiotic relationship," the store manager said.
For the Hoffarths, their involvement with Ten Thousand Villages came from a desire to expand on their community service. Driven by their faith and in the company of their community at American Martyrs Catholic Church, the couple had already been involved in actions to help the homeless and other neighbors in need.
"We wanted to get more involved," Thomas Hoffarth said. "The more we understood how the world works as a unit, we wanted to be part of that equation."

Editor's note: Thomas Hoffarth has done freelance reporting for the Long Beach Post, which is a sister publication of the Long Beach Business Journal. ■

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