

Long Beach Business Journal

March 9, 2021

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In This Issue



LBCC appoints new interim leader
(Page 2)



Gilmore Music may soon close
(Page 8)



BSBA gets new executive director
(Page 17)



Queen Mary to star in movie franchise
(Page 10)

St. Mary CEO on a mission: from small Southern farm roots to big SoCal hospital challenges



Carolyn Caldwell, president and CEO of St. Mary Medical Center. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

For about three and a half years, Carolyn Caldwell has served as president and CEO of St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach. But her journey to leading one of the area's largest hospitals—before and during one of the worst health crises in modern American history—was a long one spanning decades and multiple states.

An only child, Caldwell was born in 1961 and raised on a farm in Camp Hill, Alabama, a small rural town with a population that has never exceeded 1,650 people.

"My father couldn't write and my mom had an eighth grade education but they were very proud people who instilled that sense of pride in me," Caldwell said. "They were also very passionate about helping others."

Caldwell's father worked at a local dairy farm caring for cows while her mother worked

at a local Playtex facility. Eventually, her father began working with forestry and wildlife graduate students at Auburn University's Piedmont Research Station in Camp Hill. Because of his farming skills, he was recommended to assist the research students.

From kindergarten through her undergraduate work, Caldwell was educated entirely in her home state. She earned a bachelor's degree in zoology with a minor in chemistry from Alabama A&M University in 1983. Caldwell said she has always enjoyed science and, having grown up on a small farm, loved animals.

"While I was in college, there was an amazing [grant] program for minorities in the sciences," said Caldwell, who is Black. "I was able to qualify, so my job as an undergrad was to work and support graduate students doing their research."

After graduation, Caldwell underwent a year of clinical training as a medical technolo-

gist and then landed a job in the laboratory of Dallas Southwest Medical Center. She worked in the department for 13 years, six of them as the Texas hospital's lab director.

During her tenure as a lab tech, Caldwell met Daniel—the brother of one of her laboratory colleagues—on a blind date. The two married in 1989 and had two kids, Monique, now 35, and Jonathon, 30.

As a full-time working mom in 1994, Caldwell began pursuing a master's degree in health care administration at the Texas Woman's University in Dallas.

"Because I had worked kind of on the front lines, I felt I could really make a difference," Caldwell said of her decision to transition to the administrative side of healthcare.

With a year left in her master's program, the hospital where Caldwell was still lab director had been without a chief operating officer for months.

(Please Continue to Page 22)

Signal Hill requires more housing, but where to build?

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

As community development director for the city of Signal Hill, Colleen Doan is on the hot seat. It's her job to help come up with ways to vastly increase her city's housing stock to meet ambitious new state goals.

For a small city with a uniquely hilly topography and ongoing oil production, finding a place for new housing—let alone getting it built—is no easy task.

"It is a challenge," Doan said. "It is a major challenge."

Doan has plenty of company as city planners throughout California scramble to meet the latest iteration of the Regional Housing Needs Assessment, an initiative mandated every eight years by state housing law.

Since the last time the process unfolded, in 2012, an affordable housing crisis has exploded across California and homelessness has soared to its highest levels—creating one of the most confounding issues confronting local governments.

Under the new assessment, state housing officials have determined that more than 1.3 million new units for all income levels are needed in Southern California to meet existing and projected demand through October 2029. The last time around that number was just 412,767.

How the units are divvied up among the region's hundreds of cities, including Signal Hill, rests largely with the Southern California Association of Governments, or SCAG. And if the performance of cities to hit their goals in the previous eight-year cycle is any indication, then the odds for success moving forward are long.

Data compiled by SCAG shows that cities fell far short of meeting their allotments for low- and very low-income housing—

(Please Continue to Page 15)

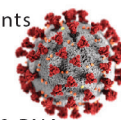
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LBCC to part ways with superintendent-president—again

By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

The Long Beach Community College
District is ending its contract with interim
superintendent-president Lou Anne Bynum,
a respected administrator who has worked at
the college for more than 20 years.
Bynum replaced Reagan Romali, who
was fired by the LBCC board almost exactly
one year ago following months of accusa-
tions of wrongdoing between Romali and
some members of the board.
Bynum had been negotiating a contract
extension, and she and the college could not
come to an agreement, according to a state-
ment from the college.

Bynum also released a statement, saying
it had been an honor to serve as interim su-
perintendent-president.
“I care deeply for the students and all of
my colleagues, and I enjoyed working for
them in this interim capacity,” she said.

The college Board of Trustees on Tues-
day, March 2, appointed a new interim pres-
ident-superintendent, Mike Munoz, who has
been the college’s vice president of student
services since 2018.
Some of Munoz’s accomplishments in-
clude increasing enrollment of Long Beach
College Promise by more than 30% from
fall 2018 to fall 2019; increasing the number
of Pell Recipients by 27% in 2019-20; ex-
panding services in mental health and basic
needs; pushing for additional technology;
and providing leadership on the Long Beach



Mike Munoz

College Promise Steering Committee.
“I want to thank the Board of Trustees
for having the confidence and belief in my
skills and leadership to give me this oppor-
tunity to lead this amazing community col-
lege,” Munoz said in a statement.
Munoz attended East Los Angeles Col-
lege and Fullerton College before transfer-
ring to the University of California, Irvine,
where he received his bachelor’s degree in
psychology and social behavior. He received
his master’s degree in counseling, and his
doctorate in education with a specialization
in community college leadership, from Cal
State Long Beach.
The board also appointed LBCC Dean
of Counseling and Student Support Services
Nohel Corral as the interim vice president of
student services.

Both Munoz and Corral began their new
positions March 14, but Munoz’s contract
comes with a nearly 15-month term that will
run through June 2022.
College officials also announced that the
board was suspending the search for a per-
manent replacement for now with the search
expected to resume next year. The board en-
tered into a formal agreement with a search
firm in December.
“We want to ensure that we have enough
time to find the absolute best final candidate
for Long Beach City College,” board Presi-
dent Uduak-Joe Ntuk said. “Because that’s
what you, our students, faculty, classified
and managers, all deserve — the best.”



Lou Anne Bynum

Advertisement for My Haven Stores featuring an image of a cannabis dispensary interior with shelves of products and a counter. Text includes: 5 LONG BEACH LOCATIONS! DTLB • LOS ALAMITOS • BELMONT • PARAMOUNT • LAKEWOOD

Advertisement for My Haven Stores with a large coupon graphic. Text includes: YOUR HAVEN FOR ALL THINGS CANNABIS, 39% OFF ENTIRE PURCHASE, For New Customers With This Coupon, Limit 1. Some Restrictions Apply. Excludes Stiizy. Expires 4/1/21, WWW.MYHAVENSTORES.COM

Tourism, labor groups plea for COVID-19 guidelines on conventions ‘immediately’

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Representatives from convention centers, labor unions and tourism authorities across the state are calling on Gov. Gavin Newsom to provide a timeline and specific guidelines for reopening the state’s meeting and convention industry.

It’s a rare show of unity among convention centers and local tourism authorities who—under normal circumstances—would compete for business. They are now joining together in an effort to prevent the state from losing billions of dollars worth of economic activity spurred by meetings and conventions.

In a letter sent to the governor, officials from the California Travel Association, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the Long Beach Convention

and Visitors Bureau, among others, said California could lose business to other states, a process they say is already underway.

“We need the governor to provide guidelines to signal to our customers that California will one day be open to hosting events,” said Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. “We want the jobs and revenue here in California, not other states.”

Tourism and hospitality play a massive role in the state and local economy. According to a 2019 report by Los Angeles-based market research firm Beacon Economics, the sector is the second largest source of employment in Long Beach, superseded only by health care, and supporting 18,562 jobs and creating an economic impact of \$1.8 billion in the year prior to the pandemic.

For every month California is not open for business meetings and events, the state is

losing \$4.1 billion in economic activity, according to an Oxford Economics study cited in the coalition’s letter.

Although unusual, this is not the first time several convention centers across the state have banded together in order to make their plea to the governor during the ongoing public health crisis.

In June, labor groups and convention centers from San Diego to San Francisco laid out their suggestions for a reopening plan in a letter to Newsom, an effort they say received “no meaningful feedback from the administration.”

Meanwhile, the Long Beach convention center has been offering “blended events,” which consist of virtual offerings as well as limited in-person attendance, for example in the form of panel discussions, since October.

In addition, convention center sales staff has been busy rebooking existing clients for

future dates and securing new bookings for the coming years. But without a reopening date in sight, this task is becoming increasingly difficult, according to Goodling.

“Every day I’m on the phone with someone trying to convince them to not cancel and take their business to another state,” he said.

In their letter, officials made it clear that they don’t expect the state to reopen for business travel and events immediately, but that a timeline was necessary to assure clients future conventions could be held in the state.

“We’re not asking Governor Newsom to open California to business meetings and events tomorrow, we’re asking for a plan today so we can safely hold events in the future,” Barb Newton, President and CEO of CalTravel said in the letter. ■

Historic Cal Heights home transformed to 21st-century classic

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

The California Heights Historic District, with some 1,500 homes within its boundaries between Wardlow and Bixby roads and Lime and Gardenia avenues, is the largest historic district in Long Beach. Cal Heights is a quiet neighborhood lined with old shade trees and sharing borders with Bixby Knolls and Los Cerritos.

The neighborhood was established on Jotham Bixby’s farmland in Rancho Los Cerritos, subdivided between 1920 and 1929, and was developed from west to east, with the result being a sort of architectural timeline, with the homes in the western part being predominantly Spanish Colonial Revival from the 1920s and 1930s and, to-

ward the east, Neo-Traditional style dominate with their fixtures and ornamental touches—non-functional shutters, weather vanes, cupolas, towers, round or arched windows—evocative of older styles without outright copying them. These relatively newer residences were built in the post Depression and post-World War II years to as recently as the late 1940s.

The California Heights Historic District, as it was originally established in 1990, was meant to honor the significance of the architecture of the older homes, and it was expanded in 2000 when the Neo-Traditional homes were deemed to be historically significant as well. The expanded area took in the three easternmost blocks that included Gaviota, Rose and Gardenia avenues.

And it’s at 3461 Gardenia Ave., at the

very edge of the historic district, where you’ll find a home that’s on the market for \$1.048 million by Nate Cole, of Unique California Properties.

What makes the 1939 three-bedroom, 1.75-bath home unique is its meticulous and thorough renovation by designer Steve Jones of bettershelter in 2011-12.

Though Jones’ business is flipping houses, to call him a flipper is to be, well, flip-pant. Rather than throw up some paint and a new roof and roll out some new sod on the lawns, Jones brings an artist’s flair to the properties he improves, staging them with art and quirky items he finds at flea markets and yard sales. And he’s very selective about the houses he selects to renovate. Though he and his team generally do homes in Los Angeles, Jones says he’s done a handful in

Long Beach.

“I love Long Beach, oh my God,” said Jones. “There are so many styles of architecture there and some beautiful homes.

“We’re always drawn to homes that were built in the 1920s and 30s. We love to try to maintain the architecture’s authenticity and integrity and try to add or bring back some of that integrity that maybe has been stripped off during the life of the house.”

In the end, says Jones, “We want to try to fit in rather than stand out too much.”

Jones bought the home in July 2011 for \$330,000 and sold it in July 2012 for \$550,000.

Among his renovation work was changing the ceiling in the living room. “We noticed the house had a peaked roof, but the ceiling was flat, so we tore that up and peaked the living room ceiling.”

He added a third bedroom and a full bath, and there was a side building next to the garage that he converted into an office, which, says Realtor Cole, is a huge selling point in the age of COVID when so many people are working from home.

The house has been well maintained in the last decade. Cole said the owners have improved it, “and they have great taste.”

The house, now with its vaulted ceilings, has large windows overlooking garden views. The flooring is dark-stained and the white ceilings are sectioned with dark-stained beams.

The kitchen has custom cabinetry, Carrara marble countertops and direct access to a large, sunny patio deck.

The master suite also has vaulted beamed ceilings as well as a walk-in closet, dual-pane wood-trimmed windows and French doors that open to the private rear patio.

Attached to the home’s two-car garage is the 200-square-foot office/studio that can be converted to an ADU and its French doors open to vegetable gardens and a mature orange tree.

Among the current owners’ improvements include newer HVAC, electrical, copper plumbing and irrigation and landscape lighting. ■



This 1939 home in the California Heights Historic District, redesigned by Steve Jones of bettershelter, is for sale at \$1.048 million. Photo by Sterling Reed.

‘We need help’: Long Beach takes first steps in creating a Latino cultural district

■ By CRYSTAL NIEBLA
Reporter

Long Beach is looking to create a cultural district for Latinos that would serve as an economic hub for the city’s largest racial demographic.

The new district, called El Mercado de Long Beach (“The market of Long Beach”), would be a space that could also help Latinos recover from the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic, as data shows this group was hit particularly hard.

The location of this district has not yet been determined, but officials from Downtown’s District 1 say given the sizable Latino population in the city’s core, it will likely be located there, possibly near Cesar E. Chavez Park.

The city is early on in the process, embarking now on a feasibility study, approved Tuesday, March 2, by the City Council. But advocates say they hope the district will provide business opportunities, along with support and resources for food insecurity, housing and health care access.

“The white flag has been raised here,” said Centro CHA executive director Jessica Quintana, who proposed the concept to city leaders. “We need help.”

Data from the city shows Latinos are concentrated in areas that have been dis-



Masked because of COVID-19, two men talk in front of Arevalo’s Barber Shop along East Anaheim Street in Long Beach, Saturday, April 11, 2020. Photo by Stephen Carr.

proportionately affected by COVID-19. The 90806, 90805, 90810 and 90813 ZIP codes—Central Long Beach, North Long Beach, Downtown and West Long Beach, respectively—have the highest case rates in the city. These areas also have the lowest vaccination rates, a problem city officials have acknowledged.

Specifics on how the new district

would address these issues are still unclear, but city officials say that the feasibility study will likely answer those questions in the coming months.

The study will also investigate funding sources for the district, including grants, Measure US funds, a bond measure, foundation support and government funding opportunities, according to a city memo. Staff would also need to

explore zoning rules for the project before proceeding.

Beyond providing services, Quintana said that El Mercado would be a designated space for Latinos who “don’t have a sense of belonging,” adding that many struggle with language barriers.

The city has several historical districts that are meant to preserve the city’s architectural heritage, but it has no districts specifically designated for racial groups. While Cambodia Town in Central Long Beach shares some similar qualities to El Mercado, Cambodia Town is categorized as a business corridor.

Officials say the idea for a cultural district has been discussed and supported by many city leaders since the 1980s. More recently, Quintana and her team presented an updated concept, El Mercado de Long Beach, during a January meeting for the Latino Cultural Center, a separate cultural project that has still not debuted.

“El Mercado de Long Beach is an exciting vision that’s been happening for years,” Councilwoman Mary Zendejas, who represents District 1, said during Tuesday’s council meeting. “I think that the timing is perfect right now, and it’s long overdue.” ■



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- ✓ **Planning Commission Approved** – Approved in December of 2020 by Long Beach City Planning Commission
- ✓ **Commerce Growth** – Relocates InSite Property Group's national headquarters to Long Beach with new jobs, more tax revenues, and self-storage and RV parking space in short supply and high demand
- ✓ **Robust Remediation and Plant Protection** – A full site clean-up plan and native plant preserve will be overseen by the City of Long Beach Planning Department and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)
- ✓ **Remove Blight and Public Nuisance** – Eliminates dust and noise-generating off-road vehicle activity, drug use, vagrancy, campfires, trash disposal, and makeshift encampments that create a public nuisance, blight and safety risks
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- ✓ **Community Benefits** – Public trail access to LA River, public parking, a trail pavilion, plant preserve, and 24/7 site security

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How Long Beach officials decide who gets vaccinated amid scarce supply

■ By **MELISSA EVANS**, Editor and **JASON RUIZ**, Reporter

Amid the science and state guidance over who is eligible to receive elusive doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, difficult and politically tricky decisions are being made by governments across every jurisdiction in the country.

Navigating these gray areas within the city of Long Beach has led to priorities that in some cases are very different from the county and state.

And while the city has won wide praise and national attention for its aggressive vaccination program, its vaccination decisions also have led to accusations of politicking, favoritism and exclusion of groups who play a big part in the city's ability to function.

Consider:

- Members of the Long Beach City Council were vaccinated against COVID-19 because they were deemed critical to the continuity of government. But that priority ranking has not been extended to most of their staff members, who handle day-to-day dealings with the public.
- Although key workers in the City Attorney's office have been offered the vaccine, employees in the City Prosecutor's office have not been provided the same opportunity.
- Long Beach has now vaccinated every elementary school teacher and staff member in its school district, even though Los Angeles County waited until March 1 to begin that task.
- Dockworkers at the local ports are now getting a slice of the city's vaccine allocations because they handle the transport of cargo that contains food and chemicals used in agriculture, but not the truckers, nor the UPS or FedEx drivers who ferry those same goods to businesses, homes and warehouses across the region.

Bruce Mac Rae, a Long Beach-based regional vice president with UPS, noted the irony that drivers for his company are delivering the vaccine itself to health authorities, yet they are not eligible to receive it.

"We're the ones delivering food, supplies, the vaccine, PPE—and we're not essential enough for the vaccine?" he said, adding that "every county and city has their own play of who they want to put in line."

Ron Herrera, president of the Teamsters Port Division, said given the designation of dockworkers, he would be making an aggressive push to give truck drivers higher priority.

"I'm a little perplexed as to why truck drivers were left out," he said, noting that the majority of these drivers are Latinos from areas hard hit by the coronavirus.

And Laura Reimer, president of the Long Beach Prosecutors Association, said she is in "constant contact" with city leaders and is pressing them to get more than a dozen people in the local office vaccinated because they are in court amid defendants, judges and court staff every day.



Registered nurse Debra Beitler gives Sandra Umali her COVID-19 vaccine at the Long Beach Convention Center, Monday, Jan. 19, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Demand outpaces supply

Officials, including the mayor, say they want to vaccinate everyone, but there simply isn't enough supply. Figures provided by the city show weekly allotments, shared by more than two dozen other service providers, range from a low of about 3,000 doses in the last week of December to a high of nearly 13,000 doses during the first week of January.

In all, Long Beach has provided more than 100,000 doses over 10 weeks for those who live or work in the city.

"There is not enough vaccine," Mayor Robert Garcia said in an interview. "We need more vaccine for every group."

In Long Beach, the people making these decisions include Health Director Kelly Colopy; the city's medical officer, Dr. Anissa Davis; the city's vaccination coordinator, Sandy Wedgeworth; and other officials from emergency management. At times City Manager Tom Modica and the mayor also weigh in, Colopy said.

The city trusts the health department with these decisions, which rely heavily on science, Modica said. "But we also have to balance what we're hearing in the community," he said, adding that he meets twice weekly with a group of department heads for input on COVID-19 response.

The decision-makers must comply with state guidance on groups currently eligible for vaccinations, including health care workers, emergency personnel, seniors over 65, educators and food workers. But, Colopy said, "the state does change who fits into a category fairly frequently."

Last week, for example, the state clarified that drivers for delivery companies like GrubHub do qualify as food workers.

And on Feb. 18, the state sent the city a letter stating that dockworkers could qualify for the vaccine as food workers because they handle the transport of food or products used in food production. The city has since set aside 3,000 doses from the state for longshore workers.

Educators, meanwhile, have qualified for the vaccine under the state's guidelines for more than a month. But given the size of this group—Long Beach Unified alone employs 12,000 people—no other agency was as quick to open eligibility.

The mayor, however, has been a leading advocate around the state that all

teachers should be vaccinated before they are asked to return to classrooms. So far more than 11,000 doses have been offered to staff and educators, or about 12% of the city's total allocation.

Dockworkers and teachers, while deemed by most to be essential workers, are also represented by powerful unions.

Dockworkers, who were previously included in a lower priority category for transportation and logistics workers, handle roughly \$400 billion in commerce entering and exiting through both local ports. They are represented by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which has enormous political power over port operations.

Mario Cordero, executive director of the Port of Long Beach, said the union is not exerting its political clout to get special treatment. He said the threat of COVID-19 on the nation's supply chain poses a real danger. The union has documented just over 1,200 cases of COVID-19 among longshoremen, which is about 9% of the roughly 13,500 workers on the docks.

Adding to that, Cordero said each time there's a positive case, other workers have to quarantine to prevent an outbreak, creating huge backlogs at the port. He noted that 30 container ships were waiting to be processed in the Long Beach harbor on Feb. 24 [the date he was interviewed for this story].

Support for vaccinating port workers came in the form of letters to the state from elected leaders, including State Sen. Lena Gonzalez, Rep. Alan Lowenthal, Assemblyman Patrick O'Donnell and Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn.

Gonzalez said in an interview that the change in policy had nothing to do with unions: "It has to do with the fact that they are essential workers. They have been on the frontline since Day One."

City workers

Administrators at the Port of Long Beach have also been offered doses, putting them in a small group of city employees to get the vaccine.

Modica, the city manager, devised a list of essential workers to receive the vaccine when it arrived in mid-December. After frontline health workers, he determined which employees were essential

for the local government to function in the midst of a pandemic.

"The city employs 6,000 people and the vast majority did not qualify, including many department heads," he said.

The city offered the vaccine to 1,100 of its workers in January, he said, the majority of them police officers.

Essential health department workers as well as those working in the emergency operations center, the joint information center, the city attorney and members of the City Council also made the list—though two City Council members qualified because of their age and one was vaccinated by another agency.

Elected leaders in other jurisdictions, including the California Legislature, have not been offered the vaccine unless they qualify in some other way.

Even though council meetings have been virtual for nearly a year, Modica, who also got the vaccine, said he felt it necessary to vaccinate council members because he needs them to authorize or ratify a number of decisions.

"What happens if we don't have a quorum?" he said. "What happens if four or five of them get sick?"

The city attorney is critical in drafting and reviewing local health orders, legal opinions and enforcement of local laws, the city manager said.

Among those who have not yet made the cut: the city clerk, most of City Auditor Laura Doud's office and City Prosecutor Doug Haubert's office, despite the fact that Haubert himself was in court recently on a case against a local restaurant owner who is accused of violating the city's COVID-19 health orders.

Prosecutors, Modica said, will become eligible as of March 1.

Successes

Vaccinations for teachers, dockworkers and others have not come at the expense of other groups, officials said.

The city late Friday released data on a new dashboard that shows they've provided the vaccine to more seniors and residents than many other jurisdictions in the region: So far 66,553 residents in the city have received at least one dose, about 14.5% of the city, compared to 12% in Los Angeles County and 8.2% in Orange County.

About 60% of Long Beach residents 65 and older have been vaccinated either in Long Beach or another jurisdiction, which is higher than 43% in Los Angeles County and 52.6% in Orange County.

And the city has also made progress in reaching those who live in hard-hit areas and who don't have the internet savvy or resources to book appointments.

Modica and other decision-makers said they've done the best they can to navigate competing interests and concerns, with Colopy emphasizing that those at highest risk have been prioritized.

"We're trying to be as data- and science-based as possible," she said.

"We're proud of what we've been able to do," Modica said. ■

Health officials implore COVID-19 vaccine 'line jumpers' to wait their turn

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Reporter

Health officials are asking residents to wait until it is their turn to receive the scarce COVID-19 vaccine amid reports that some people are using the state's appointment system to "jump the line" and get shots ahead of their scheduled tier.

The current eligible groups in Long Beach include healthcare and emergency response workers, those 65 and older, food and agriculture workers and those in education.

But according to anecdotal incidents, individuals who are not yet eligible have been able to make appointments on the state's vaccine website through links shared in emails. Some individuals have reported that they were only required to provide proof of their appointment time and their eligibility was not checked when they arrived for their scheduled appointment.

Long Beach Health Department Director Kelly Colopy in an email said the health department is aware that people have been sharing links for vaccine appointments and that it remains an "ongoing concern."

Colopy said the appointment link directs people to a state-run vaccine registration site, so the city is not able to control how many people are sharing the link or whether they can schedule an appointment. After

a person is directed to the state's CalVax website, they are asked to check a box identifying their eligible group. However, some have used the group option for "other essential worker," which does not ask for details.

Colopy said the city does screen people at its vaccination sites and turns away those who don't qualify.

"Inevitably, some people have slipped through, but we have literally turned away a few thousand people since the city began administering the vaccine," she said. "We continually train the people who work in our screening lines, reinforce criteria each day, and remind them to check for documentation."

Colopy implored residents not to share links and to only make an appointment if they qualify.

Line-jumping is reportedly a widespread problem.

Last week, members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors expressed anger over reports that people have been using the state appointment system to get shots at clinics reserved for underserved minority and low-income residents.

The problem was highlighted last weekend at the Ramona Gardens public housing complex in Boyle Heights, where Gov. Gavin Newsom was on hand for a clinic designed to serve residents of that community.

As the clinic began operating, with a



Drivers make their way into the parking garage for their COVID-19 vaccination shots at the Long Beach Convention Center, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

host of elected officials on hand, it was clear that some people in line to get vaccinated had driven there from more affluent parts of the Southland.

County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said the problem originates with the state's MyTurn vaccination-appointment system. She said the system "doesn't allow us the level of flexibility that we need to do targeted vaccinations."

In an effort to reserve appointments at a particular population, a special code is generated and provided to the clinic organizer, and people who are given the code can use it to make an appointment.

Those codes, however, are frequently being circulated online and make their way into the hands of people in far-away neighborhoods, who generally have better access to computers and the internet, and they snatch up the appointments and drive across the county to get the shots.

In a news conference on Monday, Ferrer said the county is "constantly" getting reports of people who are finding ways around the eligibility requirements.

"If you were able to make an appointment and you are not in one of the eligible groups, please cancel your appointment," she said. "Don't take away an appointment from an eligible worker."

Greg Jenkins, a 63-year-old event planner who lives in Long Beach, said he knows of several friends who were able to receive a shot even though it wasn't their turn. Jenkins said one friend serves on the advisory board for a local hospital and received a shot as an "essential healthcare worker."

Jenkins, who has underlying health conditions and desperately wants the vaccine, said the system is frustrating.

"I'm glad Long Beach is making progress and I want people to get shots, but it doesn't feel right to see people jumping in line when they're not at major risk," he said. "It's like waiting in line for hours for a concert and then you see somebody escorted right in front of you."

The vaccines must be used within hours after they are defrosted and there have been reports in other cities of ineligible people getting doses that would have gone to waste.

However, health officials in Long Beach

have said the city has been able to avoid wasting shots by keeping a list of eligible residents who they can call if they have leftover doses at the end of the day.

The effort comes as Long Beach is working to target its vaccine rollout with pop-up clinics in North, West and Central Long Beach to bring shots to hard-hit areas and underserved communities of color.

The city last week gave shots to hundreds of seniors in its Cambodian community, which is one of the largest in the country.

Community activist Laura Som, who heads a nonprofit called The MAYE Center that provides support for Cambodian refugees, said she didn't see any incidents of people from outside the Cambodian community stealing spots, but there were other problems.

Three days before the scheduled mass vaccine rollout in Cambodia Town, Som said she was notified that city staff didn't have enough people on hand to call the nearly 300 eligible Cambodians on the city list.

While the city usually sends emails for appointment information, calls needed to be made in this case since many Cambodian seniors do not speak English.

With just a few days before the vaccine clinic, Som and other community members scrambled over the weekend calling more than 300 eligible residents.

They were able to fill all the available slots for the city's reserved 300 doses and were even able to get about 100 more residents vaccinated that day when the city had an additional surplus. In all, nearly 400 Cambodian seniors were vaccinated in a day, she said.

Som said she's grateful for the city's efforts, but the hiccups for the rollout in Cambodia Town highlight the bigger problems in reaching underserved communities. Som said communities of color often have to be their own advocates and fight to get the vaccine to residents.

"At times it felt almost impossible because through every layer of the system it felt like equity was not part of the lens," she said. "We were exhausted but we couldn't let it fail. We put aside our exhaustions and our feelings and we went to work." ■

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After death of Clint Gilmore, Long Beach's last independent music store might shutter forever

■ By CHEANTAY JENSEN
Reporter

Long Beach's last independent music store, Gilmore Music, may see the end of its days soon unless someone steps up to save the 75-year-old storefront.

It's a tough predicament for Gilmore Music after its owner and operator, Clint Gilmore, died of cancer in November. He was 70. Clint's wife, Linda, has since stepped up to run the business, but after six months Linda said she's not sure how much longer she can keep it up.

Whether relief comes by community intervention, a new buyer, or a generous benefactor willing to shell out the funds to keep the store operated by its current staff—as Linda has her fingers crossed for—is up to anyone. But ultimately, Linda hopes that Clint's store and legacy can live on.

"If it's not sustainable, I'm going to have to liquidate. It's not an easy thing to step into. It's not even an easy thing for me, and I have a master's degree for Godsakes," Linda said. Prior to taking over the shop, Linda worked as a special education teacher. "Clint just knew how to do it. He was a good businessman."

Clint's father, Glenn Gilmore, a long-time musician, opened the music store on Seventh Street and Cherry Avenue in 1946, just five years after he married his wife, Esther. Over the



Clint Gilmore in the 1970s and Gilmore Music in 1962, shortly after the store's expansion. Photos courtesy of Linda Gilmore.

years, Glenn Gilmore earned a fine reputation for his instrument repair work.

"Glenn Gilmore was known as the violin specialist around town," said Ilse Benz, owner of Gilmore Music's neighboring music venue, Que Sera.

Both Clint and his older brother, Greg, grew up helping their father run the business. But in his free time, Clint would play with his band, Bittersweet Seven.

"Clint loved all kinds of music," Linda said.

When Clint took over his father's shop in 1988, he had big plans. He expanded inventory, adding a more di-

verse range of instruments from ethnic to electronic assortments and built a recording studio in the back of the store. Gilmore Music soon became the one-stop-shop for any and all music needs.

"It was the shop to go to at one point back then," said Antoine Arvizu, drummer and owner of Compound recording studio.

In the early 90s, Arvizu said he spent a lot of time in Gilmore Music's studio working for nearly five years as a part-time recording engineer for Clint.

"It was a fun little room and reminded me of those high school band rooms in the 60's where they had that acoustic wall board with the little holes in it," he said. "Clint was a funny cat... easy to work with."

While working at Gilmore's Arvizu met local musician Ikey Owens, the Grammy-award winning keyboardist most known for his work with Jack White and The Mars Volta. Arvizu said Owens recorded his first album with his band, Pocket Lent, at the studio.

"Turned into a 25-year relationship of record-making with him," Arvizu said. Owens died in 2014.

Gilmore Music saw its fair share of high-profile musicians visit the shop over the years, including members of Long Beach bands Sublime and War, Danny Elfman, Jethro Tull guitarist Martin Barre and Melissa Etheridge, who, during the start of her career, would play frequently next door at Que Sera.

Clint was considered a savant when it came to repairing instruments, able to fix anything, Linda said, adding that he would use the same tools dating

back to the 1900s his father and grandfather used to repair the instruments.

"Clint was brilliant," Benz said and recalled a memory she shared with Clint regarding an alto sax she took in for repair. "He rattled off the name of the company, where the company was located, what state, it was like a little history lesson on that alto sax in a pawn shop."

"That's really what he loved, is the repair part, more than anything," Linda said of her husband. "Brass was a bigger challenge he really looked forward to. After he had straightened out all the dents and polished it, had it all up and working—he was so proud of that."

Local blues and Americana musician Mike Malone, who recorded the first of his music at the studio inside Gilmore Music, said he remembers Clint as "super dry, you know, deadpan" but always remembered to ask about his son, who picked up his first violin from Gilmore Music when he was in middle school.

Clint also had a soft spot for helping people, Malone said, and would give him the "righteous bro deal" when he needed to buy harmonicas. For 15 years, Clint supported the Jazz Angels, a music education non-profit founded by Barry Cogert. Clint helped with repairs, monetary donations—even gave away instruments to some of the kids in the program.

"He liked to help out the college kids that were into music," Linda said. "That was his thing, whenever he would advertise [hiring] he'd try to get college kids to come in and try to work around their schedules so they could



The interior of Gilmore Music in the mid 1950s. Clint, a young boy at the time, sits behind his father Glenn, who is addressing a crowd of musicians. The man playing the clarinet is Pete Fountain, a famed New Orleans jazz musician. Photo courtesy Linda Gilmore.



“We are pro-business.”

— Suzie Price, Long Beach City Council Meeting, February 9, 2021

The Long Beach City Council is voting on issues that are anti-business — hurting minority business owners. Council member Suzie Price stated, “This entire council does everything we can to help our small businesses,” meanwhile the council unanimously voted against business owners on February 9, 2021 ... and she voted ‘yes’ for anti-small business laws again!

*Long Beach Council members’ **words don’t match their actions.***

Your Voice Matters!

Contact your city council member and ask why they are hurting local businesses.

Mary Zendejas • District 1
(562) 570-6919 • district1@longbeach.gov

Cindy Allen • District 2
(562) 570-2222 • district2@longbeach.gov

Suzie Price • District 3
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Daryl Supernaw • District 4
(562) 570-4444 • district4@longbeach.gov

Stacy Mungo • District 5
(562) 570-5555 • district5@longbeach.gov

Suely Saro • District 6
(562) 570-6816 • district6@longbeach.gov

Roberto Uranga • District 7
(562) 570-7777 • district7@longbeach.gov

Al Austin • District 8
(562) 570-6685 • district8@longbeach.gov

Rex Richardson • District 9
(562) 570-6137 • district9@longbeach.gov



Clint Gilmore, right, pictured with some members of Bittersweet Seven in the 1970s. Photo courtesy Linda Gilmore.

(Continued from Page 8)

make some money.”

By the mid 2000s, Gilmore Music became the last independently owned non-specialized music store in the city—outlasting both World of Strings, also on Seventh Street, and Whittaker Music in Los Altos. Now, Long Beach might have to say goodbye to its final music mainstay.

Working to help keep Gilmore Music standing is Amy Eriksen, Director of Angels Gate Cultural Center in San Pedro and former music education teacher for the Long Beach Unified School District. Eriksen said that once she heard of Clint’s passing and the uncertain future of the store, she felt compelled to help.

“This is our last music store in town. I think it would be a big loss to our community if we didn’t have one,” Eriksen said.

Over the last few weeks, Eriksen and Linda have met with various arts, music and business leaders in the city to brainstorm potential uses for the space. While Linda ultimately wants

to see her husband’s store and legacy continue, she recognizes the challenge of finding a buyer to run a music store during one of the toughest economic crises in history.

“I think the goal is to see what the community could do to keep Gilmore’s music legacy in the community but get her out of having to run it,” Eriksen said. “I think art and music in this town is very important. I’m a product of Long Beach Unified’s love for music.”

Arvizu said he hopes Gilmore Music sticks around, believing that independently owned shops like Clint’s store, are the heart and spirit of any music community.

“I miss those mom and pop shops,” Arvizu said. “You know, someone who was willing to get up every day and just run a music store, because he loved music. He loved repairing the gear, he loved his clients. He loved the community.”

Gilmore is survived by his wife of 37 years, Linda; daughter, Ashley; sisters, Laura and Kathy and brother, Greg. ■

The Queen Mary is getting its own 3-part horror movie franchise

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

A three-part horror film series starring the historic Queen Mary and its haunted history is set to begin filming in Long Beach and London in April.

The first movie, dubbed “The Queen Mary,” is slated to release at the end of 2021 or in early 2022, according to developer and producer Brett Tomberlin, co-founder of Imagination Design Works, one of the production companies involved with the project.

The series, which has been in development for about a decade, will examine the former ocean liner’s storied past—from its construction in the 1930s to its missions during World War II to the present day—with a focus on the myths and urban legends of it being one of the most haunted places on Earth.

Each of the three films will focus on specific time periods, Tomberlin said. Parts two and three will follow similar production schedules, meaning they will likely be released in early 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Dozens of deaths were reported aboard the ship during its 31 years in service, which have resulted in the formulation of an array of ghost stories. Some include The White Lady, a specter seen by guests and workers alike floating at the end of the first-class lounge, John Pedder, a crewman crushed to death by the infamous Door 13, and Little Jackie, one of numerous children who drowned in one of the ship’s swimming pools.

“What we really liked was the idea of the swimming pool being the [gateway] for crossing over into different time periods,” Tomberlin said. Utilizing the pool as a sort of portal, the film series will jump to different periods of the ship’s past, while remaining true to its history.

A driving force behind the story is the idea that the Queen Mary, not the Titanic, was the unsinkable ship, Tomberlin said. In 1942, while transporting over 16,000 U.S. troops across the Atlantic, the Queen was slammed by a rogue wave, tipping 52 degrees, only three degrees shy of capsizing. Additionally, all throughout the war Hitler’s various bounties and attempts to sink the ship proved futile.

“Throughout her whole history, this thing has been meant to go down and it keeps staying afloat,” Tomberlin said. “The horror aspect is that all the people that have died on the Queen Mary have stayed on the Queen Mary—almost like in purgatory—and that spiritual energy is what powers the ship through surviving all these incidents.

“When you encounter a bunch of people that have been stuck on a ship for a very long time looking for a way out, there’s a lot of desperation,” Tomberlin

added.

While the film is being categorized as a horror movie, Tomberlin said it’s going to be an elevated, high-level film that does not rely on cheap thrills and is not reduced to a slasher flick. The film instead will explore the ship’s history through a suspenseful lens with some bloody accents.

“[The writers] really captured the essence of the Queen Mary, where it’s not just another haunted house tale,” Tomberlin said. “We have a good thriller component to it and approached the subject matter of this genre in a different way. It’s not just taking a tour ... and one by one all the tour guests go missing, something we’ve seen over and over again.”

It took about five years of negotiations and “a fortune in legal fees” for the studios to acquire all the necessary agreements from various trademark holders, Tomberlin said, and another five years

working with writers Stephen Oliver, Gary Shore and Tom Vaughan. Shore, who made his feature film debut with “Dracula Untold”—a box office success grossing over \$217 million worldwide—is also directing the film.

But with all agreements in order, casting for the film is underway with the studio recently announcing Alice Eve (“Star Trek Into Darkness” and Marvel’s “Iron Fist”).

A portion of the filming will take place aboard the ship, with higher action scenes being filmed on a sound stage utilizing the same cutting-edge technology used to create “The Mandalorian.” The tech requires the Queen Mary to be fully scanned and digitally recreated to later be projected on screens behind and around the actors.

Tomberlin said mostly action sequences will be filmed on a soundstage to avoid damaging the historic ship. But establishing shots, deck shots and interiors for more docile scenes will be shot in Long Beach where the ship has been since 1967.

Dozens of TV shows and movies have filmed scenes aboard the ship, including “The Poseidon Adventure,” “The Aviator” and “Pearl Harbor.”

Film entertainment company Rocket Science is financing the project, which has a budget that will likely land somewhere between \$10.5 and \$12.5 million, which is on the higher end for horror, Tomberlin said, noting many horror films come in right around the \$6 million mark.

“We’ve seen the magic of what happened when James Cameron did ‘Titanic,’ and did ‘Titanic’ well,” Tomberlin said. “There’s another side of that with another majestic boat where we can tell a great haunted house horror story. It’s basically ‘The Shining’ on water.” ■



The Queen Mary, a historic Long Beach landmark for decades, is getting a three-part horror film franchise based on its haunted past. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Opera on demand? LBO's new artistic director has the expertise to lead pandemic-era opera

■ By CHEANTAY JENSEN
Reporter

When Andreas Mitisek announced in 2019 he'd be stepping down from his 17-year-long career as Long Beach Opera's artistic director in 2020, the company knew it would be a challenge to replace the lauded artist.

LBO's reputation for putting on some of the most innovative and experimental operas, oftentimes staged in unconventional locations—the 2008 performance of Ricky Ian Gordon's "Orpheus and Eurydice" staged in the Belmont Plaza Olympic Pool being one of the more memorable—was largely thanks to Mitisek. But when the coronavirus made its debut in March 2020, upending all live performance industries, LBO knew that their new director would not only need to be innovative artistically, but logistically as well.

Taking up the mantle as LBO's third artistic director in the company's 41-year history is James Darrah, a Los Angeles-based director, designer and filmmaker whose recent work producing digital classical concerts and film adaptations of operas has suddenly made him one of the most sought-after opera creatives. Darrah, whose official first day was Feb. 22, is expected to stay with the company until at least the end of 2024, LBO said.

"James possesses a talent and expertise for combining beautiful, powerful aesthetics with a true musical sensitivity that is, in my opinion, currently unmatched in the opera industry," Jennifer Rivera, LBO's Executive Director and CEO said in a statement. "But in addition to his talent as a director and designer, he has demonstrated that he is also truly a creative visionary with the ability to understand the ways in which opera can remain relevant for a 21st-century audience."

At only 36, Darrah had already made a name for himself in the opera world; his affinity and talent for producing live contemporary works includes credits as a producer, director, and designer with some of the most distinguished opera companies and theaters in the U.S. and Europe. A particular high point being the Los Angeles Opera's 2018 world premiere production of Ellen Reid and Roxie Perkins Pulitzer-winning opera "prism," which Darrah developed and directed.

While his foray into acting and directing calls back to his undergrad years at the University of La Verne, Darrah pursued his MFA in directing from UCLA, where he is currently a faculty member at the university's School of Theater, Film and Television. Fusing his love and eye for film into live operatic productions has been one of Darrah's distinctive talents.

So when stages went dark in 2020, Darrah was poised to pivot his work toward a digital landscape, which made him very popular. And busy.

In the last six months alone, Darrah has generated a wide range of cinematic digital content for Opera Philadelphia, Boston Lyric Opera, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra—and those particular ones are just a snippet of his recent projects.

With Opera Philadelphia, Darrah claims



James Darrah, 36, is Long Beach Opera's newest artistic director and is slated to stay with the company until the end of 2024. Photo courtesy Long Beach Opera.

credits as producer and screenwriter for the film adaptation of the rock opera "Soldier Songs" by composer David T. Little. The Boston Lyric Opera's fully animated feature-length film of Philip Glass' Edgar Allan Poe opera, "The Fall of the House of Usher" was envisioned and directed by Darrah.

As the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra's Director of Digital Content, Darrah championed its new 16-episode streaming series, "Close Quarters" which pairs classical music with cinematic visual art. On YouTube alone, the series has raked in hundreds of thousands of views.

In their desire to embrace a new, digital audience, Long Beach Opera is no different. The group has long worked to make opera more accessible and inclusive to the community. Those ideals, Darrah said, align with his own.

"If opera is going to stop being a niche art form and treated as an exotic thing...we have to start reimagining how opera is consumed," Darrah said. "We all know what it means to go watch a streaming program...opera needs to harness that that's a reality of our world."

To be clear: Darrah is not interested in abandoning live performance. And yes, for all the purists out there, it's true, there is no replacement for the visceral, unique magic of live opera. But Darrah believes that now is the time to embrace a style of opera that viewers might feel compelled to binge just as they do on Netflix or HBO: narrative works, designed for the screen.

"If you're an artist, last year was pretty awful and devastating, for all of us, [but] especially if you're working in opera, which is one of the professions in the U.S. that isn't really happening right now," he said. "Let's be part of the solution, generate projects, jobs and work with people who have really interesting things to say and interesting viewpoints."

"I think the future of that looks like we embrace the cinematic, and digital media side of opera to an even greater degree. And when we come back to live performances, those have to be a compelling reason to attend something live."

Luckily for Long Beach, LBO currently has a live performance slated for May this

year—what will be Darrah's first directorial debut with LBO. The "Les Enfants Terribles" dance chamber opera by Philip Glass, as originally seen live at the ONE Festival in 2019, is being reimagined for a drive-in experience, where the production will be performed safely around the audience's cars.

Darrah was born in San Antonio where he lived with his parents, but spent much of his time with his grandparents in Iowa. Through them, Darrah said, he developed

a love for dogs (his long-haired chihuahua, Ru, his pride and joy) as well as theater and film. The former, from his veterinarian grandfather, and the latter, from his grandmother, Janet, a schoolteacher.

"My grandmother is just so theatrical, I don't even know how to describe it," Darrah said. "She was showing me films, giving me new books, encouraging me to read. It was kind of special between the two of us."

Darrah settled in Los Angeles in 2006, and currently lives in Echo Park with his husband Alex Black, who is director of marketing for the dating app Grindr. While Darrah said he doesn't plan to move to Long Beach for his new residency any time soon—he and his partner still have many projects that keep them in Los Angeles—Darrah said he's enjoyed biking down to Long Beach to test the commute via the Metro. He tries to live as "green" as possible, he said.

Despite the distance, Darrah said he's going to try and be as present as possible in Long Beach Opera and added how proud he is that he's working for such a progressive city.

"I'm so inspired by the mayor—who I'd really like to meet—and all he's doing for COVID action, caring communication and LGBTQ representation," Darrah said. "My husband and I are so proud I'm now working in a city with an out, gay mayor unafraid to meet the moment." ■

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Signal Hill: On a shiny and upward spiral from its oily past



A mother and daughter look out over the Long Beach coast and Downtown from atop Signal Hill. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

Land in Signal Hill prior to 1921 was cheaper than dirt.

A good illustration of this fact came in the form of a dead whale, a corpse from the sea that would live on to enjoy a long career as a Long Beach tourist attraction as Minnie the Whale.

Two teenage boys found the 63-foot whale's carcass in the Long Beach surf in 1897 and hauled it ashore, quickly drawing a crowd.

A pair of forward-thinking entrepreneurs offered the boys a choice of rewards: \$160 cash or "several acres" in Signal Hill.

"Signal what?" was the boys' response as they each pocketed \$80 and disappeared into history.

It wasn't a shocking choice at the time, because Signal Hill at the turn of the century, was hardscrabble land a fair distance away from the relative bustle of Long Beach, which fairly fizzled out 10 or 12 blocks north of where Minnie washed up.

Land on Signal Hill back then was worked largely by Japanese immigrants, who grew cucumbers and zinnias on the hillside. The Japanese were sufficient in number back then to warrant a Japanese language school and a Buddhist Temple.

Things slowly began to change around 1910. Long Beach's Balboa Studios leased 11 acres of the hill to film silent westerns. You've seen most of them: "Western Musketeer," "The Dashing Ranger," "Pawnee Bill," "Twin Six O'Brien." Classics.

Additionally, the advent of the auto-

mobile allowed for an easy climb up the hill as opposed to the days of the horse-drawn wagon in which ascending the hill required a team of horses and Sherpas. Now, suddenly, wealthy people hankered for a home atop Signal Hill, with its awesome views of the blue Pacific to the south and the snow-capped mountains to the north, with breezes coming from both directions making the location, according to one early promoter, a place where "peace, plenty and prosperity reign undisturbed and nature is always at her best."

Sold! Moneyed residents fought to be king of the hill. Early wealthy folk built sprawling mansions at or above the 300-foot level of the 365-foot-high hill. Liquor baron Andres Pala put up a 15-room three-story pink mansion; Lewis Denni, who owned the Alamitos Cheese Factory on Signal Hill, moved into a mansion built in 1915. Other estates were bought by Long Beach hardware magnate Horace Green, and head of the Pine Avenue Dobyns shoe dynasty, Harvey Dobyns.

For a decade, the status quo held. The wealthy enjoyed their views and breezes and looked down from their expensive perches on Long Beach and the workers who farmed citrus, flowers and vegetables and raised livestock on the hill's lower elevations.

There had been some talk that there could be oil in the ground below the mansions. A few wildcatters took a few pokes around but came up empty.

The mighty Union Oil Co. took a serious run at finding oil in the area in 1916, drilling a 3,449-foot well at Wardlow Road and Long Beach Boulevard. It came

up just shy of what was later discovered to be a massive oil pool, but at the time, the disappointed oil crews abandoned the shaft and half a decade passed.

Shell Oil was a joke of a company. One competing oil executive once loudly boasted to a roomful of cigar-smoke-choked guffaws that he would drink a gallon of every barrel of oil Shell pulled out of Signal Hill. Soon, he would have to renege on his boast or drown in the payoff, because on June 25, 1921, a crew led by foreman Happy Yowell, tapped into a gusher at 3,114 feet at the Alamitos No. 1 well.

A fountain of crude oil shot more than 100 feet into the skies above Signal Hill, and the shouting and hoopla drew more than 22,000 people from Long Beach, including the 1,800 residents of Signal Hill, to watch the oil spouting and drenching nearby homes. It took two days before workers could cap the well. By then, there was oil everywhere and word spread just like it had 73 years earlier when gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill.

The oil rush started with small property owners selling off their land at 100 times its previous value. Common folk in town, your barbers, school teachers, grocers — pretty much everyone except those teenagers who took cash instead of land for Minnie the Whale — became wealthy in a matter of days.

The Saturday Evening Post wrote about the oil rush in Long Beach in 1923:

Long Beach was a quaint, staid place, with its large proportion of retired Midwesterners until it struck oil. Now the streets are filled with great throngs of people, the traffic is dense, and groups

stand on every street corner discussing oil and real estate.

In the banks long lines of retired farmers with market baskets on arm, wait their turn to see the officials, who cannot take the time to interview customers in their offices, but only through windows.

But after that initial flurry of quick riches for the common man, the oil boom rapidly reverted to the story about the rich getting richer.

Of course, the richest were the oil barons who quickly shipped crews and drilling equipment to the hill, which was suddenly gushing oil geysers everywhere. But the wealthy folks on the hill got to wet their beaks as well. Pala turned his mansion into a luxury dormitory and rented the rooms out to oil executives, making millions of dollars, while Denni scored a shrewd hardball deal, turning over his mansion in exchange for an unheard-of 50% royalty on oil obtained from his property and made considerably more than he made in the cheese biz.

The city of Long Beach grew dollar-sign eyes as well and figured on levying a handsome tax on each barrel of oil extracted from the hill. It was a plan that so alarmed the local residents that they incorporated Signal Hill as a city on April 22, 1924, blocking Long Beach's ideas of annexation.

With oil continually falling from the sky, along with the industry's attendant fires, Signal Hill became virtually uninhabitable. More than 3,000 oil derricks were planted in the area, earning the town the nickname Porcupine Hill.

Occasional disasters came with the oil, most notably the Richfield Refinery

blast, most likely caused by the Long Beach Earthquake in 1933, which killed a mother and her child, and the more horrific Hancock Refinery fire of 1958. That fire killed two Hancock workers while burning for 72 hours, sending dense black smoke across several cities. It took the combined efforts of the Signal Hill, Long Beach and LA County fire departments to finally extinguish the blaze, one of the worst in California history.

And it was more than fires. A different kind of disaster hit the hill on the late afternoon of Jan. 12, 1954, when a Navy F-86 Sabre supersonic jet crashed into the neighborhood at Raymond Avenue and 19th Street. The plane hit a pine tree and cartwheeled through the residential area, breaking gas mains which erupted into flames. The crash killed seven people, including the pilot. The wreckage hit a home, killing a woman and her infant son.

In those days, Signal Hill in the prime of its life as an oil-producing town, was literally covered with oil or its offshoots. It was a noisy, smelly place to live, which resulted in a real-estate boom in nearby California Heights and other neighborhoods north of the hill where homes were built to accommodate both wealthy executives and oil workers seeking a respite from the odors, smoke and chemicals related to their business of supplying billions of barrels of oil to a nation that was increasingly depending on it.



A forest of oil derricks during Signal Hill's oil production heyday.

By the late 1960s, though, oil production was slowing down and new drilling technology led to the consolidation of the thousands of wells that covered the landscape. It was time for Signal Hill to clean up and return to a more hospitable place to live. It was a time when city and ocean views were becoming as valuable as oil and developers had their eyes on the hill-top parcels.

But there was a lot of cleanup that needed to be done, and by the early 1970s, the idea of forming a Redevelopment Agency took root, but it would involve the city condemning run-down properties through eminent domain to build new development. That wasn't a popular idea, so the town's City Council went ahead and voted to form the Signal Hill Redevelopment Agency, which covered the entire

2.2 square-mile town, under the condition that homes would not be condemned.

The same oil that made the city wealthy, also contributed to Signal Hill's emergence from its roughneck background.

Signal Hill Petroleum, founded in 1984, acquired the Shell Oil properties on the hill, and the company subsequently snapped up Arco, Texaco and Exxon properties. Today, Signal Hill Petroleum own the majority of oil-producing sites and has used its wealth to remediate and redevelop former oilfields, resulting in such commercial developments as Town Center West, the Signal Hill Gateway Center and the Fresh and Easy retail center, along with residential developments that include Promontory Estates, Skyline Estates, Westbluff Estates and Hathaway Ridge.

Before the state dismantled RDAs in 2011, Signal Hill had spent more than \$17 million in acquiring properties and \$15 million in environmental clean-ups. Several high-dollar condo developments sprang up as the city's population grew. More people brought in more money, more money brought more development, more development brought more people, etc. That escalation brought in a large amount of retail and auto businesses to serve the area and bring in shoppers from Long Beach.

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Despite economic downturn and limiting regulations, Signal Hill restaurants are holding on

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Jimmy E's Bar + Grill on Cherry Avenue in Signal Hill opened its doors in February 2020, a few weeks before COVID-19 health orders put a halt to in-person dining.

"It's been a rollercoaster ride ever since," General Manager George Fallon said of the months of changing regulations on dining and the economic insecurity that followed.

But although many restaurants have struggled, Signal Hill's eateries have fared comparatively well during the pandemic, especially after the county allowed restaurants to again serve customers outdoors in late January.

The city's high density of essential businesses, from big box retailers to car dealerships, has kept workers coming in, serving as a steady customer base for its few restaurants.

"We've been doing great," Fallon said. "Luckily a lot of the businesses around us were still operating at a pretty high level."

Signal Hill relies heavily on sales tax, which makes up 68% of the city's general fund. With purchases of grocery items, home goods and electronics surging during the pandemic, the city's businesses have fared better than initially expected.

"Although retail in general has suffered, the specific mix of businesses in Signal Hill has proven in the short-term to be pandem-



Patrons eat and drink at Jimmy E's Bar & Grill's outdoor patio in Signal Hill, Friday, Feb. 26, 2020. Photo by Stephen Carr.

ic-proof," city staff said in a recent report to the City Council.

Just like their counterparts in other nearby cities, Signal Hill restaurateurs said the recent reopening of outdoor dining has been reinvigorating.

"I am so thankful that ever since we opened, our patio has been packed," said John Toman, owner of Curley's Cafe, which has been serving diners in Signal Hill for almost 90 years.

The restaurant's loyal customers, Toman said, were eager to return. "They trust us and they've been waiting for us to open back up."

For some, however, the pandemic restrictions have remained a significant challenge.

"We've been around for a long time, so we have a lot of loyal customers," said Jim Georges, who owns Golden Eagle Restaurant, a family-owned diner that has been in operation since the 1980s.

But despite plenty of outdoor seating, Georges said most of his customers, a large majority of whom are blue-collar workers, come to the restaurant seeking more than

just food. They come to sit in the classic diner booths, sharing refills of filter coffee and camaraderie.

"For this restaurant to succeed, it's gotta be back to normal—inside dining," he said. "The food—don't get me wrong, it's important too—but it's more about hanging out with friends, the fellowship."

Los Angeles County, which governs Signal Hill when it comes to COVID-19 metrics and health orders, won't be able to allow indoor dining until cases fall below 7 per 100,000 cases for at least two weeks. The earliest this could happen would be Tuesday, March 16.

Still, 60-year-old Georges—who has been working in the family's restaurants since his early teens and owns Golden Eagle with his brother Louie—said he's not ready to give up just yet.

"People are fighters. When you're self-employed, you go through a lot of trials and tribulations," he said. "We're holding on."

Signal Hill City Manager Hannah Shin-Heydorn said she hopes that the new federal stimulus package will include more direct aid to small cities, which were previously cut out of any direct relief payments, instead relying on allocations from the state.

"We are a smaller city, so we do have limited resources," she said.

Direct pandemic stimulus funds could make a big difference, she said.

"It's support like this that would then give us the resources to turn around and help support small businesses like our restaurants," Shin-Heydorn said. ■

Signal Hill's long awaited mixed-use 'city center' is once again on the back burner

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Heritage Square, a keystone development set to become a sort of downtown district for Signal Hill, is once again on the back burner with no timeline for when planning will resume.

David Slater, executive vice president and COO of oil company and developer Signal Hill Petroleum, said the pandemic did not play a role in putting the project on hold, noting there are no current estimates for when planning will resume or when the project will break ground.

In a July interview, the company's vice president of business development, Kevin Laney, said Signal Hill Petroleum was working with the city to conduct weekly video meetings about the project, adding that new conceptual plans would be shared "in the next few months."

"Signal Hill Petroleum has periodically met with city staff to discuss various conceptual developments," Slater said, "but our main focus at this time is the redevelopment of the Target Center and working with the city on future housing elements including affordable housing."

The Target Center is located in the northern part of the city at California Avenue and

33rd Street. The company did not elaborate on its plans for the site.

Signal Hill Petroleum first proposed the Heritage Square development near Cherry Avenue and East Burnett Street two decades ago, according to Slater. Since then, the project has gone through at least a dozen iterations, he said.

The most recent version of the project included about 17,000 square feet of retail space and 69 residential units, a drastic decrease from earlier plans that had up to 200 units, much to the chagrin of Signal Hill residents concerned about density.

"When we were actively planning for this project, community input was very important," Slater said in an email, adding that three or four community meetings were held.

The company remains dedicated to seeing the project through, Slater said, noting existing plans are subject to change with more community outreach likely to take place once the project becomes active.

"[Signal Hill Petroleum] has had a near-term focus on working with the City of Signal Hill on economic development and affordable housing," Slater said. "A city center, signature mixed-use development at the Heritage Square site is still envisioned in the future." ■

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With oil pumps littered across the small city, developing housing in Signal Hill is tricky. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Signal Hill Housing

(Continued from Page 1)

only 15% and 13%, respectively. They did, however, exceed the goals for “above moderate-income” housing at 127%.

Ma’Ayn Johnson, a housing program manager for SCAG, said those numbers represent “a growing concern” at a time when affordable housing is at a premium and demand far exceeds supply for both renters and potential homebuyers.

“It’s been built up over decades,” Johnson said of the dynamic. “It’s a perfect storm of a housing crisis that will continue to worsen.”

The municipalities are not responsible for actually constructing units but rather for helping clear the way for developers through such actions as zoning changes, regulatory streamlining and even by purchasing and preparing land as a cost-saving incentive for builders. Cities are also required by law to incorporate the housing allotments in their general plans—a kind of blue print for future development.

When cities don’t make their numbers, there are no consequences unless a jurisdiction seemingly fails to even try, which is why the state attorney general filed suit in 2019 against Huntington Beach. It had failed to include its housing goals in its general plan, as required by state law. A settlement was reached last year, Johnson said.

Signal Hill confronts unique challenges

In Signal Hill, Doan said she knew the allocation of housing units was going to exceed the numbers set during the previous eight-year cycle—but not threefold. Last time, SCAG allocated 169 units to Signal Hill. This time it’s 516.

“Everybody’s got big numbers, and they did give us hints that it was coming,” Doan said. “We did not realize it might be more than three times.”

Signal Hill planners are currently surveying land throughout the city to find future housing locations. Once identified, the properties can then be zoned for affordable housing.

That’s what the city did during the last cycle, which led to the development of the

72-unit Zinnia Apartments, completed in 2017. The city purchased the property, zoned it for affordable housing and then sold it to a developer. The apartment complex helped Signal Hill meet its goals for the creation of very low- and low-income units.

As arduous as that process was back then, city planners had one significant advantage over today. Signal Hill was able to buy the property through its redevelopment agency. Created in the 1940s, these agencies, spread throughout California, were intended to help cities combat blight. But in 2012, they were dissolved under then-Gov. Jerry Brown.

“Redevelopment was everyone’s best tool because it provided funding,” Doan said. “There’s been a lot of scrambling ever since that went away. At the same time, our needs for homes and specifically affordable homes have seemed to grow exponentially.”

While cities across the state now face that same reality, Signal Hill confronts uniquely difficult terrain in trying to meet its significantly higher housing goals.

To find suitable land for residential construction, planners must tiptoe around oil pipes, wells and derricks—active and abandoned—limiting available housing sites. Before a bulldozer racks the ground or the first shovel hits the dirt, an analysis of the risks of what may lie beneath must be undertaken.

“We have worked with SCAG over the years, every cycle, to remind them that we have these major constraints to development in our little 2.2 square mile city,” Doan said. “We have existing oil wells, we have abandoned oil wells, we have an earthquake fault zone that runs diagonally across the entire city. We have some constraints from oil operations and oil facility operations. Yet here we are, with more than three times the number [of units] based on a very complicated equation.”

To deal with these barriers, Doan said, the city is partnering heavily with Signal Hill Petroleum, an oil-production company that owns 50% of all vacant land in the city.

David Slater, vice president and chief operating officer of Signal Hill Petroleum, said the company and city are working together to plan the next 10 years of de-

velopment. Residential construction, he said, is a major component of that effort, including the creation of very-low to low-income housing.

“We are doing everything that we can at this time,” Slater said. “The city has a general plan, and specific zoning comes from the city, so we are working with them on what those zoning changes would be.”

The company’s oil wells were designed to have long-life reserves, Slater said, thus many of them are still producing oil for the company.

“We try to be a good neighbor, if you will,” he said, but added: “There’s lots of oil to still be produced in Signal Hill.”

Signal Hill Economic Development Manager Elise McCaleb said the city also has fewer stable revenue sources than elsewhere in helping planners create affordable housing. She said the city still has some leftover redevelopment dollars to buy properties but nothing ongoing.

Some cities, she said, may be able to help bridge the funding gap left by the demise of redevelopment agencies through various federal grants. But because of Signal Hill’s relatively small size, she said, it receives fewer and smaller funding opportunities than larger jurisdictions.

In December 2020, Signal Hill planners applied for four housing grants. The city was awarded three, totaling \$425,000. As of late February, the city is still waiting word on the fourth grant, which would

provide \$65,482 annually for five years. McCaleb said these grants would be used to fund environmental studies and analyses of land sites.

But, as Doan noted: “the grants don’t come close to the amount of funds needed and previously available.”

A permanent source of funding for cities to use to identify affordable housing sites has to be considered by the state legislature if cities are to help with California’s housing shortage, McCaleb said. “It takes a lot of work to build affordable housing,” she said.

Cities can attempt to appeal their new housing goals, but few succeed. During this upcoming housing cycle, some cities have tried to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason to reduce the number of housing units they’ve been allocated.

But according to SCAG, the organization has determined that without evidence that the pandemic will continue to severely affect the state’s population growth and employment for the next eight years, it would be unreasonable to scale back the new housing goals.

More likely, said SCAG’s housing program manager, Johnson, demand for units in California will continue to escalate for years for years to come.

“It is possible, depending on market conditions, there will always be growth, that’s for certain,” she warned. “If we don’t take care of people here today, we’re still going to have those problems.” ■

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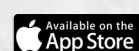
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Rhonda Love
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Rhonda Love is a producer, director, editor, and Founding Director of DreamKreator Studio, located in the East Village Arts District. A graduate of the UCLA Entertainment Management Program, Rhonda has structured partnerships with corporate brands, organizations, municipalities, and high-profile public figures. Rhonda's mission is to make communities better through media.

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Grocery Outlet owner Kia Patterson is working hard at being the boss

■ By STEVE LOWERY
Reporter

This is the third—fourth?—attempt at connecting with Kia Patterson at her place of business. She’s owned the Grocery Outlet, located at 1340 Seventh St. in Long Beach, since the summer of 2019, though sometimes she needs to be reminded of that.

“She’s a worker bee, she’s still growing into being the boss,” says Shakira Bryant who, in her role as the store’s office manager, and Patterson’s cousin, feels compelled to protect Kia, mostly from Kia. “I’ll find her fixing [a display] of garlic and I’ll say, ‘We have an associate who can do that.’ She needs to be doing boss things. But it’s just in her nature to do things herself.”

This morning, 6 a.m., the boss was outside helping unload the half dozen trucks that showed up with deli items, milk, groceries, meat and frozen food. Patterson comes by her bee tendencies honestly, honed by working nearly 18 years for Smart & Final—she was a store manager by age 24—and by the four women who raised her.

Now, on this media tour of the store that took three—four?—passes to arrange, she admits the hardest thing about owning a store is “turning on that switch that says I’m the business owner as opposed to being a manager. They are two completely different things.”

She says she noticed the difference right away, especially when something would break.

“All of a sudden, you realize you have to pay for that,” she says.

“Yeah, and it seems every time something breaks, it’s \$2,000,” Bryant adds.

You can actually see the switch as Patterson moves from boasting about her store’s impressive organic produce section to quickly pivoting to assist an associate not only load a pallet on a pallet jack but then offer a quick tutorial in operating a pallet jack, finishing the lesson with a “Now, be careful.”

And just like that, the boss turns around and goes right back to talking about organic produce—much of it 40% to 70% off what you’d normally expect to pay—which isn’t necessarily what you’d expect to find in an “extreme value” grocery store.

“A lot of people have an image of just a bunch of dented cans,” says Patterson, who, yes, is aware the chain’s original name was Canned Foods. Her store’s interior looks pretty much like any other quality supermarket: very clean, very organized, rows of shelves neatly stocked, including an impressive wine section that not only sells directly from wineries but manages to keep a lot of bottle prices around \$4, \$5 and \$6. Twice a year, the store holds a wine sale featuring 20% off all individual bottles.

“It gets crazy in here when that rolls around,” Patterson says.

Upfront today, are such featured items as organic mangos—very popular—organic avocados—most popular (three for \$5)—and bunches of organic bananas for



Kia Patterson places new green plants on the shelves while working at her Grocery Outlet location in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

\$1.99.

“A dollar ninety-nine,” she says with incredulous pride. “Where else are you going to find that?”

When she bought her first Grocery Outlet in Compton in 2017, there was virtually no place to find organic produce or much food of any quality, causing the region to be declared a “food desert.”

She quickly changed that, not only by the products she made available but by bringing in dieticians and chefs to educate her customers as to their uses and benefits.

News of what she was doing, and where she was doing it, quickly spread. In purchasing the Compton store, Kia Patterson had become, at 36, the first Black owner of a supermarket in the city.

As the story spread, Kia noticed the store getting more and more crowded as requests for media interviews became more and more frequent. Having just ended her nearly two-decade stint at Smart & Final, having stumbled upon Grocery Outlet’s franchise program online and struggling to make the worker bee-owner switch in her brain, she suddenly felt uncomfortable with the level and type of attention she was receiving, i.e., very few people wanted to talk about bananas.

“When the story first broke, the next month and a half, the store was insane,” she said. “And yes, it was good for the sales, but suddenly everyone was pulling at me. I’ve always thought of myself as a pretty outgoing person, but my level of anxiety was just crazy. People were coming at me like I was a celebrity and I would explain ‘Hey, I’m just stocking groceries. I’m not a celebrity, I gotta work.’”

It wasn’t that Patterson didn’t appreciate the significance of being the first Black-owned store, quite the opposite. She cared so much that the weight of the matter became crushing at times.

“I felt I had immense pressure, every day. I just wasn’t able to be Kia, the owner-operator of Grocery Outlet. It was as if I had to put the culture on my back, to say ‘Yes, I’m female! Yes, I’m Black! And yes, I own the store.’ I had to wear that every day. I was willing to do that, but there were days that I felt defeated, you know I don’t know if I can do this, and learn how to be

an owner. There was so much pressure. It wasn’t just me keeping the store stocked.”

Oh, and keeping the store stocked was no walk in the park, either. In fact, she says the biggest thing she’s struggled with as an owner is ordering merchandise.

“When I was a manager, I’d order hundreds of thousands of dollars of merchandise for the store. It wasn’t my money. Now that it is, I find myself much more conscious of what I’m bringing in the store and how much.”

It’s a process that continues in Long Beach. She bought this store, and sold Compton, in 2019. The move had everything to do with her quality of life. Patterson attended Lynwood High and went on to Long Beach City College and has lived in Long Beach pretty much ever since. She was raised by four women whose work ethic she says she tries to emulate. Her mother who recently retired after more than 30 years with the Postal Service, two aunts, one a recently-retired teacher who decided to go back to work because “what else was she going to do?” And her grandmother—“My world”—a seamstress who worked for years sewing parachutes for the military and, Patterson says, if she was still alive, would no doubt be on the payroll.

“She’d probably be the store greeter.”

The store will be expanding soon, taking over a vacant space next to it. Business is good and diverse, with low-income shoppers sharing aisle space with shoppers who park Teslas in the store’s large parking lot.

“How you think rich people stay rich?” Patterson laughs. Her brother, Deron Larkin, notes that the store now has a steady stream of regulars joined by five to 10 new customers each day.

“It really has the feel of a community market,” he said.

One Kia Patterson says she looks forward to growing with as she learns to think more like a boss. Shakira Bryant, for one, says she’s already on her way.

“You learn and you grow when you’re cutting the checks and she’s learning,” she says. “I mean, I’ve seen her bring the hammer down. I tell people here, ‘Yeah, she’s cool, but she’s not that cool.’” ■

Meet Jessie Artigue, the new executive director of the Belmont Shore Business Association

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

The Belmont Shore Business Association welcomed a new executive director: Jessie Artigue, a content marketer, entrepreneur and podcast host.

Artigue will take over at a fraught time for business across the city, including the popular shopping and dining district centered on Second Street.

The 36-year-old Artigue recently moved back to Long Beach after spending time in cities spanning from New York to Kansas City to San Diego before settling in Belmont Shore about six years ago. What used to be her winter home will now be the realm of her advocacy work for businesses in the Shore.

Artigue said she'd been eying the role of executive director of the business association since Dede Rossi announced last January that she'd be stepping down as the "caretaker" of Second Street after over a decade of service.

She will step into the role next month as the city continues its recovery from the pandemic-fueled shutdowns of businesses, some for good. Second Street has seen its share of closures in recent years with vacant storefronts dotting the business corridor in



Jessie Artigue. Courtesy photo.

Belmont Shore. But Artigue said she sees 2020 as an opportunity to grow.

"The best time to revamp, rethink and re-inspect the way things were being done is when it's less operational," Artigue said.

Artigue began designing a new website for the district last spring, which she hopes can serve as a sup-

plement to the existing association homepage. She said she's hopeful the site can inject a fresh new facelift for the area and serve as a customer-facing tool with blogs, tourism and neighborhood tips, while the association website can continue to function as a resource for businesses.

The site already includes prelim-

inary plans for a spring garden tour, a "brunch-a-thon" in the fall and a classic rock Christmas sing-a-long. A business directory on the site relays visitors to restaurants' and boutiques' Instagram pages while a blog, currently written by Artigue, gives suggestions for how to enjoy the area during the pandemic and explainers like why there are so many kite-surfers.

Artigue said her goals include getting tourists and residents to the area, but also businesses. The latter could include an approach of trying to attract businesses from out of town, but also retaining existing businesses and even encouraging businesses located elsewhere in the city to consider a relocation to Belmont Shore.

"I care so deeply about this neighborhood and I really do see gobs of potential," Artigue said.

The prospects of major events returning this year after being cancelled by the pandemic last year, like the Belmont Shore Christmas Parade, could help boost Artigue's efforts in her first year as director. With the city's vaccine rollout continuing and case rates declining across the county, large gatherings could be a possibility by the end of the year. ■

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Kia Patterson
7th Street Grocery Outlet
Kia Patterson is the owner of the Grocery Outlet on 7th Street. As a Long Beach native she is proud to be able to offer quality food at discounted prices to her community. Kia regularly gives back through organized food drives and charities, or by simply feeding a neighbor in need.
Groceryoutlet.com/circulars/storeid/319
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www.thepiebarlongbeach.com

Robin Thorne
CTI Environmental, Inc.
Robin Thorne is a Chemical Engineer and CEO of CTI, providing environmental/safety compliance and demolition services to public and private entities. She is also the founder of DemoChicks, a nonprofit introducing girls to nontraditional careers. Robin enjoys spending time with family and walks on the beach and fine dining.
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There's money in STEM—Robin Thorne wants women, girls to get their share

By ALENA MASCHKE
Reporter

A few years ago, in 2018, Robin Thorne's company CTI Environmental was contracted to demolish a federal prison complex in the California desert. It was a multimillion dollar contract, with general laborers getting paid \$42 an hour—good money for a job that doesn't require prior training.

But one thing stuck out to Thorne: She was one of only three women working on the lucrative project.

So the chemical engineer and CEO decided to start DemoChicks, a non-profit with the mission to help women and girls find a footing in male-dominated industries like construction, demolition and architecture by introducing them to the science of the trades.

Since 2019, in addition to running her own environmental compliance company in Long Beach, Thorne has been organizing monthly educational workshops, which are currently offered online as a result of the pandemic.

Thorne said she's always had a passion for math and science, and the entrepreneurial spirit to propel her forward, something she now wants to pass on to younger generations.

"I think I was a born entrepreneur," she said, reflecting on her time working at her uncle's corner store in Philadelphia as a child, or selling pencils and erasers to her classmates at school. "The seed was planted early on."

She also knew that she wanted to be in the STEM field since she was in high school, although it ended up taking her several years to enter a college program in chemical engineering, learn about California's complex environmental regulations that would become her expertise, and eventually founding her own company in Long Beach.

In her early 20s, Thorne worked a variety of odd jobs, including a stint at the Postal Service. But something was missing. "It wasn't for me: There was



Robin Thorne, CEO of CTI Environmental, in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

no creativity, no excitement," she said.

After giving birth to her son, Thorne began seriously thinking about the life she wanted to build for her young family and the career that would enable her to do it.

"Engineering made sense, because engineers design, they improve," she said. "My love for math, my interest in science and my curious nature led me to engineering."

According to data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women are still vastly underrepresented in STEM occupations. While the percentage of women who work as mathematical and computer scientists, engineers or chemists has increased over the past two decades, most STEM occupations still show a significant gender gap.

Thorne's own occupation presents an especially stark example: Only 19.4% of chemical engineers are women, according to the bureau's 2020 data, up from 13.1% a decade ago.

This low percentage of women in

the STEM workforce is despite their equal educational attainment in the field.

According to the National Science Foundation, women make up half of science and engineering graduates at the bachelor's degree level, although their choice of studies varies widely between specific disciplines. Women are highly represented in the biological sciences, earning a higher percentage of degrees in this discipline than men, but they make up only 18% of computer science graduates.

With her program, Thorne now hopes to break down barriers of entry into the field propped up by stereotypes about women and people of color in science and engineering professions, and by a lack of awareness of her industry.

She first began dabbling in educational outreach as a student at Drexel University in the 1990s. Together with a group of her fellow students, she visited her son's elementary school to present science experiments and shatter stereotypes of what scientists and engineers looked like.

"We wanted the girls to see girl scientists and we wanted the kids to see scientists of color as well," Thorne said.

Since then, the chemical engineer and licensed general contractor has focused on educating both children and young adults about the opportunities that lie in fields outside of the public vision, like demolition.

"When people think about demolition, they think imploding or a wrecking ball—and I haven't done either," she said. With the help of DemoChicks, Thorne is hoping to shed light on the science behind her industry—and hopefully inspire more young women to follow her path.

"That's always been my nature, to broaden people's horizons," she said.

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On pointe: At Gravity Dance Company, Miss Q strives to teach dance and life skills

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Shiquita Sargent is as confident as they come—and with good reason.

The 35-year-old has overcome a number of obstacles in her young life. At her dance studio, Gravity Dance Company in Bixby Knolls, Sargent aims to teach her students the same grit, perseverance and love for dance that has carried her through tough times.

Three years ago, Sargent beat cancer—twice. Overcoming the illness gave her a new outlook on life and even more motivation to pass the life lessons she learned along the way on to her young disciples, especially during a time as challenging as the past year.

“It’s changed the way that I live my life,” the teacher, dancer and art director said. “I live with an abundance of love and happiness every single day. I wake up just so grateful.”

When the coronavirus pandemic hit and she had to shutter her school temporarily, Sargent said she felt a depression creep in that she hadn’t experienced since she was first diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2017.

“I remember, one night, I couldn’t sleep. I was so up in arms about the fact that I wasn’t living my art, it started to really, really affect me.” She was worried her students would feel the same. “Some of those children rely so heavily on dance. It’s their form of expression.”

So she got creative and began teaching virtual classes during the first months of the pandemic. “We hosted dance classes online, three days a week, and the kids were all in their kitchens, their garages, their bedrooms—it was just beautiful, the way we banded together,” Sargent said. Later, she transitioned to outdoor classes at Signal Hill’s Hilltop Park.

Ivory Blockmon, the mother of one of Sargent’s students, said the camaraderie of the group and the care “Miss Q”—as she is often called by her students—has for every single child in her school, has made a lasting impact on her 9-year-old daughter’s life.

“The love she has for my daughter, the drive, the push—her energy is great,” Blockmon said.

After being bullied at school, Blockmon’s daughter Kalani, who was 6 at the time, turned inward, rarely speaking or engaging with the outside world.

All that changed when she entered Gravity Dance Company three years ago. “Miss Q and the other people there brought her back to live,” Blockmon said. “The way she teaches them how to love one another and stick together, it really helped her get better with people.”

Showing her students that someone outside of their immediate family values and appreciates them, that they have



someone in their corner, is an important part of her role as a teacher, Sargent said.

“For them to see someone outside of their family unit being so invested in them, in their life, that does a lot. It shows them that they can trust, shows them that people care,” she said.

The seed for what would become Sargent’s unique and personal teaching approach was planted early on by her mother, a social worker who raised two children on her own.

“My childhood experience, the way I grew up, I apply all of that to these kids, because they’re going to need it,” she said.

That includes her own experience of struggling with her identity as a Black girl attending a predominantly White elementary school in Belmont Park.

“A lot of those children had never really been around Black students or Black people,” she remembers. Questions about her hair, her name, her single-mother, made her feel uneasy in the company of her peers at school.

But back at home near Poly High School, she also found herself fitting in less and less.

“It was very tough dealing with that at school and then coming home and not being Black enough for the kids on the block,” she said. “It definitely gave me identity issues.”

At Gravity, Sargent said she’s aiming to create a safe space where her students, a vast majority of whom are Black, can feel a sense of belonging.

“I feel like my job is to really prepare them for the world,” she said. “I want them to be the best possible version of themselves.” ■

Owner Shiquita Sargent moves across the dance floor as she instructs her students at the Gravity Dance Company in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

CITY OF LONG BEACH BID OPPORTUNITIES

TITLE	BID NUMBER	DUE DATE
Engineering Svcs for Port of LB Water System Transfer Study Project	RFP (EO-3549)	03/10/2021
Towing Business Operations Mgmt. Software	RFP FS21-023	03/11/2021
Shoemaker Bridge Replacement Project Value Analysis	RFP PW21-017	03/12/2021
Evaluation Services for Citizen Police Complaints	RFP CM21-027	03/12/2021
On-Call GIS Professional Services	RFP	03/12/2021
Latex Printer	ITB PW21-024	03/15/2021
SCADA & Radio Communication Network Support Services	RFP	03/16/2021
Workforce Development Services – Subject Matter Experts	RFP ED21-016	03/18/2021
Fusion Bonded Epoxy Coated (FBE) Pipe	ITB ER21-028	03/23/2021
El Dorado Duck Pond Rehabilitation	R-7030	03/24/2021
Municipal Band Concert Support Services (Re-Issue)	RFP PR20-018	03/30/2021
Citywide Access Control System	RFP TI21-020	03/31/2021
LB Must Facility Phase 1	R-7179	04/29/2021

Bidder Registration

To receive notifications of bid opportunities, register with the City of Long Beach at www.longbeach.gov/finance/business-info/purchasing-division/purchasing-division/ Additional details on upcoming bids and how to register can be found on the website.

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‘It was a difficult fight’: From loss, Takisha Clark is picking up the pieces and expanding her business



Takisha Clark, owner of a postal service Capital Postal & Mailbox Service, stands in front of her business with her delivery van. Clark who went through a rough patch of experiencing homelessness in the early 2000s is making a comeback and franchising her business. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

Takisha Clark, a single mother from Compton, felt she was on the right path to financial freedom, until a devastating loss knocked her life out of control. After overcoming homelessness and an addiction to pills, Clark is quickly gaining a foothold in a fast-growing industry and is breaking records.

As the world economy continues to revolve around online shopping, the dependence of fast and reliable package delivery has never been greater. Clark’s postal service business, Capital Postal and Mail Services, is positioned in a thriving industry, she says, with lots of room to grow.

Capital Postal first opened its doors four years ago at a shopping plaza in North Long Beach. Her business offers a multitude of services such as packing, mailbox rental, shipping and printing. The company recently acquired a license as an official package courier for USPS, DHL and FedEx.

This year, Clark is hoping to franchise her business, which would make her the first Black woman to do so in her industry—one of her most touted achievements. Clark said a client has shown interest in opening a franchise located in Nevada, which would expand Clark’s business across state lines.

“It actually feels great,” Clark said. “My goal is to transform my mom-and-pop small business into a corporate company.”

Clark has also been listed on Yahoo Finance’s Top 10 Entrepreneurs of 2021 alongside other recognizable names such as Tesla’s Elon Musk.

Ambition is something Clark has never lacked. She started her first business when she was 22 years old. She ran a childcare business in Victorville in the early 2000s, which gained her enough income to purchase three homes. Things were going well for Clark, until tragedy struck.

Her younger sister was killed in a fatal car crash in 2007. The loss of her sibling drew Clark into a spiral of de-

pressive episodes.

“It took a toll on me,” she said. “I couldn’t continue to work at the time, so I took some time off. It hit me so hard that I ended up becoming addicted to pills for a whole year. I couldn’t function.”

Clark never mustered up the courage to return to her daycare business. She said she let everything go, and as a result, became homeless after losing two of the homes she owned and short-selling the third. Clark had hit rock bottom for roughly a year, losing all ambition and falling deeper into homelessness and pill abuse. But as she began to slump further, Clark knew she had to find a way out.

“I had to get it together,” she said. “This is not what my sister would have wanted for me.”

She started going to school full time, staying with friends until she began getting a better footing in society once again. In 2010, Clark took a job as a receptionist working for Shields for Families, a national nonprofit that

focuses on helping victims of child and drug abuse. Rising through the ranks, Clark was eventually promoted as a social worker and ran a program aiding families struggling with drug and alcohol addiction.

Her time there allowed her to regain that ambition she had lost years ago.

“While working with them I got back on my feet,” Clark said.

In 2013, Clark started a side gig working in credit repair and quickly learned the ins and outs of accounting. A year later, she opened up a franchised location through Liberty Tax.

“After I started my Liberty Tax, things just started looking up for me,” Clark said.

Using the experience she gathered there, Clark eventually opened her own tax office called Good Faith Tax Services.

That business didn’t last long, as she decided to close its doors this last tax season as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, by then she had already mapped out her next business

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ambition that would focus on the mail and packaging industry.

"I just decided to just focus on the Capital Postal side of things," Clark said.

Clark always had a passion for the postal service industry and was curious to know how to get involved. She was also attracted to the industry's lucrative worth.

"The shipping industry is a billion-dollar industry, there's a need for it and it's not going anywhere," Clark said. "Doing the Capital Postal thing, I knew that that was something I can do forever."

Capital Postal currently has five employees, offers mailboxes on site for rent and owns three in-house delivery vans. Her company also provides mentorship and on-the-job training to local youth through a partnership with Pacific Gateway—an employment agency contracted with Long Beach.

Looking forward, Clark's main goal this year is to franchise the business and is currently seeking a second location for her store. The hardships Clark endured after losing a loved one have helped shape her into the entrepreneur she is today. She said it was her determination to endure and a belief in herself that allowed her to break out of homelessness and find her way again.

"It was a difficult fight just to try to get back," Clark said. "I had to work my way all the way back up." ■



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St. Mary CEO

(Continued from Page 1)

The hospital's chief executive officer, James Warren, called her into his office.

"We've not had a COO for the last six months and I'm having a hard time with everything," Caldwell recalled Warren saying. "So what would you think about getting into administration?" And I'm like, 'OK, sure.'

"I get back to my office, still not really grasping what happened," Caldwell said. Her subsequent call with the human resources director left no doubt that she had just been named chief operating officer.

"I don't think that could happen today because there are so many training and fellowships and residencies that people have to go through now," Caldwell said. "But that was my story. That's how it happened."

Because he'd gone out on a limb for her, Warren made Caldwell promise that she'd finish her master's degree. One year later, in 1997, she kept that promise, graduating once again.

"When I graduated, [son Jonathon] was graduating from kindergarten," Caldwell said. "There is a picture where we both have our caps and gowns on."

Caldwell worked as COO under Warren for three years. When he left

the hospital in 1999, the highly regarded Caldwell was named interim CEO—a position she held for 15 months before she transferred to a larger facility, where she served as COO from 2000 to 2003.

From there, Caldwell took her CEO experience on the road. She headed two Missouri hospitals from 2004 to 2012. Then Caldwell and her husband moved to Palm Springs, where she served for five years as CEO of Desert Regional Medical Center.

"It was a wonderful opportunity," Caldwell said of the move to California. "Our kids were adults, and that is where we plan to retire."

But Palm Springs would have to wait. Some refocusing and downsizing within the company meant at least one more move for the Caldwells, though they still own their Palm Springs home. In 2017, she accepted the position of CEO at St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach. Back then, she said, the only thing she really knew about the city was that it was home to the Queen Mary.

Caldwell said St. Mary is the first faith-based organization she has worked for and admires its commitment to its deeply rooted mission, especially given Long Beach's diverse community.

For nearly two years, Caldwell largely stayed out of the public eye despite heading up one of Long Beach's

largest hospitals. But in February 2019, St. Mary physician leaders publicly accused Caldwell and her administration of cutting them out of decisions involving patient care.

In a letter, physicians accused the administration of retaliation by threatening to eliminate contracts the hospital has with physician groups, effectively firing doctors.

"Change is never easy and I recognize that," Caldwell said. "Even though it may be a change that's better for the overall organization, if it's impacting someone and they are not seeing that betterment, then you can have some challenges."

A lawsuit filed last year by physicians against Caldwell and the corporation that owns St. Mary is pending and is expected to be heard in June, according to a doctor familiar with the case, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation. The case and the incidents leading up to it cannot be discussed until then, they added.

But Caldwell's greatest challenge—like many others in her position—came from the COVID-19 pandemic, which she likened to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early '90s, during her medical laboratory days.

"When the pandemic initially started, everyone at the time was thinking, 'Oh, there is a virus, nothing we've not done or seen before,'" Caldwell said.

"But when it continued, when our hospitals became overburdened with the number of patients we were seeing... We have been a year into this and it's just the sheer exhaustion."

With the vaccine slowly being administered throughout the country, Caldwell said the hospital's staff is cautiously optimistic that the end of the threat is drawing nearer with every shot. But while infection rates and case numbers have decreased rapidly, daily deaths continue, with the city well beyond 800 coronavirus-related deaths and the country exceeding 500,000.

While hospital staff are accustomed to dealing with death, Caldwell said the heartwrenching circumstances around COVID-19—watching patients die alone because their families cannot visit—have made the experience much harder.

As the stress on hospitals brought on by the winter surges of COVID-19 eases, Caldwell prepares to step into a new leadership role in the city: board chair of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, a position she will assume on July 1.

"She will use her executive leadership experience to lead our membership and the Long Beach community through a significant economic recovery period," said Jeremy Harris, president and CEO of the chamber. "I am looking forward to working alongside Chair-elect Caldwell to support the businesses that fuel our local economy and champion our city."

Looking back over her career, Caldwell said that being a female hospital executive in a profession dominated by men has, at times, only added more challenges to an already difficult job. According to 2019 data from the American Hospital Association and the American College of Healthcare Executives, nearly 90% of hospital CEOs were white men.

"Going back to the '90s, when people weren't talking a lot about diversity like they do now, I was often the only woman, the only minority at the table," Caldwell said. "But when I walked in the room, when I took that seat at the table, I felt like I deserved to be there. I never allowed myself to feel like I shouldn't be there or let others treat me as if I shouldn't be there."

Caldwell recalled one instance in her early CEO days when she was leading a construction project with an all-male crew and leadership team. After her first meeting, Caldwell recalled, a consultant on the project—also a woman—told her she did not handle herself well.

"She said, 'You're writing the checks, this is your project,'" Caldwell said. "That experience stuck with me all these years. You have to sometimes demand respect."

"No one would ever tell you they didn't hire you or give you a promotion because you are a woman," Caldwell said. "But I know my value. I don't let it define me." ■



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Conventions Drive Long Beach's Hospitality, Tourism Economy

When visitors come to a convention on Long Beach's waterfront, they also go out to dinner after with friends at nearby restaurants, shop for gifts to bring home, stay overnight at hotels, and rent bicycles to pedal up the beach path. When they like what they see, they may schedule a return trip with the whole family.

Hospitality and tourism is the second-largest job sector in Long Beach and an industry that — pre-pandemic — was estimated to generate \$1.8 billion in economic impact annually, according to an independent study conducted by Los Angeles-based Beacon Economics.

"Convention business is 100% important to Long Beach — it brings people to the city and highlights what we have here," said Imran Ahmed, general manager of the Long Beach Marriott.

But the city has been forced to make due without conventions for more than a year now due to coronavirus and regulations that have limited gatherings as a way to prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

"Convention business is integral to our business," Imran said. "It's been a very trying year, and the only thing the city can do to help us is to convince the governor to open small conventions and restaurants again to start employing people and generating business and getting the economic engine moving."

When gatherings do resume, Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Steve Goodling and his staff have banded together with the California Convention Center Coalition in a commitment to maintain necessary safety protocols.

The tourism sector of the state's economy accounted for \$66.1 billion in direct spending and 457,000 jobs in 2019, according to the Coalition formed by 130 frustrated industry leaders calling on Governor Gavin Newsom to issue state-wide guidelines clarifying under what conditions events can resume in California. Coalition leaders claim California is losing business and jobs because of the uncertainty.

"Every day I'm on the phone with someone trying to convince them to not cancel and take their business to another state," Goodling said, noting that beyond the financial implications, the industry-leading Convention Center is at the heart of Long Beach's downtown, a vital cultural hub where young ballerinas, violinists and race car drivers are inspired to one day take that stage for themselves.

In terms of jobs in Long Beach, hospitality and tourism is second only to health care. Trade and transportation make up the third largest category of employment.

And, in terms of taxes, visitors in Long Beach keep the city's coffers full, with transient occupancy tax generated by

overnight visitors at hotels being the fourth-largest tax revenue generator.

Long Beach City Councilwoman Cindy Allen underscored how valuable conventions and tourism industries are to the city and its small businesses. She said, "These business owners wagered their futures on our active convention center and tourist traffic."

Downtown Long Beach Alliance Board Chair Alan Pullman, founding principal at Studio One Eleven, said Long Beach's economic health depends on bringing visitors to the city, especially downtown.

"The most attractive thing for people is other people," he said. "When you are in a downtown that is vibrant, people are always on the sidewalks and going to events. It feels safe. It's enticing. It attracts more people. A downtown without any foot traffic feels a little dead and is not attractive to anyone."

Businessman Terry Antonelli, owner of L'Opera and longtime CVB board member, said there must be tourism to bring back the economy post-pandemic. He hasn't yet reopened his Italian restaurant but hopes the situation with COVID-19 continues to improve enough so that he can soon welcome back customers and employees.

"Conventions are huge for us," he said. "I think we will get a run of business from pent-up demand when we first open, but then business is going to be off a bit until the conventions are back to hitting their stride."

Parkers' Lighthouse General Manager David Maskello noted that trade show and special event visitors regularly book out all or part of Parkers' for private banquets, which has become a dependable revenue stream for the fine dining restaurant.

"The CVB brings so many eyes into Long Beach," he said. "I cannot tell you how many times someone tells us they were here for a convention last year and have come back for vacation because they wanted to bring their family back."

Maintaining Long Beach's reputation as a destination is a priority for city leaders, according to Public Works Director Eric Lopez. The Convention Center has benefited from approximately \$65 million in public-facing renovations over the past decade to create industry-pioneering event spaces and flexible solutions for conventions.

"It's been transformed into a place where people want to go," Lopez said, crediting the award-winning CVB staff and the Convention Center operator ASM Global with helping the city invest in the right areas to keep Long Beach at the forefront of the industry. "It's really a space that is memorable that people talk about long after their convention or special event brought them here."

