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Doctors expect thousands of additional cancer deaths in the coming years after pandemic causes decrease in screening



Jose Pedraza, 47, receives chemotherapy for his stage 3 colorectal cancer at MemorialCare's Todd Cancer Institute, Wednesday, March 31, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Jose Pedraza was in pain, but like many people during the pandemic, he opted to not visit a hospital. His wife has chronic asthma, and the thought of inadvertently infecting her with COVID-19, possibly resulting in her death, kept him out of his doctor's office.

"That was on my mind heavily," Pedraza said, "being afraid of catching COVID and bringing it back to her. I was terrified."

Instead, he WebMD'd his symptoms. His conclusion? A bad case of hemorrhoids.

Had it not been for the pandemic, Pedraza said he would have visited his doctor as soon as symptoms appeared. But for

three weeks, he lived with the pain until it intensified to a level where he could no longer put off a doctor visit.

"I really, really thought long and hard about going to the doctor," Pedraza said. "When I finally went, I just didn't have a choice. I was in so much pain, I had to do it."

One visit to the doctor did little to improve his condition. Three weeks later, his symptoms not subsiding, Pedraza returned to his doctor who decided to order him a colonoscopy. Pedraza, who is 47, recalled bringing up the idea of cancer during his first visit, to which his physician replied that he was "way too young to worry about that."

Doctors found "something" during his colonoscopy, so he

was referred to a surgeon, who in turn referred him to Dr. Nilehs Vora, an oncologist and medical director of the MemorialCare Todd Cancer Institute, who gave him the news he had been dreading: Pedraza had stage 3 rectal cancer and a 60% chance of survival.

"I was just in disbelief," Pedraza said. "There were a lot of emotions going through my head."

While those with symptoms were allowed to visit hospitals, elective procedures, including preventative cancer screenings, were canceled for months by hospitals to slow the spread of coronavirus.

But even when they were available, Vora said many people

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Community Hospital emergency department expected to open in May, operator says

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

The long-shuttered emergency department at Community Hospital is expected to reopen in May, according to the facility's operator Molina, Wu, Network. The reopening will mark a turning point for the hospital, allowing it to admit its own patients, spokesperson Brandon Dowling said.

Since partially reopening at the beginning of January, dozens of patients have been treated at the East Long Beach facility, but all have been transfer patients from other local hospitals, Dowling said. An operational emergency department would allow the hospital to admit walk-in patients as well as accept critical ambulatory care patients from county emergency medical services.

"That is one of the main needs identified when the hospital closed," Dowling said, adding that the reopening will ease the burden placed on other local hospitals and increase public safety.

To the dismay of residents, the nearly century-old hospital was shut down by MemorialCare Health System in 2018 when the operator deemed necessary seismic retrofits too costly due to a faultline under the facility. MWN is actively working with state regulators to meet new seismic standards that take effect Jan. 1, 2025.

As the operator awaits fi-

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After more than 50 years, family-run strawberry ranch to close following patriarch's death



Rigoberto Ramirez Jr. separates baskets as he sorts strawberries at Ramirez Strawberry Ranch in West Long Beach on Sunday, March 28, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

■ By **CRYSTAL NIEBLA**
Reporter

Because of the death of their father and their mother's failing health, the family that runs the well-known Ramirez Strawberry Ranch in West Long Beach said they'll soon be shutting down.

Stanton Councilman Rigoberto Ramirez Jr. originally said he planned to run the business in place of his late father, Rigoberto Sr., a prominent member of the community who harvested the ranch for more than 50 years. But on Sunday, the son said those plans have changed so that he can help care for his mother.

He said he expects to end operations by the end of May.

Earlier this year, both of Rigoberto Jr.'s parents were hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19. Only his mother survived. Rigoberto Sr., who was known for his delicious strawberries and the camaraderie he had with his customers, died at 85 in February.

Rigoberto Jr.'s 78-year-old mother, Catalina, survived but developed atrial fibrillation, which is a condition that causes an irregular heartbeat. She now needs an oxygen tank and help with ordinary tasks such as dressing herself, according to Rigoberto Jr.

"She needs someone full time," he said.

The ranch, which is leased from So-Cal Edison, produces strawberries and fava beans, and when Rigoberto Sr. turned 65 in the early 2000s, the family downsized the land from 14 acres to 3.

Because negotiations about what will happen to the land are ongoing, Rigoberto Jr. said to "stay tuned," as he will announce more details "as soon as we ink the deal." He added that he wants "someone agriculturally related to take the place."

After a morning rush of clientele, some customers on Sunday afternoon asked Rigoberto Jr. about the prospects of the ranch.

One Long Beach resident, Erlinda Cortez, who asked about the ranch, said she hopes that the land, strawberries or not, will remain a space for agriculture on the Westside. She'd like to see the next land leasers "keep it going."

Others, such as North Long Beach resident Maria Guadalupe Mosqueda, were unaware that the strawberry ranch could shut down. Mosqueda, who said she buys strawberries there weekly, was surprised at the news that her go-to spot could go away.

"I'm sensitive to the community because I grew up on the Westside, and I'm in very good communication with Edison to find a replacement for the strawberry field and give something the community could be proud of," Rigoberto Jr. said. ■



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Will office workers return at pre-pandemic levels?

Long Beach's business districts remain hopeful

■ By KELLY PUENTE
Reporter

Like many business owners, architect Alan Burks, head of the Long Beach-based Environ Architecture, saw his work dry up last year as capital projects and office designs halted in the COVID-19 pandemic.

But business has picked up lately with requests for certain office layouts that Burks said he hasn't seen in years.

Enter the post-pandemic workplace.

Gone are the days of open and collaborative spaces where workers can gather and spread ideas—and possibly viruses. With the threat of COVID-19, the new design space is more closed to minimize contact.

Clients now want more private offices and meeting rooms. Cubicle walls are higher and spaced farther apart. Layouts feature a double walkway system, so workers won't have to pass each other on the way to the break room.

For Burks, the new design feels somewhat like the old 1980s designs—isolating spaces that are counterproductive to today's more collaborative and creative work environments.

"We've spent the last 15 years trying to develop very collaborative workplaces, and unfortunately COVID has forced us to take 10 steps backward," Burks said.

Burks has been getting more requests for redesigns as companies prepare to bring workers back to the office, but how many will return remains to be seen.

Many of Long Beach's office buildings have been sitting mostly empty for more than a year now after health officials ordered all but essential workers to work from home as the COVID-19 pandemic hit early last year.

The change has been permanent for some companies as they realize they can work remotely, sparking fears that once-booming business districts may never be the same if workers stay home.

But with the steep decline in virus case numbers and the rise in vaccination rates—more than one-third of eligible Long Beach adults have received at least one dose of the COVID vaccine—the city's business districts are hopeful that workers will begin to return.

A March survey by accountants KPMG showed that most major global companies no longer plan to downsize their office space after the pandemic. Last August, nearly 70% of chief executives said they planned to reduce offices, but a survey this year found that just 17% still planned to cut back.

However, the majority of chief executives said they don't expect to see a "return to normal" until at least next year.

Downtown Long Beach saw a significant impact from the pandemic last year that was made worse by the fallout from the May 31 police brutality protests that



Alan Burks of Environ Architecture at his office in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

left many storefronts boarded up to prevent looting.

By last summer, parts of Downtown looked like a ghost town, but the foot traffic this year is starting to return, said Kraig Kojian, president of the Downtown Long Beach Alliance.

Kojian thinks workers will return, but the face of Downtown may look different post-pandemic.

"We're not sure what things will look like in the coming months," he said. "The jury is still out."

In one trend, more companies are considering a hybrid office where half of its workforce is remote, or at least partially remote. Burks said he's been getting more requests to design spaces with "hotel stations" where remote workers can pop in and work for the day.

In another trend, local Realtors say they're seeing an increase in companies wanting to downscale from their large Downtown offices into smaller spaces in other parts of the city, like the Kilroy Airport Center, which features free parking.

The DLBA's quarterly market survey last year showed that office vacancies increased in the Downtown area for buildings large and small. Last year, occupancy rates for Downtown's three largest office buildings—One World Trade Center, Landmark Square and Shoreline Square Tower—dropped to 77% from 89% the previous year.

The Downtown office market had

been growing before the pandemic, with rents steadily increasing since 2014, a July DLBA report noted. But by the second quarter of 2020, rent had dropped 3%, while new leases for offices plummeted from an average of 98,497 square feet of leased office space from 2017 to 2019, to just 3,376 in the first half of 2020.

"In a benchmark comparison of regional office markets, Downtown Long Beach was one of only two areas to see rents decrease over the past 12 months, indicating that Downtown may be one of the first markets to experience changes in demand caused by COVID-19," the report noted.

Doug Shea, a commercial Realtor with Centennial Advisers, said he's seen a number of clients considering moving from the Downtown area to smaller, more affordable office spaces in East Long Beach.

"They're realizing they don't need to be Downtown anymore," he said.

Toliver Morris, CEO of Morris Williams Commercial, said he's also seen the trend of businesses considering a move from the Downtown core, but many more will likely stay for the convenience.

"One of the drawbacks to Kilroy (Airport Center) is there's no amenities," he said. "You can't just walk to lunch. Anytime you want to go somewhere you have to get in your car and drive."

For now, he's optimistic that Downtown, along with the rest of Long Beach's

business corridors, will see a strong resurgence. He points to a March report from the national VTS Office Demand Index (VODI) showing that demand for office space is approaching pre-pandemic levels.

The VODI, a commercial real estate index that tracks tenant demand, reported that the rate of demand has outpaced seasonal norms in the first two months of 2021, with New York City, Seattle and Washington, D.C. seeing the strongest gains.

Demand for office space in Seattle, for example, is up 182% this year. Overall, it's down just 24% from pre-pandemic levels.

Morris said he's even seen requests from clients looking for larger office space to accommodate social distancing. As the pandemic wanes, Morris thinks more chief executives will require people to return to work to keep company culture.

"I think the concerns that people had as far as office space going the way of the dodo is unfounded and proving not to be true," he said. "People will come back to urban centers and ultimately they will thrive. It may not be 100% of the old normal, but it will be more than people thought in a post-COVID world."

Kojian said office workers are vital to Downtown's pulse, and many will want to come back.

"You can't replace that human interaction and energy," he said. "I think a lot of people are missing that." ■

Long Beach is now in the ‘orange tier’ of coronavirus rules, so what’s open?

■ By JEREMIAH DOBRUCK
Reporter

Long Beach officially loosened COVID-19 rules on Thursday, April 1, for bars, restaurants, gyms, swimming pools, offices and a handful of other locations.

The city’s health department made the move now that the rate of coronavirus infections has subsided enough across Los Angeles County to qualify the region for the state’s “orange tier,” which is the second-least-restrictive set of rules in California’s county-by-county reopening plan.

Despite the progress being made, officials continued to urge caution and emphasized the need for masking and physical distancing.

“Please remember that the pandemic is not over and mask wearing is not solely to protect you, it is to protect others around you,” Mayor Robert Garcia said at a briefing Wednesday, March 31. So far, 910 Long Beach residents have died from the virus.

Long Beach is instituting the looser orange tier rules quicker than the rest of LA County, which put them into effect Monday, April 5. The city felt comfortable doing this because the rate of community spread locally is so low, Long Beach Health Officer Dr. Anissa Davis said.

“It will be really important for all of us to take responsibility for the fact that we are opening maybe a couple of days before other jurisdictions,” she said, urging people to not let their guard down.

So what does the orange tier mean for Long Beach? Here’s what the Long Beach Health Department says is now different.

• **Bars:** For the first time in nearly a year, bars that don’t serve meals can reopen on-site dining. They must be outdoors only, and customers can’t mingle. Drinks can only be served to people seated at tables,

and they must keep their masks on any time other than when they’re physically drinking—or eating, in the case of bars that serve food. Any pool tables or other bar games are not allowed. LA County will only allow bars to operate between 10 a.m. and 11:30 p.m., but Long Beach officials did not say whether they would institute a similar rule.

• **Restaurants:** Along with bars or breweries that serve meals, restaurants can now have customers indoors up to 50% capacity or 200 people, whichever is fewer. They had been limited to 25% ca-

capacity or 100 people in the red tier. Other safety measures—like masking—are still in place, including a requirement that tables must be separated by at least 8 feet.

• **Gyms and fitness centers** may now operate indoors at 25% capacity. They were limited to 10% in the red tier. Climbing walls are also allowed to open.

• **Offices,** even “nonessential” ones, can now welcome workers back indoors with the proper safety precautions. Until now, telework had been required. It’s still strongly encouraged.

• **Weddings and funerals:** Food and beverage are now allowed to be served at weddings and funerals as long as people are seated at tables and not mingling while being served and eating. Self-service food and buffets are not allowed. Indoor capacity for these events is limited to 50% and, of course, physical distancing and masking is still required.

• **Colleges and universities** can now have indoor lectures and student gatherings limited to 50% capacity or 200 people, whichever is less. Distance-learning is still strongly encouraged.

• **Retail:** Capacity limits are lifted on all standalone retailers—indoors or outdoors. They were capped at 50% capacity in the red tier. Malls must keep their common areas closed, but food courts can reopen with the same restrictions as restaurants: (50% of capacity or 200 people). By contrast, LA County is only allowing up to 75% capacity at retail locations.

• **Pools:** Public or shared pools, as well as those at gyms and sports facilities, can open at 25% capacity indoors. All outdoor spas, hot tubs, splash pads and pools can stay open—as they already were under the red tier. Indoors, they must remain closed, Garcia said.

• **Professional sports:** Teams are allowed to have indoor training sessions and competitions, as long as there’s no live audience. To allow an audience, they must play or practice outdoors and enforce other safety restrictions. Non-professional and youth sports were already allowed, with restrictions.

• **Religious services** can operate at 50% indoor capacity. They were restricted to 25% in the red tier.

• **Movie theaters, zoos and aquariums** can operate at 50% indoor capacity. They were restricted to 25% in the red tier. ■



Despite theaters being allowed to expand to 50% capacity, AMC at Marina Pacifica was still operating at 25% on Thursday, April 1, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



Jay Mendes, 5, and Cynthia Neal eat lunch at Dale’s Diner in the Lakewood Village neighborhood, Thursday, April 1, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

City auditor says former Queen Mary operator has not provided financial records on \$23M in city bonds

■ By KELLY PUENTE
Reporter

Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud on Wednesday, March 31, said former Queen Mary operator Urban Commons has not provided records to account for how \$23 million was spent to repair the ship, despite having more than a year to produce the documents.

Since December 2019, Doud has been investigating how \$23 million in city-issued bonds was spent to fix some of the most critical repairs for the ship listed in a marine survey.

In a statement Wednesday, Doud said Urban Commons has not provided “electronic check register, cash account detail, bank statements and canceled checks, cashier’s checks, wire transfers or other payments made to vendors and subcontractors relating to the \$23 million funded by the city.”

The audit investigation is ongoing due to the lack of records from Urban Commons, she said.

“At this time, we cannot fully account for all \$23 million spent by Urban Commons as they did not provide the necessary records requested by my office and mandated in the lease agreement with the city,” she said. “My office will continue to pursue these required and requested documents.”

A representative for Urban Commons, a Los Angeles-based real estate investment firm, could not be reached for comment.

Long Beach City Manager Tom Modica in a statement Wednesday said the city supports the auditor’s review and has worked closely with her throughout the process.

“Access to any and all documentation from Urban Commons is important and a requirement under the lease in order to have public review of how funds are spent,” Modica said. “We expect them to produce any documentation requested by our City Auditor as we conduct this review.”

City officials, however, have said they have documentation for the approved work and that everything was done properly.



The Queen Mary is going through a transition after the company that operates the historic ship filed for bankruptcy. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

“We absolutely got \$23 million of repairs done that needed to be done,” Long Beach Economic Development Director John Keisler said in a January interview. “The ship is in better shape than it’s been in decades.”

The issue with the auditor is the latest in a history of problems for Urban Commons since it signed a 66-year lease to operate the city-owned ship in 2016.

As part of the lease agreement, the Long Beach City Council in November 2016 gave the green light to issue \$23 million in bonds to be paid to Urban Commons to fix some of the most critical repairs listed in a 2015 marine survey. The marine survey projected costs of up to \$289 million for urgent repairs over the next several years.

Doud and District 3 Councilwoman Suzie Price were the only two city officials to speak out against the plan initially, urging the city to take more time to review the contract.

The Queen Mary did see a new paint job and other repairs, but the \$23 million ran out and some projects were sidelined as many critical repairs ran over budget. Fire safety repairs, for example, were initially projected to cost \$200,000, but the cost ballooned to \$5.29 million to fix a dangerously outdated sprinkler system.

The news comes as current Queen Mary operator, Eagle Hospitality Trust, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January. The ship’s lease is set to go to auction in May.

Long Beach City Attorney Charlie Parkin on Thursday said the city plans to take legal action against Urban Commons in bankruptcy court for violating its lease agreement and not providing records to the city auditor.

Urban Commons created Eagle Hospitality in 2019 to list on the Singapore Stock Exchange with the goal of raising millions for a \$250 million development project called Queen Mary Island.

Urban Commons hit tensions with the board of Eagle Hospitality and its shareholders when it didn’t fulfill financial obligations and repeatedly failed to pay rent for its portfolio of hotel properties. The problems culminated in September when Eagle Hospitality’s managers terminated the master lease agreements for Urban Commons’ hotels, including the Queen Mary—an action that essentially removed Urban Commons as the Queen Mary’s operator.

Urban Commons is now in legal disputes with Eagle Hospitality.

Problems have also mounted for Urban Commons head Taylor Woods, who has been accused of improperly applying for a more than \$2 million federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan for the Queen Mary last September without first notifying the managers of Eagle Hospitality.

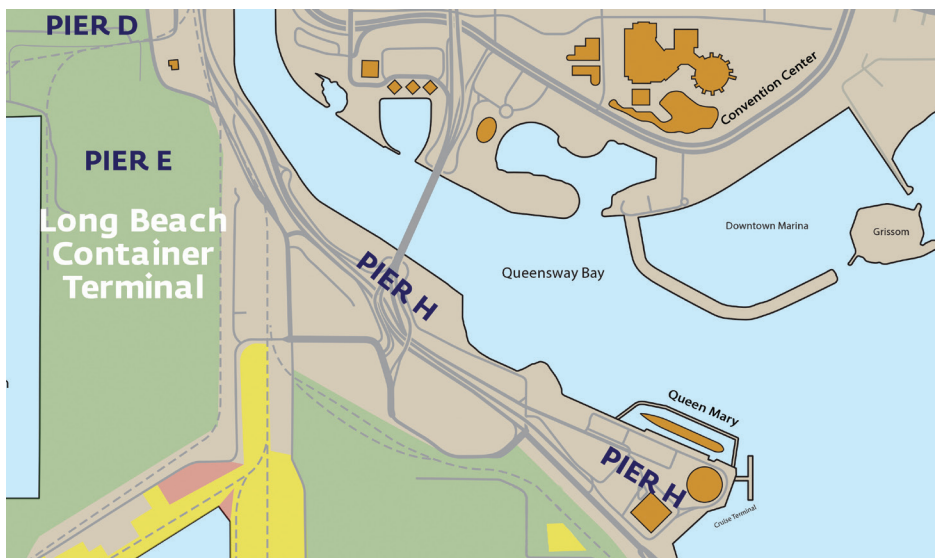
Woods has said it was a clerical mistake, but the issue has not yet been resolved, according to bankruptcy court filings.

In the court documents, Alan Tantleff, chief restructuring officer for the debtors, said the incident “matches a pattern of behavior in which Woods and (Urban Commons principal Howard Wu) have used the Queen Mary entity to benefit Urban Commons in a way that leaves it with liability that they should never have incurred.”

Long Beach has owned the century-old vessel since it arrived from Scotland in 1967 as a hotel and tourist attraction. For decades, the city has leased the ship to various operators who are charged with maintenance, and many of those operators have met similar financial struggles.

On Tuesday, the Long Beach City Council will consider asking the city to transfer control and operation of the coastal land that houses the Queen Mary and Carnival Cruise Lines to the Port of Long Beach’s Harbor Commission.

City officials have not provided further comment on the plan and it is not clear whether the problems surrounding the ship had anything to do with the decision to request a change in oversight. ■



A map of Pier H, which includes the Queen Mary, the Carnival cruise terminal, the Hotel Maya, the Residence Inn, the Reef Restaurant and Harry Bridges Memorial Park. Courtesy of the Port of Long Beach.

Opulent isn't the word for this \$9 million off-water home in Naples

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

If a house in Long Beach can be too rich, too overly opulent, a bit past palatial, it would look like the huge and private Naples home just listed at \$8,995,500 at 93 Giralda Walk.

It's a staggering amount for an off-water property in Naples, far eclipsing the typical highs of around \$3 million that the more spectacular houses without a waterfront location fetch.

What's more, if listing Realtor Josh Reef, of Douglas Elliman Beverly Hills, succeeds in getting the asking price, it will be a sale in excess of any recent residential real estate transactions in Long Beach, including last year's top-dollar property, the 1.28-acre Casa Oceana just west of the Belmont Pier with 225 feet of ocean frontage that sold for \$7.25 million, almost \$5 million shy of its initial listing of \$12 million, and the 2018 sale of a Treasure Island home at 19 Sea Isle Drive, that sold for \$7.2 million.

So the Giralda Walk home is indeed a hot and prestigious property.

Once you step foot inside this 7,730-square-foot mansion, your first thought is to dispose of the word "opulent," as being woefully insufficient



The foyer/entry features a grand staircase and a crystal chandelier. Photo by Doyle Terry, courtesy of Josh Reef.

as you stand in a marble-floor foyer with its towering ceiling, a grand staircase leading to the second floor and enough wood paneling to build a

couple of bungalows, all illuminated by a crystal chandelier. If you didn't already know what the price tag was, you'd be afraid to look and it would be untoward to ask.

"It's a compound," Reef said of the sprawling property with its five bedrooms and nine bathrooms. Four of the bedrooms are on the second floor and each has its own en suite bathroom. The lavishly appointed master and its bath are on the lower level.

The balance of the first floor is for entertainment and relaxation. Pick a room, any room. The kitchen is perfectly appointed for military-grade partying. "It can easily handle catering for 100 people or more," said Reef.

As you hike around the rest of the floor you'll stumble upon an elegant formal dining room, two fireplaces, a handsome library, a large family room, onyx powder rooms and baths, a sun room/gym, a spa and exercise pool, a wine room, a full bar and a three-car

garage.

Upstairs, along with the four bedrooms and their bathrooms—everywhere, marble battles with wood for dominance (the wood wins, but it's a brutal fight)—you'll find one of the home's two laundry rooms (the other is in the garage), outdoor terraces and another family room staged as a home theater.

The buyer will want to carry on the tradition of lavish decorating for the holidays, because the residence is a perennial award-winner in the Naples Improvement Association's Home Decorating Contest.

Among the home's former owners are Long Beach auto dealership owner Mike Salta and most recently the family of Mike Campbell, a noted boat racer and yachtsman and founder and owner of the warehouse and transportation company Mike Campbell and Associates, Ltd. Campbell died in 2008. ■



This five-bedroom, nine-bath home at 93 Giralda Walk in Naples is listed at \$8,995,500. Photo by Doyle Terry, courtesy of Josh Reef.

Long Beach unemployment dips to 11.7%, economists hopeful more strong job gains to come

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

As more businesses reopen or expand operations thanks to falling COVID-19 numbers, unemployment rates across the country, including in Long Beach, continue to fall.

The city's unemployment rate is 11.7% as of February, down from 14.1% the month before, according to preliminary data released Friday by the California Employment Development Department. Of the city's 241,200 workers, 28,300 are without a job.

The city's unemployment rate has dropped significantly since peaking in June

at nearly 21%, but there is still a ways to go until Long Beach reaches the historic low of 4% unemployment achieved in May 2019. Long Beach's unemployment remains well above the national rate of 6.6%, which is down from 6.8% in January.

At the county and state level, unemployment also continues to decline, with rates now 10.9% and 8.4%, respectively. The county rate represents a decrease of nearly 2%, while the state figure dropped just under 1%.

Like Long Beach, county, state and national unemployment rates remain above pre-pandemic levels, with county and state numbers more than double those from February 2020. But the downward trend has

economists hopeful for what's to come in the coming months.

"After a dark winter when the California labor market recovery stalled, February has brought significant hope to the state's displaced workers," Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the UC Riverside Center for Forecasting, said in a statement.

California accounted for over 37% of net jobs added nationwide, according to a Beacon report. While there are still nearly 1.7 million fewer people employed statewide, Osman said that the vaccine rollout is grounds for optimism that there will be significant job gains throughout spring and summer.

Leisure and hospitality, one of the hardest-hit sectors throughout the pandemic, had the biggest job gains in February, according to Beacon, with payroll increasing by 102,200. The sector has a long road of recovery ahead, having lost more than 689,000 jobs during the economic downturn.

Health care, manufacturing, retail and administrative support also posted healthy job gains.

By contrast, a few sectors experienced job losses in February, including information, wholesale trade, real estate and professional, scientific and technical services. Government saw the most job losses at 6,000. ■

CSULB will have in-person commencement ceremonies at Angel Stadium

■ By **CHEANTAY JENSEN**
Reporter

Cal State Long Beach 2020 and 2021 college graduates will finally get to walk with their peers this year as school officials announced the green light for in-person graduation ceremonies this spring.

Traditionally, CSULB commencement was held on campus. This year, however, graduating students will walk at Angel Stadium in Anaheim in May. The venue can safely accommodate several hundred students at a time in keeping with state health

guidelines, school officials said.

Media relations associate vice president Jeff Cook said only graduating students will be allowed to attend the ceremony inside the venue. Families will be able to view the ceremony from the stadium parking lot, according to the school's announcement.

"Details will be finalized in the coming weeks," Cook said.

School officials said the decision to hold in-person commencements was reached after a recent school-wide survey that asked students if they would prefer a digital, drive-

by or in-person commencement now that the state had entered the "red tier" of coronavirus regulations that permit outdoor stadium performances starting April 1. By a 6-1 margin, graduates voted to have the ceremony in-person.

A virtual celebration will also be available, including a live stream on the commencement website.

Each college will host its own two-hour ceremony with separate degree conferrals for 2020 and 2021 classes.

The schedule is as follows:

- College of Engineering - Friday,

May 28, 9:30 a.m.

- College of Liberal Arts - Friday, May 28, 5 p.m.

- College of the Arts - Saturday, May 29, 9:30 a.m.

- College of Health & Human Services - Saturday, May 29, 5 p.m.

- College of Education - Sunday, May 30, 9:30 a.m.

- College of Business - Sunday, May 30, 5 p.m.

- College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics - Monday, May 31, 9:30 a.m. ■

But how many steps to the beach? How to decipher Realtorspeak

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

You're in the early stages of looking for a house to buy and you will be immediately swamped by real-estate jargon that you'll have to untangle: debt-to-income ratio, pre-qualification, inspection and appraisal contingencies, title search, proof-of-funds, etc.

But, as you're scrolling through the real-estate listings on the web looking for your perfect pad, you'll also find yourself lost in the lofty language of Realtors who burnish their offerings with overly generous descriptions and more euphemisms than a funeral director.

Living rooms are full of natural light, kitchens are ready for a gourmet cook, backyards are elysian get-aways. No street escapes the adjective "tree-lined," and lawns, it's even been noted, are "grassy."

A recent listing bragged that the house came with a kitchen "with just enough space for prepping those home cooked meals." That's Realtor-speak for "small," or, more bluntly, "cramped." A wee bit more expansive than a hotplate and a cutting board.

Here are some other terms you might run across in the course of your house-hunting. They're not outright lies, but as truths, they're perhaps a bit overly decorated.

"Lovingly maintained": A particularly nice way to say that while the owner hasn't done any upgrades, the Harvest Gold refrigerator still purrs like a kitten and the avocado-green swag lamps are dusted twice a week.

"Freeway close": Like that's a selling point? I like to have fairly easy access to a freeway, but a couple-block buffer would be nice. I don't need big rigs tumbling into my pool all the time.

"Curb appeal": It's how the property looks while you're driving by, but you can't see the exposed wood lath in the living room, the sex dun-



This is a listing photo for a condominium in the St. Regis complex. It's not an exaggeration when the listing says it's "steps to the beach." Listing photo.

geon in the guest room and the considerable fire damage in the kitchen.

"Priced to sell": Well, that should be the idea when you're pricing your home, rather than "priced to scare potential customers away." What it really means is the seller isn't likely to want to haggle over the price. Take it or leave it, and "you're welcome."

"Steps to the beach": Theoretically, every place is steps to the beach. An average person can walk a mile in about 2,000 steps. If the house is farther away than a mile, do the math yourself. Also: **"Close to beach."** Yes, on a global scale, even 72nd Street at the tip of North Long Beach is close to the beach (as opposed to, say, Omaha). A couple of current listings I've seen include, "A great opportunity to live so close to the beach!!" for a home on 25th Street, and a "charming beach bungalow" on Market Street, above 53rd Street. In real life, you wouldn't want to go much farther north than Fourth Street if you want to live close to the beach. On the other hand, if you're worried about the rising sea, Naples and the Peninsula are perhaps a tad too close to the beach.

man special": I'm looking for a home, not a hobby. And, anyway, you didn't mention that my tools should include a water-cooled plasma torch, a bulldozer and a fleet of dump trucks.

"Extra storage": There's no such thing as "extra" storage. I don't care how much storage your house has now, I can guarantee you don't have any empty cabinets or drawers. No one's ever said, "How are we ever going to find enough things to fill all this storage?"

"Tree-lined street": How do you feel about jacarandas? Are towering palms even trees?

"Starter home": The implication is that it'll do for now, and in a few years when it triples in price, you can sell it and buy the home of your dreams. Which will also have tripled in price, so you'll have to move out of state, add on to your starter home or live the rest of your life in close quarters with your immediate family, which has tripled in size.

"Cozy": Why waste an extra syllable when you could've just said small? The afghan my grandmother crocheted for me is cozy, but I wouldn't want a house that barely has room for it. Also: **"Doll house."** Have you ever seen a doll house? Can you fit a couch in one? Did it have a "wide-open floor plan"?

"Plenty of room for an add-on": Did I give the impression that my housing budget has enough wiggle room to leave money to add on a family room, another bedroom and a bathroom?

"Bonus room": What, did they just find a room that they didn't know they had? Is it a selling point? "Buy today and we'll throw in a BONUS ROOM! at no additional cost?" It's a room that you have to go through to get to another room. It's where you're going to keep empty baskets and holiday decorations or use for a podcast studio. ■

"Low-maintenance yard": Dirt is low maintenance. Artificial turf is low maintenance. Cracked concrete is low maintenance. Weeds, for that matter, are low maintenance; leave them alone and they'll do fine.

"In-law potential": I'm going to pretend you didn't say that. If you don't want me to buy the property, just tell me in English and I'll move along.

"Turnkey": It's supposed to mean all ready to move in, but it doesn't mean it's really all ready to move in because you've still gotta pack up all your old stuff, which is way more than you'd imagined you've amassed over the years, but there's no time for moving-day triage, so you pack up everything and haul it to your turnkey house and then unpack it all and now the house looks like a hobo flat, so, no, not turnkey unless it comes with everything you need to live, including furniture and salt and pepper shakers and you can throw all your old stuff away.

"Bring your paintbrush": How about you bring your paintbrush and charge me an extra \$5,000.

"Bring your tools," or **"handy-**

LBCC, CSULB to bring more students back in the fall

STAFF REPORT

Long Beach City College and Cal State Long Beach announced plans this week to bring back a limited number of students and departments for in-person classes in the fall after a year of mostly virtual instruction.

CSULB will bring back 4,276 course sections, close to 50% of the total offered, university President Jane Close Conoley said in an email to faculty and staff this week.

Departments at the university are prioritizing classes for on-campus instruction based on the needs of their students. Some are bringing back laboratories, activities or performances, while others are prioritizing smaller seminars for freshman or graduate students, Conoley said.

Also in the fall, the university will welcome back a majority of residence hall students, resume in-person library hours and offer most student services in person. The campus also anticipates being able to allow some campus gatherings hosted by student organizations, according to Conoley's email.

"By spring, we anticipate resuming up to 100% of our pre-pandemic, in-person

campus course offerings," Conoley said.

LBCC, meanwhile, plans to offer up to 35% of fall semester classes in person. Each class will be capped at 50% capacity, LBCC said in a statement.

"The safety of our campus community is always paramount and guides all of our decisions at Long Beach City College," LBCC interim Superintendent-President Mike Muñoz said in a statement. "Re-opening will not happen overnight, but we know that we're closer to returning to campus than ever before with additional classes returning in the fall."

The fall classes offered on campus will

be prioritized based on student or teaching necessity, LBCC said.

The college is also looking into providing some student services in person.

Both LBCC and CSULB suspended all in-person class sessions and campus activities in March 2020 in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. After cases of the virus spiked in the winter months, the city and region are slowly allowing more businesses and community activities to resume.

The fall semester for CSULB begins Aug. 23, and LBCC students return on Aug. 30. ■

LBUSD teachers negotiate raise, including a retroactive pay boost



Tina Marraccini reads a book to her kindergarten class on the first day of in-person classes at Alvarado Elementary School in Signal Hill, Monday, March 29, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

By MIKE GUARDABASCIO
Reporter

It's been a whirlwind year for Long Beach Unified School District teachers, who have gone from fearing layoffs to recently reaching a tentative agreement for raises.

When the school year began, the LBUSD—which employs over 12,000 people—was talking about cuts, but waves of relief funding from the federal and state level changed that picture.

Now, as the 2020-21 school year draws to a close, the district and the Teachers Association of Long Beach have struck a deal that includes a 2% raise as long as it

receives final approval.

The district and the TALB negotiating team reached the tentative agreement last week, and it was approved by TALB's executive board on Tuesday, March 30. The agreement will now go to TALB membership for a vote from April 14 to 16. If they approve, it will be up for formal approval by the LBUSD Board of Education at its April 17 meeting.

"As we start a hopeful new chapter in our school district's long and proud history, these tentative agreements allow us to remain fiscally responsible while still providing tangible support to our employees, many of whom have endured one of the most difficult years of their lives," said

LBUSD Superintendent Jill Baker in her bargaining update.

In addition to the raise going forward, teachers will also receive a one-time "retro check" that reflects the raise retroactively to the start of last school year.

In her letter to membership, TALB President Christine Kelly said the union had been in the process of negotiating the new deal since the start of last school year.

"There have been at least 25 bargaining sessions over the last 18 months," she wrote. "It has been a long, tough road and they've appreciated your support through it all."

While teachers are the most commonly recognized part of the LBUSD work-

force, and while TALB is the largest union in the city, teachers only represent about half of the district's employees.

Many others belong to the Long Beach chapter of the California School Employees Association, representing classified staff that includes nutrition workers, custodians, maintenance workers, and others. The LBUSD is still in the process of negotiating its new deal with the CSEA employees, but Baker said she expects they'll receive raises as well.

"For employees who are not represented by TALB, we will strive to uphold our tradition of parity on pay increases as we move forward, including as we continue to negotiate with CSEA," she wrote. ■

Councilman who voted in favor of Downtown hotel project files appeal with Coastal Commission, abruptly pulls it

■ By JASON RUIZ
Reporter

The developers of a proposed 30-story Downtown Long Beach hotel, were thrown a curveball when a City Council member appealed the project to the California Coastal Commission before abruptly pulling it early Thursday, April 1.

Councilman Roberto Uranga, who also serves on the Coastal Commission, signed onto an appeal in late March challenging some of the aspects of the proposed hotel, by Seattle-based American Life, including how it affects pedestrian access to the coast, the cost to stay at the hotel and how the hotel's valet parking would impact access to a public park.

The appeal was also signed by Coastal Commission Chair Steve Padilla.

Celina Luna, Uranga's chief of staff, originally declined to comment on the appeal because it was still active and said that the appeal could be heard as soon as May. A few hours later, a Coastal Commission spokesperson confirmed the appeal had been pulled.

Uranga said in a text message that he still wants more "affordable visitor serving accommodations," but said the project would provide thousands of high paying construction and hospitality jobs, "both industries which have suffered the brunt of the economic impacts of the pandemic."

"Long Beach has the largest number of affordable coastal accommodations in the urban Southern California region and I will work with my colleagues to ensure that we continue to make this a priority."

The City Council had previously approved a tax sharing agreement in 2016 and 2017 as well as other parameters for the hotel once it opened, including it having a unionized workforce, its housekeepers having access to panic buttons and even a request that a local restaurant be recruited to operate a location at the hotel if the operators used a third-party purveyor.

The tax-sharing agreement was meant to make the project economically feasible as the developers said a nearly \$50 million funding gap existed.

While the project was always touted as a four-star development, no members of the council, including Uranga, objected to what it might cost to stay at the luxury hotel.

Part of the appeal filed by Uranga pointed to the shrinking share of economy-priced rooms along the state's coast and their replacements being luxury hotel rooms.

The commission has used in-lieu fees to mitigate this effect by requiring developers to pay millions of dollars in some cases to offset the construction of luxury buildings. In February, the commission considered requiring a boutique hotel developer to pay in-lieu fees equaling 25% of the project's total units at \$100,000 per unit.

If a similar approach was taken with the American Life project, it could add over \$10.7 million to the cost of construction for the rooms alone.

The appeal also sought in-lieu fees for



A rendering of the proposed 429-room hotel that could replace the empty lot at the corner of Pine Avenue and Ocean Boulevard.

a pedestrian bridge to cross Pine Avenue as well as widening of existing pedestrian walkways.

American Life president Greg Steinhauer said that he was in disbelief that Uranga would file an appeal against the project when he had previously voted to award American Life the RFP for the land and voted with the council's unanimous decision to move the project forward in 2016.

"I don't know what's going on with that," Steinhauer said, adding that an appeal at the Coastal Commission would not help the project.


The appeal by Uranga came less than a month after Steinhauer's team received a lifeline from the Long Beach Planning Commission when it granted American Life a three-year window for it to break ground on the project. Without it, Steinhauer said the project would have died.

The vote by the Planning Commission in March appears to be one of the last obstacles outside of financing the project that's expected to cost over \$200 million. City officials said Thursday that because the project is consistent with city zoning laws, the Planning Commission is the decision-maker on the project, not the City Council.

Jeremy Harris, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, said that the bureaucratic environment of the state is part of why it's hard for developers to make deals that pencil out.

Harris said the tourism and convention sector of the local economy is likely to be one of the last to fully come back online so he's excited that the vacant lot at the corner of Pine Avenue and Ocean Boulevard looks like it will finally be activated.

"I think it's going to be a big win for Long Beach and our local economy," Harris said. ■



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North Long Beach mobile home park embroiled in litigation is sold at auction for \$11 million

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

Residents of a North Long Beach mobile home park who were awarded close to \$40 million by a jury after suing the former owners over numerous health and environmental issues will also receive a portion of proceeds from the recent sale of the property, their attorney says.

Friendly Village Mobile Home Park at 5350 Paramount Blvd. was sold at auction March 1 for \$11 million to a nonprofit called ACI Friendly Village, Inc.

Lawyers representing the park's residents said the sale was a win for the residents, who, for years, have been locked in legal battles with the park's previous owner.

"It's at least one time where there's a happy ending," attorney Brian Kabateck said. "There is a happy ending, and for a lot of people it's been life-changing for them."

Maurice Priest, ACI's principal and affordable-housing advocate, told the court that he intends to "manage, operate and maintain the property, so that families can continue to live there and not lose the investment they have made in their homes."

The land where Friendly Village is located was a trash landfill for the city before



Milly Bejarano stands behind her home with an exposed fire hydrant pipe, August 23, 2018. Residents of Friendly Village mobile home park live on land that was once an industrial dump site. The land beneath the entire site is constantly sinking and shifting, causing sewage backups, electrical problems and structural damage to the North Long Beach properties. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova

it was converted into a mobile home park. Methane gas trapped underground from the garbage buildup began to shift the ground beneath the homes. Streets throughout the park sank, exposing sewage pipes and wa-

ter lines.

In 2013, the county public health agency found methane levels near trash bins at the park were near "explosive levels." In 2016, the state later recommended excavating the underground landfill to relieve pressure from the gas.

The residents subsequently filed a lawsuit in 2017 claiming that the property owner, Kort & Scott Financial Group, had left them in an uninhabitable situation. A jury in 2019 awarded the residents \$34 million in punitive damages, in addition to \$5.5 million for damages.

The recent auction sale of Friend-

ly Village will add additional settlement payments to about 100 families who filed claims when the former owner filed for bankruptcy, Kabateck said.

"It's really hard to even estimate—to anticipate the question of how much of that money they are going to receive," Kabateck said.

Many of the residents, some who were retirees or elderly, were able to move out of the property after receiving six-figure settlement payments, the attorney said.

The actual sum of the settlements will be distributed within the next 60 to 90 days.

"That will end the entire history of the lawsuit, complaints, everything like that," Kabateck said. "It's our hope that the new owner will live up to its promises, and make this a better place for all these folks to live."

Ray Boucher, an attorney representing the mobile home's previous owners, did not immediately respond to calls for comment.

Richard Marshack, the trustee overseeing the sale of the property, said several companies inquired about buying the property, but turned down the offer because the cost to remediate the land was too costly. Marshack said he was confident Priest and ACI Friendly Village, Inc. will make substantial improvements on the property and improve the community for all the tenants.

Priest said he is conducting meetings with environmental experts to determine how they can improve the former landfill that is now home to over 170 residents.

"We consider it an opportunity to do good work," Priest said. "This is a challenge that we volunteered for, and now we get to work." ■

New DoorDash entrepreneur support program awards two Long Beach restaurants \$20K

■ By **CHEANTAY JENSEN**
Reporter

Two Long Beach restaurants were recently announced as winners of the DoorDash Main Street Strong Accelerator Program, a new program by the food delivery company in partnership with the Accion Opportunity Fund, to help support small-business entrepreneurs from underserved communities hit especially hard through the pandemic with monetary aid and educational opportunities.

Both Spicy Sugar Thai in Alamitos Beach and Sura Korean BBQ & Tofu House in East Village will receive \$20,000 to use toward their business and access to an eight-week curriculum course covering topics such as marketing, technology integration, managing cash flow and menu creation from restaurant industry experts.

"I'm really excited," said Sugar Sungkamee, owner of Spicy Sugar Thai. "I'm surprised. I didn't think I was gonna get it. I thought there were too many people that applied."

One hundred restaurateurs were accept-

ed into the program and will have access to the course, however only 25 restaurant owners were awarded the \$20,000 grant.

Of the 25 recipients, 18 are based in Los Angeles, two in Long Beach, and one each in Redondo Beach, Van Nuys, Pasadena, Inglewood and San Gabriel.

Spicy Sugar Thai is a woman-owned business opened by 29-year-old Sungkamee in 2015.

Sungkamee said she plans on putting the \$20,000 toward renovations to her dining room and to hire back more employees now that Long Beach has entered into the "orange tier," which allows for higher indoor dining capacities.

Sura Korean BBQ owners Claire Kim and her husband Brandon Sugano said they were very excited to win. The couple opened up the authentic Korean restaurant in 2008 and also bought Fine Feathers Kombucha on Long Beach Boulevard last year.

"Super excited for this program and hope the accelerator takes us to new heights in the Long Beach culinary scene," Kim said. ■



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Fireboat stations receive major upgrades to tackle emergencies at Port of Long Beach



Fireboat Station No. 15 located at the Port of Long Beach. Photo courtesy of the port.

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

Renovations are nearly complete to Fireboat Station No. 15, the Long Beach Fire Department's 20,000-square-foot facility equipped to handle maritime emergencies at the Port of Long Beach, officials announced.

The upgrades include advanced communications technology, a workshop where crews can maintain and repair gear, modern living quarters for a six-member team and a garage large enough to house a fire engine and a second emergency vehicle.

From the outside, the most noticeable feature is the protruding red and white roof that will protect the station's 11,200-square-foot boat bay from adverse weather. This is the first fireboat station with a protective roof in the port's history, officials said.

The facility will house the fire department's fireboat named Vigilance.

Construction of the new fireboat station began in the spring of 2019, port spokesman Lee Peterson said. Assistant Fire Chief Paul Alvarado said they are anticipating the station to be operational sometime in April.

Alvarado added that similar work will

be done at another nearby station, Fireboat Station No. 20. On March 8, construction crews began clearing a path for the construction of the second two-story facility, Alvarado said.

The total cost for the two stations is nearly \$109 million, according to officials.

"This station will provide the perfect position to respond to both the inside and outside of the harbor," Alvarado said.

Located at Pier F along the inner mouth of the port, crews working out of the station are equipped to respond to emergencies both on land and sea as well as provide support for other first responders. Fireboat Vigilance can shoot water nearly the length of two football fields and higher than a 20-story building—enough to spray water or foam anywhere aboard some of the largest ships that sail into the port.

Alvarado said fire crews have to be vigilant for potential flammable liquids that may spill off the container ships and into the harbor.

"It's important for a harbor district to respond to a port that's working 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he said.

Long Beach Fire Chief Xavier Espino said the fireboat can also serve as a floating command post in the event of an emergency.

The 9/11 attacks in New York prompted the Long Beach Harbor Commission in 2010 to come up with a plan to modernize the port's safety infrastructure. Port officials also wanted to have emergency services that could keep up with modern cargo ships that were sailing into the port daily. In total, the plan to upgrade the facilities and equipment cost the port nearly \$177 million.

"Our firefighting facilities and equip-

ment were already aging, and 9/11 made them obsolete overnight," Thomas Baldwin, director of program management in the port's Engineering Services Bureau, stated in the port's newsletter. "The study jointly commissioned by the port and the fire department confirmed we now had higher requirements for response times and capabilities to protect lives and property within the port complex." ■

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Nurse practitioner Dea Kurtovic, left, answers questions from Jose Pedraza during his chemotherapy session, Wednesday, March 31, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Cancer

(Continued from Page 1)

have not visited a doctor for potentially life-saving screenings over the past year. Data shows that cancer screenings across the county were down between 83% and 90% amid the pandemic, he said.

“We’re talking about potentially 80,000 diagnoses of cancer that didn’t get diagnosed in 2020,” Vora said, noting that most diagnoses are made on asymptomatic patients.

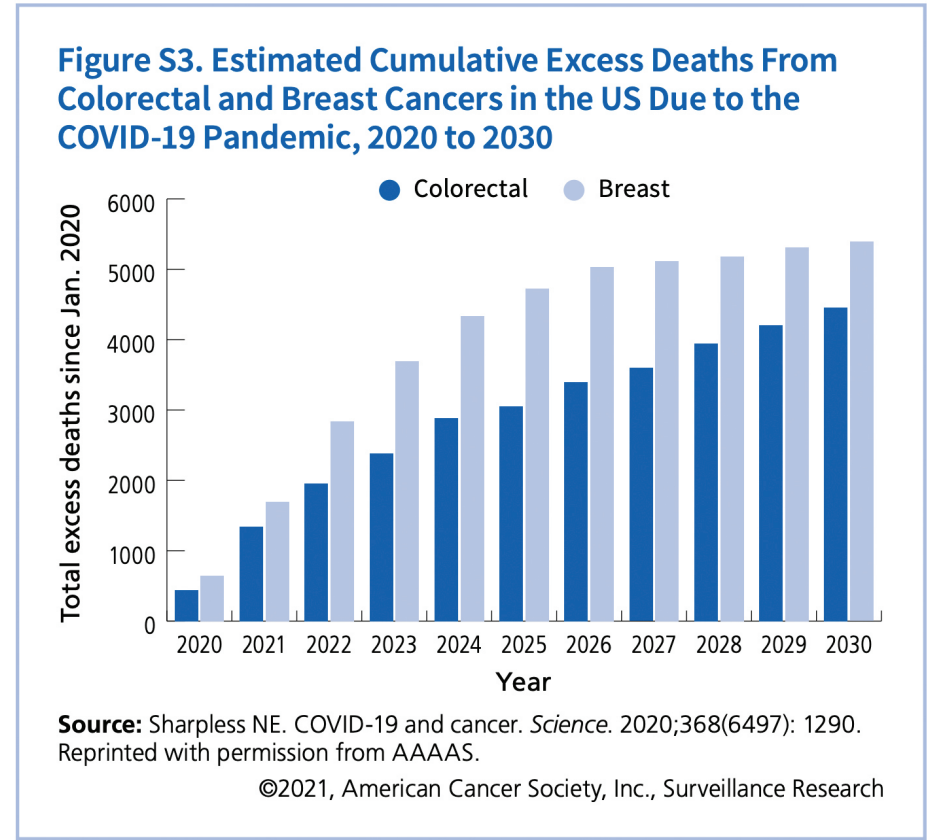
At Memorial alone, mammograms decreased nearly 30% in 2020 compared to 2018 and 2019, according to hospital data.

The past 12 months have been a struggle for Vora, he said, having to continual-

ly weigh the risk-benefit balance between protecting people from cancer and protecting them from coronavirus.

“There was a lot of trying to understand—what’s necessary and what can wait,” Vora said. “In January, patients ... were becoming infected [with COVID] from staff members while they were in the hospital. It was a scary time. I think we all have a little bit of post-traumatic stress.”

The longer cancer remains undetected, the deadlier it becomes. Cancer is classified by stages ranging from one to four and mortality rates increase the higher the stage, Vora said. For example, on average, stage 1 and 2 colorectal cancer has a 10% mortality rate, stage 3 is 30% and stage 4 is 86%, according to the National Cancer Institute.



Each cancer has its own guidelines for frequency of screenings, even when symptoms are not present, Vora said. For example, breast cancer screenings should be done annually, as should cervical cancer screenings. Many cancers do not present symptoms until later stages, Vora said, so the goal is to catch cancer early with screening tests, thereby improving the chances of patient survival.

Because of delayed diagnoses brought on by the pandemic, the American Cancer Society estimates there will be thousands of additional cancer deaths through 2030, including over 5,000 from breast and over 4,000 from colorectal cancers.

“It’s sobering when you think about numbers like that and the impact the pandemic will have,” Vora said. “We need to come together to figure out how to re-

sume cancer screenings, how to educate our people about the importance of this.”

Fortunately for Pedraza, his cancer is localized and has not spread. He has already undergone around 40 sessions of chemotherapy and radiation, with promising results. He has a couple sessions left before doctors reevaluate his health.

Pedraza’s continued treatment schedule keeps his COVID concerns alive, especially given his diminished immune system brought on by the regimen, but the couple has recently been vaccinated, which reduced his fears and allows him to focus on the positive.

“My most recent test results really gave my wife and me something to look forward to as far as moving ahead with life,” Pedraza said, “and being able to plan for the future.” ■

New Super Track model aims to shorten wait times for emergency room patients at Long Beach Memorial

■ By BRANDON RICHARDSON
Reporter

Long wait times are not a foreign concept to anyone who has visited an emergency room, whether the trip ended up being warranted or not. For the last decade, Long Beach Memorial has been working to decrease wait times through its Fast Track unit.

The idea is simple: Immediately triage patients into three tiers based on the acuity of their condition and have dedicated staff and resources ready to quickly treat and discharge those with less severe injuries and illnesses. This in turn also reduces wait times for patients with more severe maladies by alleviating any bottlenecks.

While successful in its mission, the Fast Track unit has been set up in temporary quarters since its inception. But that is going to change in June when construction of a permanent space is completed, with aspirations of decreasing wait times even further, Long Beach Memorial COO Ike Mmeje said.

“We will have a new process estab-

lished that really builds on what we had with the Fast Track and makes it more of a Super Track,” Mmeje said, adding that the new facility will allow staff to triage patients more quickly and take them through a six-stage process for more efficient treatment across the board.

The goal is to decrease total time in the emergency room to one hour for low-acuity patients, two hours for moderate-acuity patients and three hours for high-acuity patients, according to Emergency Department Director Elizabeth Reid. More severe patients naturally require more time

because of additional testing and treatment requirements.

The one-hour goal for low-acuity patients, which makes up about 25% of emergency room visits, is not an easy accomplishment, Reid said. The old Fast Track unit did not decrease times to that level.

The Super Track will be a vast improvement from the old Fast Track, Mmeje said, noting the previous space had temporary dividers and far less privacy. The \$2.1 million project incorporates all the space from the former unit as well as some additional square footage, which will make it more spacious, bright and private.

Reid said no additional staff would need to be hired to operate the new space.

“We’re trying to enhance the patient experience and save resources through efficiency,” Reid said. “We recognized some opportunities, especially for the lower-acuity patients to be treated and discharged in a way that keeps them up front and away from the higher-acuity patients in the back.” ■



Staff prepares the new Super Track unit at Long Beach Memorial for an anticipated June opening, Thursday, April 1, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



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As our frontline staff tirelessly work to battle this disease, we implore our community to continue doing your part by social distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands and getting vaccinated once it becomes available to you.

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The crowd was virtual in December 2020, but in other years, the Convention Center's Terrace Plaza hosts thousands of local residents for Long Beach's annual tree lighting ceremony and fireworks show, such as this from 2019.

Long Beach Convention Center represents a 'shovel-ready' infrastructure opportunity

Study: Facility needs \$85 million investment to clear backlog of repairs

President Joe Biden has ambitious plans to help kick start the post-pandemic economic recovery. The first part of that plan? A roughly \$2 trillion investment for improving the nation's infrastructure.

Dubbed the American Jobs Plan, the proposal would fund improvements to facilities, roads, bridges, railways and other infrastructure in communities across the nation. In unveiling his

the cornerstone of that return on investment coming from the Convention Center — is a priority, said Public Works Director Eric Lopez.

"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

\$32M annual contribution to city finances from hotel stay bed taxes pre-COVID

proposal, Biden has said that it will create "really good-paying jobs" and help the nation compete better.

Here in Long Beach, local leaders say an investment in tens of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance at the Convention Center would directly benefit a local tourism and hospitality industry responsible for thousands of jobs and nearly \$2 billion in positive economic impact.

Maintaining Long Beach's reputation as a destination — with

the industry. "It's really a space that is memorable that people talk about long after their convention or special event brought them here."

The Convention Center has benefited from approximately \$65 million in public-facing renovations and ongoing improvements over the past decade to create industry-pioneering new event spaces and flexible solutions for convention guests and visitors.

Behind the scenes, a longer-term problem — the need for reinvestment in facility maintenance — does lurk outside public view for the massive facility, which includes an arena, grand ballroom, multiple theaters, meeting rooms, exhibit halls, indoor and outdoor spaces, with some of those spaces currently being used for vaccination distribution.

“It’s a really large, vast facility that requires ongoing reinvestment,” Lopez said, with city officials identifying roughly \$85 million needed to address some deferred maintenance for out of public view systems and machinery long-past their lifespans.

Hospitality and tourism, including the Convention Center itself, 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.

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. He said they want to be ready to offer hybrid digital options, too, and rebuild one of the most critical cogs keeping Long Beach’s economic engine turning.

And he noted that beyond the financial implications, the industry-leading campus serves as a center of our city and is vitally important for many jobs and the economic prosperity of the community.

“The investment into the convention center is more than worth the return, Goodling said, “When we came out of the recession, when you look at the TOT revenue, it almost goes straight up — it looks like Bitcoin stock.”

Before the pandemic, the hospitality and tourism industry supported 18,652 jobs, 15,000 of which were supported by direct visitor spending; 1,599 supported by indirect spending; and 2,053 supported by induced spending, which is spending by individ-

18,652

Long Beach jobs supported by the hospitality and tourism industry, the city’s 2nd largest employer.

uals or households caused by increased earnings linked to the direct and indirect spending, according to Beacon.

About one-quarter of total visitor spending at that time was spent on food services. Accommodation spending accounted for the second largest percentage of total visitor spending at 22.4%, followed by entertainment at 14.2%, transportation at 14% and retail at 12.7%.

And, visitors in Long Beach keep the city’s coffers full. City officials said transient occupancy tax generated by overnight visitors at hotels is the fourth-largest tax revenue generator in Long Beach.



Vaccine signs are placed at the entrance of the Convention Center’s Terrace Plaza on March 26, 2021. The Convention Center campus has hosted two walk-up and drive-up mass vaccination sites for months, where tens of thousands of Long Beach residents have already been vaccinated.

Long Beach City Councilwoman Cindy Allen, representing District 2, maintains that the city and its small businesses have come to rely on hospitality and tourism.

“These business owners wagered their futures on our active

convention center and tourist traffic, and had until COVID-19 been growing due to the increased vitality downtown, largely driven by our successful convention attraction,” Allen said.

“Until conventions are set to return, their ability to plan and budget for the future is uncertain,” she said. “We must find a way to restore a sense of predictability and certainty to enable these businesses to thrive, and that rests on reopening our convention center, restoring lost contracts there, and getting back to the incredible partnerships between conventions, hotels, eateries, and shopping retailers that drove Long Beach’s wonderful, increasing vitality one year ago.”

THE LIST

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GayLynn Motta, LCSW, ACHP-SW Clinical Care Manager

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Barry Heller, MD

Long Beach Clinical Trials
Barry Heller, MD and his research clinic, Long Beach Clinical Trials, enrolled over 200 patients and tested hundreds more in COVID-19 treatment studies. Under his guidance and leadership, Long Beach Clinical Trials enrolled the first patient in an antibody phase II trial in the world. Barry was published in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA), and The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) for his extensive work on COVID-19 treatment studies.



Borady Ven

Long Beach Clinical Trials
Borady Ven - Borady Ven is the manager of Long Beach Clinical Trials and worked 7 days a week and through holidays to ensure that patients had access to investigational treatments of COVID-19. Under her leadership, Long Beach Clinical Trials enrolled over 200 patients in COVID-19 treatment studies and tested hundreds more.



Sheila Rosario, Lead Clinical Research Coordinator
Long Beach Clinical Trials

Sheila Rosario is the Lead Clinical Research Coordinator at Long Beach Clinical Trials assisted in the enrollment of over 200 COVID-19 positive patients in their treatment studies. Under her management, patient care was optimized and data was sent quickly for analysis.



Kevin Chua

MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Night Shift RN, Intensive Care Unit, MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Kevin has been an ICU nurse for 6 years and was instrumental in leading the night shift ICU team during the COVID-19 pandemic as a charge nurse. Kevin enjoys spending time with family and friends, and traveling in his free time.



Monica Garcia

MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Night Shift RN, Intensive Care Unit, MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Monica has been an ICU team member for four years and did an amazing job partnering with non-ICU nurses to care for critically-ill COVID-19 patients during the pandemic. She always approaches her work with a positive attitude and strives to provide the best care possible to her patients.



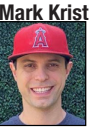
Ann Stevens

MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Night Shift RN, Intensive Care Unit, MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Ann is one of the most senior nurses on night shift in the ICU with over 30+ years of experience. She has an abundance of nursing knowledge and guided young nurses to care for patients during the COVID-19 surge. She is an avid softball player and looking forward to her upcoming retirement.



Emma Schultz

MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Day Shift RN, Intensive Care Unit, MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Emma has been an ICU nurse for 10 years and has been committed to improving processes on the fly to care for very sick ICU COVID-19 patients and does everything she can to support the entire ICU team. She enjoys traveling to exotic destinations to indulge herself in native cuisines.



MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Day Shift RN, Intensive Care Unit, MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center
Mark Kristick has been an ICU nurse for eight years. He performs numerous specialty roles that made him an asset to the ICU team during the COVID-19 surge. In his free time, he is an avid Angel's fan and enjoys spending time with his dog named Whiskey.

The List of the 4/20 edition of the Long Beach Business Journal will highlight Green Businesses in our community. To be included, please call 562-912-0161 or email ads@lbpost.com

‘Feels like home’: Businessman opens homes for seniors that offer personalized care

■ By STEVE LOWERY
Reporter

When Jose Umana in 2020 opened his fifth residential care home for seniors, all located in Long Beach, it marked the realization of an ambitious lifetime goal he’d made for himself when he first went into business.

“My grandmother was big on goals,” Umana said. “She always said ‘If you don’t set goals, how do you know if you’ve made it?’”

Of course, what if you make it in half a dozen years, which is exactly what Umana, all of 41-years-old, did?

“Yeah, guess I’ll have to make a new goal,” he said with a smile. “My new goal is 10.”

And there’s every reason to believe that his companies, Premiere Cottages and Brighten Cottages, will achieve that as well.

The senior care industry will be seeing 15% to 20% growth over the foreseeable future, Umana believes. If that sounds overly optimistic, Umana may actually be being conservative, considering that estimates are that by 2030, aging baby boomers, ranging in age from 66 to 84 years, will number 61 million people.

“It’s a growing industry and there are more and more facilities, with smaller ones becoming more popular,” Umana said. “It’s going to be a jump. Boomers are coming through the pipeline, we’re going to see a big increase in the need for care.”

And a significant amount of people will be looking for care that is more personalized. Umana’s homes, limited to six residents, offer focused, personal care with one caregiver for every three residents. The homes are in Long Beach neighborhoods and have been configured to comply with regulations as well give residents a feeling of being home.

Louisa Lawless said she searched all over Long Beach and Los Alamitos for a facility to place her father, Francis, but found herself struggling with the thought of her father in someplace much larger than Umana’s, places she says she found “scary.”

“I couldn’t in good conscience leave him in a place that felt like a hospital,” Lawless said. “I began speaking to someone who helps with placements for seniors, and she recommended more of a boarding house. It was about a mile from our house. It felt more warm, like the staff really cared.

”Dad wasn’t enthusiastic at first, it took him two weeks. But before long, they were joking and had nicknames for each other; Jose called my dad ‘Pops.’ Dad was treated with dignity and respect, got to play the piano every day and would even request one of the staff members make their special meatballs. I just don’t know if [Dad] would have gotten that kind of treatment at a larger



Owner of Premier Cottages Jose Umana and administrator Elsa Roman stand in front of one of the five senior-living homes they operate in Long Beach on Wednesday, March 31, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

facility.”

Umana’s homes range in price from \$4,500 a month for a shared bedroom to \$6,200 for a private bedroom. The interiors are tidy and comfortable, with large swaths of hardwood floors dotted by recliners and feature outdoor spaces suitable for hanging out.

He says the reason he only has homes in Long Beach is that he wants to ensure that he can get to any of his properties relatively quickly. He and his second in command, Elsa Roman, endeavor to visit each of the five properties every day.

“This is not a job where you can come in and coast,” Roman said. “You constantly have to think on your feet, because something always comes up.”

Roman oversees much of the daily care of residents and says the key to competing with much bigger operations is the ability to “offer everything they do, but do it in a way that feels like home.”

They look like home. Though they are converted to adhere to ADA regulations as well as those rules pertaining to senior care, the houses are just that, Long Beach houses. Umana says he looks in what he considers safe, “good neighborhoods,” where his clients will feel comfortable and welcomed.

Not that he finds that right away. Whenever he has bought a house in a new neighborhood, he always makes a point to knock on every door and introduce himself and what his company does and asks if his neighbors-to-be have any questions? He knows what’s coming.

“I literally go to each neighbor, let them know who we are, and what we do and they’ll say, ‘Oh, we heard it was going to be a rehab house for drug and alcohol addiction,’” Umana said. “I clarify that, tell them we’re the best neighbors they can have: We go to bed early, we don’t make noise and we’re not going to be partying.”

Once in the neighborhood, Roman says it’s not unusual for neighbors to reach out with gifts or items they think

the residents might like or need.

“We had a neighbor just recently who came by with some magazines they thought the residents would want to read,” she said. “When we take [residents] on walks outside, they’ll say hi. They get to know them. We’ll be out there and they’ll invite them to pick fruit off their trees.”

Roman’s description of seniors being made to feel very much at home brings a smile to Umana’s face. He got into the senior care business in 2007, he says, because he was raised for most of his childhood by his grandparents, Jesus and Francisca Gonzales in San Salvador, El Salvador.

It was there that his grandmother instilled in him the importance of setting goals. Of course, no one had to instill in him the desire to chase them, he pretty much had that from the start.

“My grandmother called me a hustler because I was always doing something to make money,” he said. “I’d go to people’s homes and ask them if they wanted me to take their trash away for a quarter or whatever they wanted to pay me. Or I’d offer to fix leaks in the roof.”

Asked what age he was when he did this, you know, 11 or 12, he laughs.

“Ha! I was 8 or 9!”

Umana said he grew up with grandparents as “Mom and Dad.” And that the respect and love he had for them informs how he runs his business.

“I want to provide our residents with the kind of care I would have expected for my own grandparents,” he said.

“It comes down to the level of care,” said Lawless, whose father passed away in early March. “They made him feel like a member of their extended family. They would call and say that he needs a new sweater or a button for his pants.

“The guilt you feel for putting someone in one of these homes is significant, but once I saw the level of care, the guilt dissipated and was replaced by comfort. When I saw how well he was taken care of, I was like, ‘OK, we’re good.’” ■

Community Hospital

(Continued from Page 1)

nal approval to reopen its emergency department from the California Department of Public Health, which issues hospital licences, the operator has begun working to staff the forthcoming department, Dowling said. The hospital already employs 180 people, including medical and nonmedical staff, with plans to hire an additional 30 to operate the emergency department, according to Dowling.

Despite having been open only a few months, Community Hospital's acute-care license renewal is coming up in late April, a date established with its original license years before MWN took over the facility. Every medical facility must renew its license annually.

Dowling said the process for Community will not require additional surveys of the hospital like those that delayed its reopening for months last year. The operator will only need to submit some paperwork and pay its annual fee, he said.

In late January, the state allowed Community Hospital's behavioral health department to reopen with 28 patient beds. The facility initially opened with 51 beds, including 11 in the intensive care unit and 40 medi-



The emergency department at Community Hospital is expected to open in May after being shuttered more than two and a half years ago. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

cal/surgical.

The scope of the emergency department will be determined by the state but regardless of any license limitations, the operator is happy the process is drawing to a close.

"We're closer than ever to reopening Community Hospital's emergency department," MWN CEO Virg Narbutus said in a written statement. "We're staffing up and working closely with our state

partners as we move into this exciting new phase for CHLB."

Editor's note: John Molina—of Molina, Wu, Network—is the primary investor in the parent company that owns the Long Beach Post. ■

Health care news in brief

St. Mary gives funding to nonprofits

Dignity Health-St. Mary Medical Center announced in early March that it awarded funding to two nonprofits to expand their services: Food Finders, Inc, and Project Angel Food.

The grant funds provided to Food Finders, Inc. will support its Community Market Places, offering food hubs across Long Beach to serve food insecure residents, while the contribution to Project Angel Food will assist with home-delivered, medically-tailored meals and nutritional counseling for chronically ill older adults.

"This year's decision for our community grant partners was harder than ever, as Dignity Health realizes how many meaningful organizations are struggling through the pandemic," Carolyn Caldwell, St. Mary Hospital president, said in a statement. "Thanks to our annual Community Health Grant Program, we are able to work collaboratively to improve the well-being of the communities we serve and we believe that food insecurities are one of the greatest needs impacting the health of Long Beach residents."

Since 1991, Dignity Health has awarded \$80 million to 3,600 community-based health improvement projects through its Community Grants Program.

MemorialCare hospitals earns CNOR Strong designation

Long Beach Medical Center and Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach have earned CNOR Strong designation from the Competency & Credentialing Institute for the sixth consecutive year.

The CNOR Strong designation is given to hospitals and medical centers having at least 50% of its operating room nursing staff CNOR certified, and provides programs that reward and recognize its certified nurses.

St. Mary appoints five new board members

Dignity Health-St. Mary Medical Center recently appointed five new members to its Hospital Community Board, which helps guide long term goals and policies for the hospital while making strategic plans.

The new members include Sandy Cajas, president and CEO of the Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Gloria Cordero, who has worked in public affairs and other roles for Long Beach City College and the city of Long Beach; Terry Geiling, president and CEO of the American Gold Star Manor in Long Beach; Vattana Peong, executive director of The Cambodian Family Community Center in Orange County; and Long

Beach Police Chief Robert Luna.

"St. Mary's nomination committee wants to ensure that the HCB truly represents the diversity of the community we serve," Carolyn Caldwell, president of the hospital, said in a statement. "These new board members are well respected leaders in the Long Beach community who will truly help St. Mary advance its mission to care for all."

MemorialCare names Spine Center medical director

Dr. Amandeep Bhalla, board-certified and fellowship trained in orthopedic spine surgery, has been named the medical director of the Spine Center at MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center.

In this new role, Bhalla will help align physician leadership, clinical outcomes and advanced technology through collaborating with administration and participating in strategic planning. In addition, he will ensure the Spine Center's commitment to providing a full range of spine surgical procedures, from minimally invasive to complex treatments, for each patient's unique spine condition.

"Dr. Bhalla is a generational talent who is well known in our community for providing compassionate and comprehensive spine care to patients," said Ike Mmaje, chief operating officer, Long Beach Medical Center. "We are honored to have Dr. Bhalla take on this new leadership role. Dr. Bhalla's mission-based lead-

ership, clinical excellence, passion for patient-centered care, and interest in advanced technology will energize the Spine Center."

MemorialCare heart institute names medical director

The MemorialCare Heart & Vascular Institute at Long Beach Medical Center is expanding its leadership team by naming Dr. Elvis Cami as the first medical director of advanced cardiac imaging.

Cami brings extensive training in cardiac imaging technology and techniques, ensuring that patients receive the most accurate and timely diagnosis and the most advanced and personalized treatments for heart disease, the hospital said in a statement.

Cami joins Long Beach Medical Center from Royal Oak, Michigan, where he served as medical director of cardiac MRI at Beaumont Hospital, and assistant professor at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

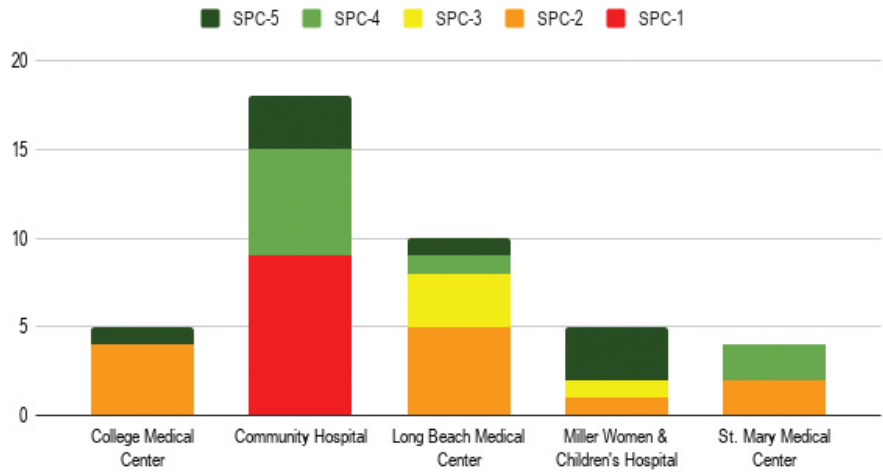
His goal in this new role at the MemorialCare Heart & Vascular Institute is to fully integrate advanced cardiac imaging technologies and solutions into the comprehensive cardiovascular care experience. A main measure of success is the ability to create a roadmap for each patient, which can be used by the clinical, cardiac catheterization and surgical teams as they provide the best outcomes and experiences for patients and their families. ■

Seismic retrofits could cost hospitals billions—now they’re pleading with legislators to ease requirements

By ALENA MASCHKE
Reporter

In the early morning hours of Feb. 8, 1971, the earth below the San Fernando Valley began to rumble. The Van Norman Dam nearly collapsed, threatening to unleash the contents of the reservoir on the thousands of homes below. But for those who still remember the Sylmar earthquake half a century later, the images that remain are those of two hospitals decimated by the 6.6 magnitude temblor. The destruction of the Veterans Administration and Olive View hospitals in Sylmar accounted for 49 of the quake’s 64 victims. Twenty years later, another destructive earthquake hit Southern California. The Northridge quake with its 6.7 magnitude killed 72 people, caused over \$20 billion worth of damage, and led to the evacuation of eight area hospitals after water pipes broke and the power went out. The Sylmar earthquake led to the

Here's how Long Beach hospitals compare on seismic safety:



According to data collected by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, all Long Beach hospitals have to catch up on seismic safety standards by 2030, with Community Hospital facing a prior deadline in 2025. Data visualization by the Long Beach Business Journal.

1978 founding of the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, which regulates the seismic safety of hospitals. And later, after the Northridge quake, the California Legislature passed a number of new laws around building safety, including the Hospital Seismic Retrofit Pro-

gram of 1994, which is still in effect, with its requirements becoming more stringent every few years. Over the next 10 years, California hospitals, including all of the hospitals in Long Beach, will have to make changes to the structure of their buildings to conform to the standards set following the Northridge quake—costly changes.

Struggling to come up with the funds, hospitals are now asking the state to reconsider some of the requirements that were written into law over 20 years ago. Since the passage of SB 1953 in the year of the Northridge quake, the state’s agency for health planning and development has rated individual buildings on hospital campuses based on their ability to withstand a major earthquake. Buildings in the lowest structural performance category, SPC-1, had to be retrofitted or replaced by 2008, although hospitals could apply for exceptions to that deadline, in some cases extending it to 2025. To meet these requirements means that a building is no longer at a significant risk of collapse in the event of a major earthquake. Except for Community Hospital, which is expected to complete retrofits by 2025 as required, all Long Beach hospitals currently meet this standard.

In 10 years, however, hospitals will come up on another deadline, requiring them to bring any building that houses inpatient services into compliance with an even higher standard. This is where hospitals, represented by the California Hospital Association, are pleading with the state to

reconsider its calculations. According to the 2030 standard, hospitals have to be “reasonably capable” of providing inpatient services after a hypothetical—but, according to scientists, inevitable—major earthquake event. The necessary retrofits and replacements come at a significant cost. A 2019 study conducted by the RAND Corporation and funded by the hospital association, estimated the total cost of statewide compliance to be between \$25 billion and \$105 billion, depending on how many hospitals choose retrofitting instead of replacement to meet the new standards.

These figures include the cost of updating “non-structural performance categories,” such as fire sprinkler systems, in addition to structural changes such as adding steel beams or wrapping concrete in carbon fiber to make buildings more earthquake-resistant. Some operators have also pointed out that the fact that all hospitals in California must complete their construction work by the 2030 deadline, two years after Los Angeles is expected to host the Olympics, could create a surge in demand for construction services and supplies, further driving up the cost of compliance.

To bring down those costs, hospitals are asking state regulators to reconsider whether every hospital building that houses inpatient services needs to be capable of providing a full range of those services after a major earthquake. Elective procedures—while an integral part of a hospital’s inpatient care services—likely wouldn’t have to be provided in a disaster zone, immediately after a major earthquake, said Jan Emerson-Shea, vice president of external affairs at the California Hospital Association.

“Does it really make sense to have every service that a hospital provides be able to operate?” she asked. Which types of hospital care could be considered non-essential after an emergency and therefore be exempt from seismic requirements is still to be determined, Emerson-Shea noted. The hospitals’ plea has found the support of at least one California legislator, who has introduced a “spot bill” to address the issue in the current legislative session. State Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula, D-Fresno, a former emergency room physician who represents Fresno and the northern part of the



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CommunityHospitalLB.org

Central Valley, this year introduced a bill that would require hospitals to submit, by 2023, a list of each building, detailing the specific services provided.

While the bill is likely to change over the course of the legislative session, in its current form it would provide better understanding of the types of services each individual hospital provides and where they are housed, laying the groundwork for the potential exceptions sought by the hospital association.

“At minimum, we need an assessment,” Emerson-Shea said.

Last year, a bill that sought to establish a committee that would identify alternatives to hospital care in the event of a major disaster, authored by State Senator Anthony Portantino of La Canada Flintridge, was amended numerous times and eventually died in the assembly.

For now, local hospitals are drawing up plans to meet OSHPD’s requirements as they stand today.

Community Hospital, the only hospital in Long Beach whose campus still includes buildings that are considered at significant risk of collapse in a major earthquake, is in the process of retrofitting its facilities to meet the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development’s 2030 standards within the next five years.

An early estimate put the overall costs of retrofitting the hospital, which was built in 1924 and sustained only minimal damage as a result of the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, at \$60 million, according to construc-



Plans for a \$20 million seismic retrofit of Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach were approved last year. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

tion manager Ben Grubb.

While Grubb hopes a recent request for proposals will result in a lower overall project cost, the hospital’s age and location on a faultline have made meeting seismic compliance standards especially tricky. “We’ve got every curveball you could probably imagine [thrown at us],” Grubb said.

The hospital just recently reopened, offering only a portion of

services for now, after being shut down for several years due to seismic safety concerns.

Dignity Health’s St. Mary Medical Center, the oldest acute care hospital in Long Beach still in operation today, counts two buildings that will need to be replaced or retrofitted by 2030, including the Bauer Tower, which houses the main hospital patient units.

The hospital’s original building, erected in 1923, was destroyed in

the Long Beach earthquake of 1933, then rebuilt in following years by the founding nuns, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

Dignity Health did not provide comment on the status of its compliance plans, nor did leadership at College Medical Center, which will need to bring four of its buildings into compliance by 2030.

Plans for a retrofit of MemorialCare Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach were approved by OSHPD last year and will cost the hospital approximately \$20 million to perform, according to Chuck Coryell, executive director of plant operations.

Funding for retrofits at Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital comes from a variety of sources, including state bonds that were approved by voters in 2018, but are exclusive to pediatric facilities.

When it comes to retrofitting or replacing the five Long Beach Medical Center buildings that would become noncompliant in 2030, including the hospital’s main tower, there are currently no state funds available to support the project, according to Chief Operating Officer Ike Mmeje.

“It’s an unfunded request,” Mmeje said. It’s too early to say what the full scope of the project will be and how much it will cost, Mmeje said, but funding it will be a significant challenge the Long Beach Medical Center and its operator MemorialCare will have to grapple with.

“That’s us and every other hospital in California,” Mmeje said. ■



Community Hospital Long Beach operator Molina, Wu, Network is working with state officials to meet new seismic standards by Jan. 1, 2025. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of nurses—but also hindered their training



Long Beach City College nursing student Steven Garcia administers a COVID-19 vaccination at the convention center in Downtown, Thursday, April 1, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

As the coronavirus pandemic ravaged the country over the past year—with Los Angeles County becoming a national hotspot—nursing crews were stretched thin trying to keep up with the constant and exhausting demands of care.

But at a time when their services were most needed, the training of new nurses hit a bottleneck created by the pandemic itself, leaving educators worried about the profession's next generation and scrambling for training alternatives.

The problem is this: To conserve personal protective equipment and minimize the risk of spreading the deadly virus, hospitals have severely limited nursing students' access to their facilities, where they would normally receive practical training during "clinical placement."

Some community colleges have gone so far as to stop accepting nursing students altogether because they have been unable to find clinical

placements for them, a critical component of nursing education.

This disruption of practical training, experts say, could impact the future state of nursing.

During clinical placement, students learn not only to apply their classroom work in a hospital setting but also how to work under pressure with other healthcare workers in an emergency situation—skills that can't be taught anywhere else, said Sigrid Sexton, who leads Long Beach City College's nursing program.

Before the pandemic, first-year nursing students at LBCC would spend one day per week in clinical training, while second-year students were in the hospital two days per week.

"Nursing education is very dependent on concurrent experience in hospitals," Sexton said. But when the pandemic hit, the school suddenly lost all of its placement sites. "They really shut us out," she said.

Even prior to the pandemic, Sexton said, finding clinical placements for students was a challenge for com-

munity colleges forced to compete with private universities that are expanding their programs. "Nursing education," she said, "is a big profit-making business."

The training problem has surfaced while interest in nursing has climbed as health care workers have enjoyed a wave of public appreciation for their critical work on the front lines of the coronavirus crisis, and demand has driven up pay and benefits.

Undergraduate applications to Cal State Long Beach's school of nursing shot up 80% between spring 2020 and spring 2021. At LBCC, applications for the associate's degree nursing program have doubled during the pandemic.

Both CSULB and LBCC have continued accepting students throughout the pandemic, although in slightly smaller groups in the case of LBCC, which reduced its twice-annual enrollment from 40 to 36 students per class. In the most recent cycle, 1,400 prospective students applied. CSULB, meanwhile, accepted its

normal 80 students out of 433 applicants.

Students at both schools, however, have been forced to repeat semesters and delay their graduations because they were unable to log the necessary hours of clinical experience.

To make up for that loss of hands-on learning, educators have begun looking elsewhere for training opportunities.

Educators at CSULB and LBCC, for example, dispatched students to assist in community vaccination efforts. Students also have participated in simulations, telemedicine and worked at COVID-testing sites. At CSULB, students have been using expensive high-tech mannequins to practice a wide range of services, from setting up IVs to monitoring patients' vital signs.

Recognizing the placement problem, the state nursing board is now allowing students to complete a larger share of their clinical training hours through simulations, replacing some of the hours normally spent in

hospital training.

Still, health care experts say, there's no substitute for a hospital setting—a shortcoming that's becoming evident in some students.

"Their self-confidence is not there," explained Lucy Huckabay, director of CSULB's undergraduate nursing program. Mannequins can help students practice technical skills, but communicating with a patient, handling their emotions and movements—that's something an inanimate object can't simulate.

Sexton of LBCC, for her part, offered a darker assessment: "The grand experiment is playing out—and it's a disaster." She said recent graduates are far less comfortable engaging with their colleagues and are hesitant to approach patients, requiring longer orientation periods to warm up to the hospital environment.

But there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

With the winter surge behind them, hospitals are once again allowing groups of students to be trained at their facilities, albeit, for now, less frequently and in smaller numbers.

One barrier to clinical placements by hospitals has been the fear that students might become infected. But with vaccinations for the broader public, including nursing students, coming in the near future, a return to regular cohort sizes and more clinical placement days might also be on the horizon, Sexton said.

And while longer orientation periods might be necessary for nursing graduates who missed out on in-hospital training during the pandemic, Huckabay of CSULB predicted that students will eventually make up for the lost hours.

"I think students are resilient," she said, adding that their overall education has still equipped them with the critical thinking and decision-making skills they need to succeed. "Their foundation is very strong."

And in Long Beach, the long-term effects on nursing might not be as severe as elsewhere.

Although the World Health Organization has estimated a global shortfall of some 5.9 million nurses during the pandemic, the nursing corps in Long Beach has remained strong.

"Within two weeks, we had most of the nurses that were needed for patient care," Tony Garcia, chief nursing officer at MemorialCare's Long Beach Medical Center, said of his team's experience during the second, more severe wave of infections that took place in the latter months of last year.

To meet the surge in demand, Long Beach Medical Center contracted with dozens of traveling nurses, offered incentives for staff nurses to pick up additional shifts and retrained pediatric nurses from the associated Miller Children's & Women's Hospital to assist in caring for adult patients.

"If you'd ask me what would we do the next time something like this happened, we would do exactly the same," said Garcia, who added that training and hiring more full-time nurses would not be economically feasible for most hospitals.

Still, Garcia acknowledged that the pandemic may result in the need for more nurses in the future, as news reports across the country trace a worrying trend: experienced nurses dropping out of the profession as a result of their traumatic experiences during the pandemic.

"One very big danger that we're seeing from the pandemic is nurses rethinking their career choice," Garcia said, adding that, luckily, he hasn't yet seen any dropouts among his staff. "Nurses go into their profession with the goal of saving lives and making people better. Unfortunately, this virus is very vengeful." ■

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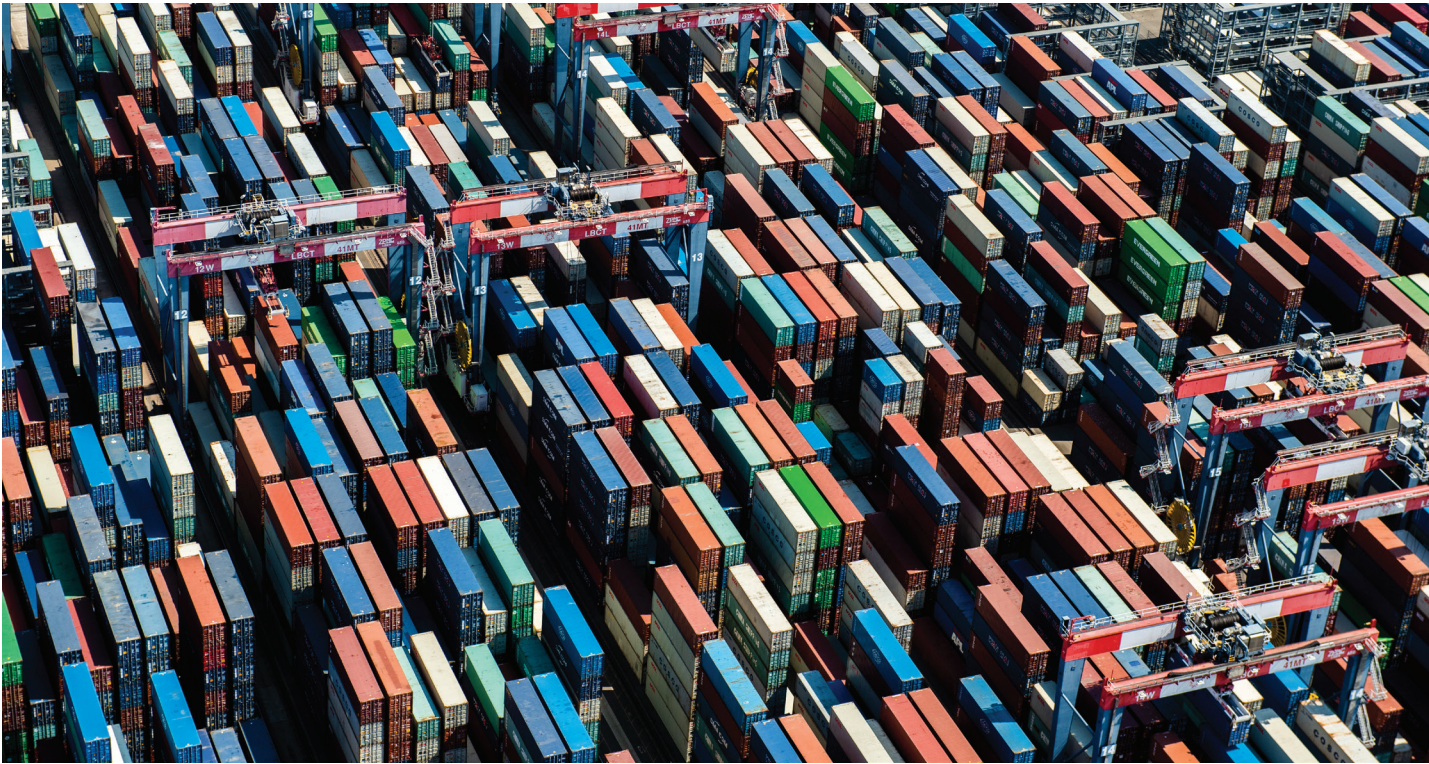
Training program aims to bolster local goods movement workforce

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

As online shopping grows year after year, so does goods movement around the world. Rather than quelling activity at bustling ports, the pandemic actually saw a surge of goods after its initial shock to the sector. Month after month, the Port of Long Beach loaded and unloaded record numbers of shipping containers.

Billions of dollars of goods pass through the Port of Long Beach, the nation’s second-busiest, each year destined for cities across the U.S. This level of goods requires a massive workforce. The port supports 51,000 jobs—about one in five—in Long Beach; 560,000, or one in 20, jobs in Southern California; and 2.6 million nationwide.

“Ports and supply chain companies across the country and around the world understand the importance of developing a skilled workforce to ensure the future of the goods movement industry,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Ma-



Containers await transportation at the Port of Long Beach, Thursday, October 1, 2020. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

rio Cordero said in an email.

To that end, the port partnered with Long Beach City College in 2018 to develop the Maritime Center

of Excellence, a program dedicated to professional development for jobs related to the supply chain and logistics sector.

Beginning in 2019, the short-term, highly intensive training program focuses on four areas: logistics specialist, dispatcher, logistics manager and transportation supervisor. Nearly 130 people have completed the training to date, with another 26 currently enrolled.

The program does not provide job placement services, but the course content—designed and taught by industry professionals—is a quick, affordable foot in the door for those looking for entry-level jobs that pay a living wage, Melissa Infusino, director of workforce development at Long Beach City College, said.

“When people think of the port, many times—and this is part of our challenge—they think of longshoremen,” Infusino said, noting such positions often have a waitlist of up to seven years. “But there are so many jobs that are available now, that pay a living wage and you don’t need a college degree for.”

Training ranges anywhere from 57 to 62 hours per course and the goal is to run at least two sessions per year for each focus area, Infusino said. If enrollment increases, each training could be offered more frequently she added.

Maritime Center courses are not-for-credit training, meaning participants pay to be there but do not earn college credits. Courses range from \$440 to \$495 but scholarships are available through the port that cover 80% of the cost. To date, 86 scholar-

ships have been given.

After only a year of courses, the program was turned upside down by the pandemic, with classes postponed before being shifted online. At the same time, the pandemic increased the need for port-related workers as an influx of goods have made their way across the Pacific.

“We’ve seen during the pandemic just how essential the supply chain and its workforce are to the continued operation and well-being of national economies,” Cordero said.

The transition to online training was smooth, Infusino said, adding that training remains online. If people want to participate but lack digital literacy skills, she said the college offers free 18-hour courses that build computer skills.

The pandemic caused many to lose their jobs, which led to the program partnering with regional workforce development organizations, including Long Beach’s Pacific Gateway, Infusino said. The partnerships have expanded support for participants such as child care and additional financial assistance.

Infusino recalled one student—a single mom—who received a scholarship, went through one of the beginner courses and was hired as an office clerk in a company’s billing department. She returned to take an intermediate course, which allowed her to receive a promotion with her company to safety coordinator.

“We’re not only getting folks in the door,” Infusino said, “but now we’re also helping them to advance within their company.” ■

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