

# Long Beach Business Journal

May 4, 2021

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## In This Issue



**Meet the new LGBTQ Center director**  
(Page 21)



**The Petroleum Club is bouncing back**  
(Page 17)



**Crucial to community, gay bars are back**  
(Page 20)



**SpaceX pens lease at Port of Long Beach**  
(Page 3)

## ‘It feels like home’: Hotel conversion program offers hope to Long Beach’s most vulnerable homeless residents



Beverly Session lays out photos of her past onto a bed in her Project Homekey room in Long Beach, Monday, April 5, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**  
Reporter

Beverly Session—or Ms. Beverly, as she’s affectionately called—speaks with composure, carefully choosing each word, spacing every sentence.

But when the 64-year-old recounts the precise moment a social worker at the Long Beach Multi-Service Center told her she could move out of her car and into a small room at the Coast Motel near the Traffic Circle, Session is so overtaken she struggles to catch her breath.

“I cried with him that day, I was so thankful,” she recalls, breaking into tears again at the memory. She had been living in her 2004 Honda CR-V for over a month, unable to take a single full shower.

Soon she’d be on the move again as years of loss swiftly gave way to hope, thanks to a new form of homelessness intervention. A few miles from her temporary housing at the Coast, Session was offered a room to make her own through a statewide program called Project Homekey.

At the former Best Western on Long Beach Boulevard—one of three hotels and motels purchased by Long Beach and Los Angeles County at the end of last year—she has finally found a place that feels safe, clean and promising.

“It feels like home,” Session says with gratitude, as she sits on a couch in the hotel’s former breakfast room, now a makeshift case management office.

Using \$800 million in state and federal dollars, Project Homekey has created thousands of units

across California by funding the purchases of hotels and motels to house homeless people.

Most facilities in the program so far have focused on housing a specific and exceptionally vulnerable segment of the region’s legions of unhoused—people who are over 65 or have pre-existing health conditions that put them at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19.

A 2019 report by the LA County coroner’s office reported that homeless women have an average age of death of 48. Homeless men, on average, die at 51. By comparison, today’s average life expectancy in LA County is 82.

Yvette Ahlstrom, vice president of Orange County operations at the Illumination Foundation, which runs the city-acquired site

(Please Continue to Page 10)

## Single-family market hot but ‘unhealthy,’ experts say

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Reporter

While the ongoing pandemic wreaked havoc on many aspects of life, it did not have obvious adverse effects on single-family home sales.

The amount of time that homes spend on the market is down and prices are up, but some experts would not consider it a good market.

“It’s really an unhealthy housing market,” said Phil Jones, owner and CEO of Coldwell Banker Coastal Alliance, noting that current market conditions are stressful for everyone involved.

Demand for housing in Long Beach remains high but the inventory of for-sale homes is low, with only 483 properties—single-family detached and condominiums—on the market as of April 1, Jones said.

Buyer fatigue has become an issue, Jones said, which has led to a slight slowdown in local sales.

“Buyers are getting beat up and, as a result, they either go to the sidelines or they get desperate and make offers ... waiving contingencies, which is not good for them,” he said.

One result of the current state of the housing market is an increase in grievances and litigation once escrow closes, Jones said. In some cases, buyers are discovering issues with properties that they claim were not disclosed.

“We also have seen more buyers back out of escrow than usual,” Jones said. “It’s just an unhealthy environment overall.”

Despite the challenges and the exhaustion of buyers, demand has not wavered and—coupled with low interest rates—continues to push home prices up. As of March, single-family home prices were up 14% year-over-year, Jones said. The

(Please Continue to Page 9)

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Downtown businesses less optimistic about economic growth than before pandemic, survey shows

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**  
Reporter

Business owners surveyed by the Downtown Long Beach Alliance this year expressed less optimism about the growth of the Long Beach economy than they did in previous years.

While most business owners still expressed optimism for the future, according to the association’s 2021 Economic Profile, only 64% of business owners said they were confident that the local economy would expand over the next year, compared to 78% the year before.

“Although we are starting to see improved health and economic outcomes from the pandemic, I believe the recovery process to reach pre-pandemic operation levels will take some time,” Kraig Kojian, president and CEO of the Downtown Long Beach Alliance, said in an email. “A number of business owners are more cautiously optimistic about the coming year than in years past, and many are still working to dig themselves out of increased debt and losses from 2020.”

Many Downtown businesses were hit hard by the pandemic, which imposed restrictions on a number of sectors that are prominently represented in the area, such as restaurants, bars and personal care services.

Among food and hospitality businesses surveyed by the association in the fourth quarter of 2020, 83% reported that they had permanently laid off or furloughed employees due to revenue losses. Across all sectors, 712 businesses responded, with 55% reporting layoffs.

A more recent survey included in the report suggests that the situation may have improved since, with only 25% of business owners reporting that they still had fewer employees than they did at the same time last year. However, this survey had a smaller

sample size of only 250 respondents. Overall, a majority of businesses said they expected to maintain the same number of employees and 37% said they were planning to hire up over the upcoming year.

Staffing levels at office-based businesses were affected far less than those in the service sector, with many retaining employees who continued to work from home. According to the survey, many are expecting remote working arrangements to continue, with 42% of responding businesses saying they anticipate using a hybrid model of in-office and remote work.

A survey conducted by the association this spring found that a majority of employers said they did not expect to return to even a third of pre-COVID occupancy levels by the end of 2021, although that response was in part contingent on the availability of vaccines, the association noted in the report.

Some office workers have returned to Downtown already, but daytime activity remains far lower than before the pandemic. Rental rates for offices remained almost unchanged throughout 2020, but net absorption for this real estate sector was negative, meaning that more office space came onto the market or remained vacant than was leased up.

With fewer workers coming Downtown and restrictions on ground-floor businesses as a result of the pandemic, retail vacancies have increased as well.

“Businesses may need to pivot to a more experience-based business model that attracts people to a physical location, in addition to building out e-commerce capabilities to expand their reach and sales,” Kojian said, adding that it will be the task of the DLBA, its partner organizations and local businesses to promote Downtown as a place worth spending time in. ■

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# SpaceX to occupy 6.5 acres at Port of Long Beach

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Reporter

Hawthorne-based SpaceX, a space exploration and transport company founded by Elon Musk, will move into a 6.5-acre facility at the Port of Long Beach, Mayor Robert Garcia said.

Company officials could not immediately be reached.

SpaceX approached port staff several months ago, and the deal came together rather quickly, Port Director Mario Cordero said in an interview.

“We’re honored, as our signage says, to be the ‘port of choice’ for SpaceX,” Cordero said. “We look forward to a collaborative relationship with them.”

Beginning May 1, the company will occupy a facility at Pier T, which will house the company’s West Coast launch vehicle recovery operations.

The Port of Long Beach said in a state-

ment that the company would take over a waterfront facility vacated one year ago by Sea Launch, a commercial satellite launching company that had been at the port for 20 years.

Prior to Sea Launch, the site was used by the U.S. Navy.

Ever since the departure of Sea Launch, numerous companies have been interested in the Pier T facility, Cordero said. The area includes a nearly 61,700-square-foot warehouse and office building, in addition to more than 62,000 square feet of paved land.

SpaceX will use the facility’s existing wharf to dock its vessels and offload equipment, the port said.

According to an agreement approved by the Long Beach Harbor Commission Monday, the company will pay \$107,000 per month for use of the facility, which is market rate, Cordero said. The term of the lease is two years and SpaceX may terminate its lease at any time with a 90-day notice.



Pier T at the Port of Long Beach. Photo courtesy of the port.

SpaceX is responsible for maintenance of the facility and grounds, while the port will maintain the wharf structure of the pier. Any improvements to the site, including new construction, also would be covered by SpaceX. While no development plans have been announced at this time, Cordero said this is a great opportunity for the port.

“It’s fair to say there could be a more expansive SpaceX presence at a later date,” Cordero said. “It’s a great opportunity for the Port of Long Beach to explore a more long-term role of SpaceX here.”

Founded in 2002, SpaceX was recently awarded a \$2.9 billion contract by NASA to build a spacecraft to land astronauts on the moon for the first time since the last Apollo mission.

Long Beach Economic Development Director John Keisler said the move highlights the aerospace industry’s deep roots in the city. SpaceX is the fifth space company to move into Long Beach since 2015 when Virgin Orbit moved into Douglas Park. Since then, SpinLaunch, Rocket Lab and Relativity Space relocated their headquar-

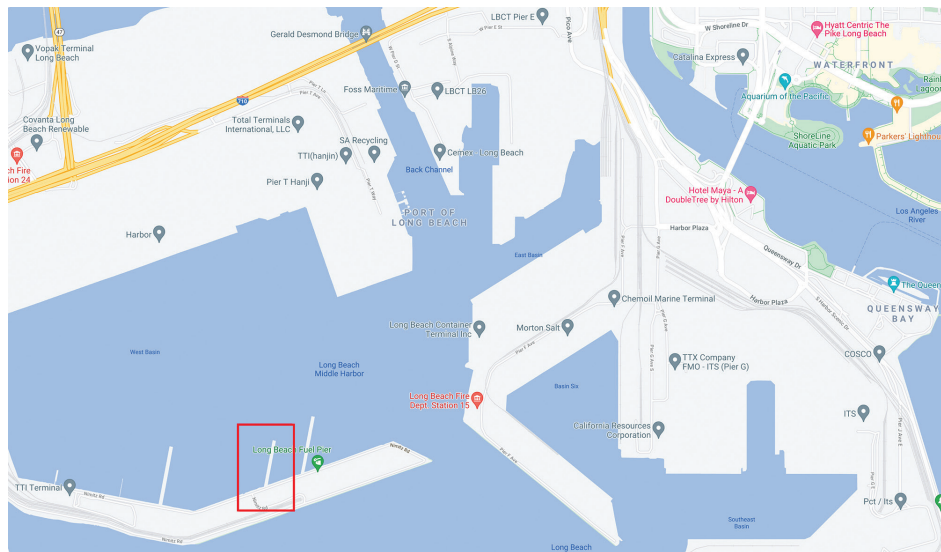
ters to Long Beach.

“This is part of the ongoing transition that we have been leading since the C-17,” Keisler said. “The transition from military aerospace manufacturing to rocket and satellite launch, and space and technology.”

The addition of SpaceX to Long Beach means a big boost to the local economy, Keisler said. He noted the increased attraction for government and venture capital spending and the high-paying jobs the company will bring, which will equate to more people spending money in the city.

The economic boost will be crucial as the city recovers from the impacts of COVID-19, Keisler said. But more importantly, the company’s investment in the city is part of the groundwork being laid for future investment that will have positive long-term economic impacts.

“It’s an endorsement of the strength of the talent that is here,” Keisler said. “It’s an endorsement of the strength of the industry’s presence. It’s an endorsement of the future of the city.” ■



A map of Pier T at the Port of Long Beach showing the area SpaceX is taking over. Screenshot.

## Federal government set to pay over \$35 million to house migrant children in Long Beach

■ By **KELLY PUENTE** and **JASON RUIZ**  
Reporters

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will pay more than \$35 million to use the city’s Convention Center as an emergency shelter for migrant children from now through Aug. 2, according to the city contract released Friday, April 23.

Under the contract with the convention center’s management company, the federal government will pay \$197,356 a day for facility rental along with additional fees of up to \$113,550 a day for meals and bottled water, assuming the facility reaches its capacity of 1,000 children and 400 staff.

The contract also contains an estimated \$858,000 in fees that would be owed to the city of Long Beach for use of services from the Health Department, Fire Department and Police Department—including the resources to manage any potential protests.

The short-term contract is for the period of April 19 to Aug. 2, but it could end sooner if there is no longer a need to shelter the children.

The federal government last month tapped Long Beach to help with the increase in unaccompanied children arriving at the Mexico border. Convention centers in San

Diego and Texas have already been converted to emergency shelters.

The first children arrived in Long Beach on April 22 after city officials and community leaders got a chance to tour the facility.

The site is expected to house no more than 1,000 children who are expected to arrive

in groups every other day. The children will include mostly girls 17 and under, and some boys, 12 and under.

Experts anticipate the lease agreement will also have a broader economic impact over the next three months—bringing in an estimated \$50 million in total spending.



Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia speaks during a press conference hours before hundreds of migrant children arrive at the Long Beach Convention Center, Wednesday, April 28, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

The analysis published by Robert Kleinhenz of Kleinhenz Economics and Seiji Steimetz, from Cal State Long Beach’s Office of Economic Research, said that the next 100 days of the center’s use could kickstart economic activity in Downtown and the Los Angeles-Orange County metro area.

The \$50 million estimate comes from the fees and other costs to lease the convention center and hotel room rentals for the hundreds of federal employees, workers and volunteers who will help run the site.

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the city did not enter into negotiations to profit, but said that the migrant child facility could generate the economic equivalent of about 10 conventions.

The convention center has largely sat idle during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently has become the city’s largest vaccine administration site. Officials said the migrant shelter will not impact the vaccine site and that the children, staff and volunteers in the shelter will be tested for COVID-19 every three days.

The federal government’s contract with Long Beach ends in August, which is when the city-owned convention center plans to resume scheduled events. ■



Boba shortage has Long Beach tea shops anxiously awaiting shipments of tapioca balls

By JASON RUIZ  
Reporter

Loose Leaf Tea on the Downtown Long Beach Promenade has been serving milk teas and other boba inspired drinks for almost three years, but like seemingly every boba purveyor in the country, the shop is bracing for a potential shortage of the black tapioca balls that cluster at the bottom of their drinks.

The shop uses about 30 six-pound bags of tapioca pearls on a weekly basis and gets shipments about once per week. Right now, the shop has about a one-week supply, according to a manager who identified herself as Maria R.

“It’s always scary because we do get our boxes of supplies but we don’t know if we’re always going to get our shipments on time,” she said.

The shop is also running out of tea and its signature printed cups, leaving them to have to place stickers by hand on each order. Maria attributed it in part to the backlog of ships at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

Mario Cordero, the executive director of the Port of Long Beach, said that there are a number of factors feeding into the backlog but likely the largest one is the growing 24/7 shopping culture that has been enabled by online retailers like Amazon. The more people order, the more

shipping containers the port processes. The Long Beach port saw a 74% increase of inbound containers last month compared to March 2020 and the resulting backlog has about 24 ships at anchor outside of the Long Beach harbor.

Those ships are indicative of a growing economy, something that could last into the summer, Cordero said. Combined with the Los Angeles port, Cordero said over 17 million containers were processed last year.

“Whether it’s boba, a dishwasher or outside furniture, these times have certainly shown a willingness for consumers to spend,” Cordero said.

Anxiety of the looming boba shortage was sparked by an Instagram post in April by the Boba Guys, a chain of drink shops co-founded by Andrew Chau and Bin Chen. The duo also helped found the US Boba Company in Hayward that supplies domestically made boba balls.

The chain recently opened a location at the 2nd & PCH shopping district in southeast Long Beach. A representative from Boba Guys did not respond to a request for comment.

In the video posted April 8, Chau and Chen and David Fan from Fanale Drinks, who started the boba factory in Northern California, blamed the shortage on the pandemic’s effect on the global supply chain.



Delays at the Port of Long Beach and a global shortage of shipping containers are contributing to shortages in certain items, including Taiwanese boba, pictured here at Loose Leaf Boba Company in Downtown Long Beach, Wednesday, April 21, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

While the boba balls are made in California, it depends on tapioca starch from the cassava plant, which is native to countries in southeast Asia like Thailand. Chau said the company is trying to seek other means of importing the tapioca starch, but added that shortage could last about four to five months for stores that depend on their company for supplies.

Other suppliers in Taiwan have been

handcuffed by a drought. But whether the tapioca balls are domestically made or imported they ultimately have to pass through the ports.

“It does mean that boba is going to be out and it’s going to be weird for a lot of us who run boba shops, including our name Boba Guys, it is going to be awkward,” Chau said in the video.

A spreading fear of “Bobageddon” has put pressure on employees at Loose Leaf and other tea houses as customers come in looking for specific flavors and have increasingly found only disappointment.

“One lady had four drinks and hers was the fourth one on the list and we ran out of her flavor so she cancelled the whole order,” said Alex, the owner of Boba Tea House on Willow Street just west of the 710 Freeway.

He said that his father was in Los Angeles in search of supplies for the tea shop and said that some suppliers are out of 80% of flavors. Alex said he noticed the boba shortage about a month or two ago but the effect on sales has been minimal so far. He doesn’t expect to run out of boba any time soon and is hopeful it won’t get to that point.

“It’s not like at the start of the pandemic,” he said. “Then, I couldn’t find sugar or milk and it took an extra hour out of our day to go shopping. I was like ‘How are we going to make drinks?’”

But not all shops are feeling the tapioca pinch.

A manager at Cha for Tea near Cal State Long Beach said that they hadn’t received word of a shortage from their producer in Taiwan, but the shop is running low on honey.

The situation at the port is getting a little better, however, Cordero said. The two dozen vessels floating outside the harbor is better than the roughly 40 that were floating off the coast a few months ago. He estimated it could take a few weeks to process the ships currently floating in the harbor.

Long Beach tea shops are hopeful that at least one of them has tapioca balls on board. ■

Passenger traffic at Long Beach Airport is increasing but remains low



Dozens of people wait to depart Long Beach Airport, Wednesday, Dec. 23, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By BRANDON RICHARDSON  
Reporter

Passenger traffic continues to climb at Long Beach Airport but remains low compared to last year and pre-pandemic levels, according to airport data.

Just under 114,500 passengers traveled through the municipal airport during March, a nearly 15% decrease from the same month the year before the pandemic first set in and forced lockdowns. Compared to 2019, pas-

senger traffic is down 60.5%.

Though still far below normal levels, the March figures show a promising trend of increased demand for travel. Total passenger traffic in February was down 82% from 2020. Air travel bottomed out early in the pandemic in April, when passenger traffic plummeted to 98% below the same month in 2019.

“With the increased distribution of vaccines and the nine new destinations added in the last month, we are finally starting to turn a corner in our

passenger traffic,” airport spokeswoman Kate Kuykendall said in an email. “The road to recovery will be long, but we are seeing very encouraging signs, especially with our new service to Honolulu and Maui.”

Year-to-date passenger traffic as of March was 207,024, a 70.5% reduction from the same period last year and a nearly 74.3% decrease from 2019.

Total air cargo passing through the airport totaled 1,034 tons, down 24.7% from the same month last year and 42.7% from March 2019. ■



# Losing lawsuit over sewer, water fees could cost Long Beach \$9 million a year, officials say

■ By **JASON RUIZ**  
Reporter

A lawsuit against the city that's winding its way through the state's legal system has the potential to decrease Long Beach's budget by \$9 million annually, officials said recently.

The city is already facing a \$37 million shortfall in the fiscal year starting in October 2023, but if it loses a lawsuit over Measure M water and sewer line transfer fees, future budgets could face an additional permanent shortage of \$9 million.

The looming budget issue was outlined on April 20 to the Long Beach City Council's Budget Oversight Committee.

The lawsuit stems from a 2016 challenge against the city's practice of charging access fees to city-run utilities for using water and sewer pipes. The practice, in place for decades, had recently generated as much as \$14 million for the city before it was challenged in court.

A ballot initiative (Measure M) allowing the fees in 2018 was approved by residents, but was almost immediately challenged and has since been wrapped up in a cycle of appeals.

A January 2020 ruling in favor of

the appellant, Long Beach resident Diana Lejins, required the city to put an escalating amount of the funds it would normally transfer into the city's coffers into an escrow account. The upcoming fiscal year that starts in October, and every year after that, requires a \$9 million deposit until the case is settled.

The city's director of financial management John Gross, said that the city believes there is "better than a 50/50 chance of prevailing," but in all likelihood the case is headed for the California Supreme Court after an appeals court issued its ruling in December.

"If the decision goes against the city, it's not going to be easy, maybe not even possible to resolve it with another ballot question," Gross said. "The revenue will likely be lost if there is an adverse decision."

Gross outlined four scenarios that could play out, two with the city ultimately winning and two others where the city could have to repay tens of millions of dollars, likely through judgment bonds. Paying off the bonds could negatively affect the city's budget by millions for up to 20 years, Gross said.

The two favorable scenarios for the

city would see somewhere between \$9 million and \$27 million in escrow funds, depending on when a final verdict is made by the Supreme Court, eventually released to the city for it to use on one-time expenses. The \$9 million reduction to future budgets would also be eliminated.

However, if the Supreme Court decides against the city, Long Beach would be responsible for repaying that money along with other money it spent after the passage of Measure M but before the 2020 ruling that required escrow deposits.

The range the city could owe could be between \$25 million and \$42 million, Gross said, adding that "it's a big deal."

"The city will have a lot of money to pay back and not an easy way to do it," Gross said. "Hopefully it ends quietly and goes away at the end of this year."

Councilman Al Austin, who chairs the committee, said the city's projected budget issues were alarming. Austin said that everyone has the right to disagree with city operations but this issue is clear that litigation has impacts.

"I really wish we could get this behind us," Austin said. "I think this is

unfortunate."

The city would typically be ramping up its budgeting process at this time of year, but the projected shortfall of \$30 million for the upcoming fiscal year has likely been fixed by the City Council's decision in March to allocate part of the federal funding from the American Rescue Plan on replenishing the city's reserves and balancing the city's budget in the upcoming year.

However, ongoing costs for the city continue to rise, meaning that the federal money will only provide short-term relief. City employee salaries are expected to increase by nearly \$23 million next year and the insurance fund that covers liability issues and worker's compensation is expected to grow by about \$8.6 million.

The city will likely continue to face potential deficits as long as it continues to spend more than it's taking in. Even with the federal funding, the city is facing over \$47 million in shortfalls in the next few years.

"You have to solve the problem that you're spending more than you're earning and we're not doing that in FY22," Gross said. ■

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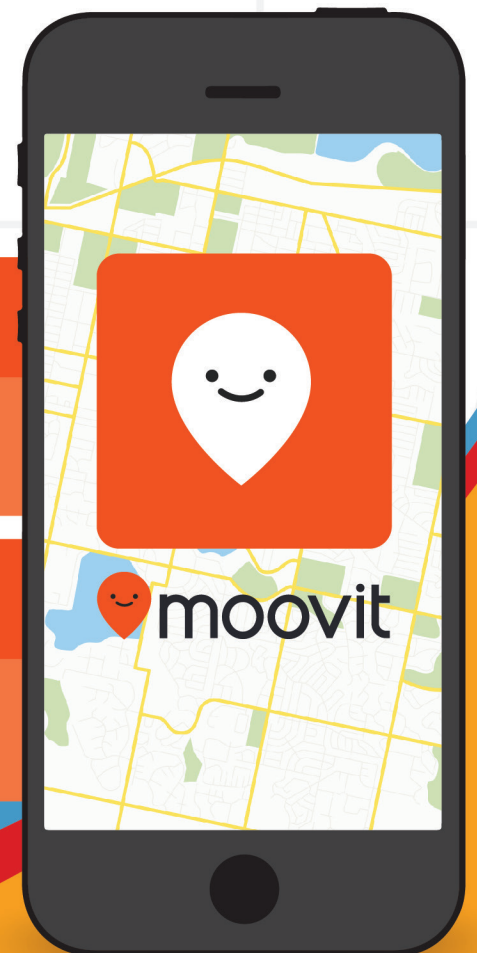
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LONG BEACH  
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# Poke chain Sweetfin sails into Long Beach with first cloud kitchen concept

■ By CHEANTAY JENSEN  
Reporter

It was 2015 when poke, the raw fish dish ubiquitous in Hawaii, exploded in the U.S. mainland. At the forefront of this craze was Sweetfin, a Los Angeles-born “fine-casual” restaurant that swiftly swept Southern California with its extensive, chef-driven menu and build-your-own-bowl concept.

Though the trend seems to have ebbed six years later, Sweetfin is thriving with new sights for expansion set on Long Beach. Mid-May will be the grand opening of Sweetfin’s 12th location and its first foray into the cloud kitchen concept.

“We’ve been looking at Long Beach for some time to be honest,” said co-owner Alan Nathan. “We feel [Long Beach] is a very outdoorsy, healthy lifestyle-driven city, coastal as well. We love everything about

Long Beach and we feel that Sweetfin will resonate down there.”

Both Sweetfin, and the restaurant’s vegan/vegetarian iteration, Plant Shop, will be operating under a takeout and delivery-only model—with orders processed solely online—from the industrial kitchen warehouse at 1388 Daisy Ave., which is home to some 20 other cloud kitchen restaurants in Long Beach and Greater Los Angeles.

“So much of our business these days, especially through COVID, is going through digital [means], it just didn’t make sense to have a traditional brick-and-mortar to start,” said co-owner Seth Cohen, but noted that Sweetfin intends to open a dine-in location in Long Beach in the future.

Though inspired by Hawaiian traditions of poke, Sweetfin’s menu incorporates Asian and Californian twists in their menu, from signature sauces to toppings, as developed

by executive chef Dakota Weiss, a “Top Chef” alum and former executive chef at the W Hotel in Westwood.

Signature bowl, the Japanese-inspired Yuzu Salmon, for instance, is a tart take on a salmon poke with yuzu kosho sauce topped with avocado, cucumber, jicama, and cilantro. Though not an American sauce by origin, the U.S. obsession with Sriracha is celebrated with tuna by way of a Sriracha ponzu and topped with avocado, asparagus, cilantro, sundried tomatoes and onions.

The Build-Your-Own-Bowl (BYOB) concept allows the diner to experiment and features five health-oriented bases (bamboo rice, kelp noodle slaw, citrus kale salad, black rice and the paleo friendly cauliflower rice), six signature sauces, and protein options guests can top with over two dozen types of herbs, spices, fruits and veggies.

“If you look at what poke bowls used to

look like before we opened, it’s apparent how far we’ve come along,” Weiss said via email. “Our hope is that we can continue to come up with innovative bowls and create delicious dishes that our customers love. Poke is such a great vessel for absolute creation and it’s a dish that has endless possibilities.”

Health-minded (their entire menu is also gluten-free) and sustainably oriented, Sweetfin’s proteins are largely sourced from suppliers that employ sustainable practices. The yellowfin and albacore tuna are wild caught, though the salmon and shrimp are farm raised. For the vegan and vegetarian eater, there is tofu and vegetable poke, which is made with sweet potato, avocado, carrots, cucumber and edamame.

But for the plant-based diet, Sweetfin’s Plant Shop kitchen offers more variety with specialty Asian-inspired salads bowls and noodle dishes, designed by Weiss. ■

# Rocket Lab to take part in climate change monitoring mission

■ By BRANDON RICHARDSON  
Reporter

Long Beach-based launch and space systems company Rocket Lab has been selected to develop a mission operations control center for a collaborative satellite mission meant to monitor and help curb emissions, the company announced.

Once in orbit, the MethaneSAT—a 350 kilogram (about 771 pounds) class satellite—will locate and measure methane from the oil, gas and agricultural industries around the world. The program will enable regulators, businesses and researchers to track and reduce emissions faster, according to the announcement.

Rocket lab will develop, manage and op-

erate mission control for the project in Auckland, New Zealand, where one of the company’s launch sites already exists. The center is part of the New Zealand government’s NZD\$26 million (about USD\$18.8 million) commitment to the international program.

“The ability to detect and measure gas leaks from space will undoubtedly change the way climate change is understood and managed,” Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck said in a statement. “This is an internationally significant mission that can help alleviate modern society’s impact on Earth in a big way, and we’re thrilled to be able to play our part in helping to mitigate climate change through MethaneSAT.”

The MethaneSAT team consists of experts from numerous public and private aerospace organizations as well as researchers from Harvard University and the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, which are developing the data acquisition and analytical capabilities.

With the non-profit Environmental Defense Fund leading the program, MethaneSAT’s highly sensitive spectrometer is capable of detecting methane concentrations as low as two parts per billion. The satellite will quantify and report emissions in near

real-time from sources, providing regular monitoring of regions that account for more than 80% of global oil and gas production, the company said.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas responsible for at least a quarter of today’s planetary warming, the company noted. Data will be published for free for stakeholders and the public to compare progress by companies and countries.

The Long Beach company will deliver the IT and software infrastructure required to task the satellite on orbit, including tracking, pointing and positioning, and collision avoidance. The firm also will manage the collection and dissemination of climate change data generated by the MethaneSAT program.

Rocket Lab will manage mission operations for 12 months, after which time the company will continue providing support by training New Zealand’s future space operators and scientists in mission management and satellite operations.

The facility is slated to be functional by mid-2022 ahead of on-orbit operations that are scheduled to begin in the fourth quarter that year. ■

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Rocket Lab’s Electron rocket lifts off from the company’s New Zealand complex, Monday, March 22, 2021. Photo courtesy of Rocket Lab.



# City Council expresses support for aligning local elections with county, state

■ By JASON RUIZ  
Reporter

Long Beach voters could soon be asked to change the city's charter again to realign the city's elections with the state's and county's schedule after a court ruling last year put charter cities like Long Beach back in control of when local elections are held.

The city is expected to align itself with the state's elections next year and then draft a charter amendment for voters to decide in November 2022. Next year's schedule could still be in doubt due to holdups with federal census data needed to complete mandatory redistricting.

A charter amendment could permanently link the city to statewide elections, which would allow for a longer lead time between the primary and general elections in some contests. Because of this, councilmembers may ask voters to approve other reforms such as campaign contribution limits, public financing of local elections and even flipping some citywide races to different years to increase turnout.

The discussion during the City Council meeting on Tuesday, April 20, stems from a recent ruling in a case involving the city of Redondo Beach, which challenged whether the state could dictate

election schedules in charter cities.

The state had initially mandated that cities such as Long Beach that have low voter turnout align their elections with the state to increase voter turnout.

This year the city was forced to align with the state's cycle, which is March-November in presidential election cycles like last year, and June-November in gubernatorial election cycles like next year's elections.

Aligning with the state has created stark differences in the turnout of Long Beach voters. The 2016 April primaries brought out just 13.5% of voters while the 2020 March primaries saw over 40% of voters cast ballots.

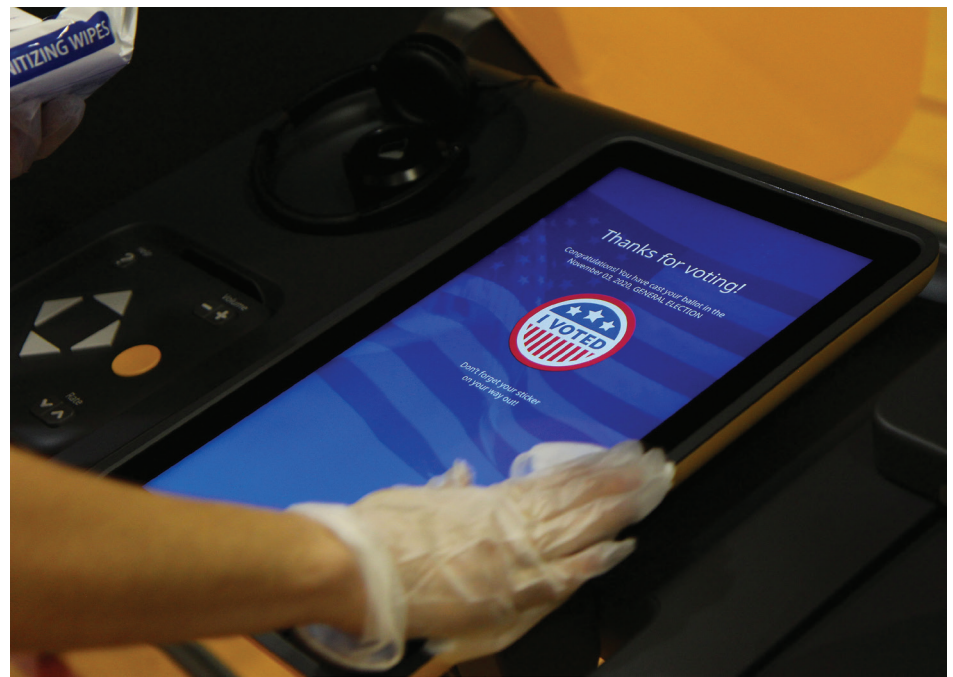
Nearly three-quarters of Long Beach voters cast a ballot in the November 2020 election.

Mayor Robert Garcia said he's always supported the consolidation of elections because the data shows that doing so increases turnout from all populations, including communities that are disenfranchised.

"To me this is a civil rights issue," Garcia said.

Council members expressed support for the increased turnout seen through the most recent elections but also pointed to potential problems invited by the longer, more expensive elections.

Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flani-



A volunteer wipes down a voting machine immediately after a voter casts a ballot on Election Day 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

gan said the longer runoff periods probably allows challengers more time to make up ground on incumbents, which she said is a good thing, but asked that the city look at how independent expenditures on city elections could be reined in.

"It's a step in the right direction but I think there are a lot more steps that need

to take place," Mungo Flanigan said.

Because the state recently moved up its primary election date in presidential cycles to make California more impactful on the national stage, aligning with the state would skew local elections.

Council districts with even numbers would face a runoff period that stretches eight months, while the runoff period for odd-numbered districts would be five months. Some council members said the disparity could make those even districts more expensive to run and more mentally exhausting.

"I was in a six-week runoff one time and one reporter described myself and my challenger as two heavyweight prize fighters in the 12th round," said Councilman Daryl Supernaw. "It took a toll on us just doing that six weeks, not to mention the toll it takes on the voters."

Supernaw chairs the council committee that oversees elections and said he brought the item to the floor Tuesday night because it required a broader discussion given the time crunch the city may be in.

The city is in the middle of a redistricting process that can't be completed until federal census data is turned over to localities. The pandemic delayed the count last year and now is delaying the release of data, which could jeopardize even the proposed June 2022 primary election.

The city attorney's office has advised the council that it should wait for the new district lines to be drawn before proceeding with an election, but because of the census hold up there is hope that the state will issue guidance, and possibly new election dates, for all cities.

The proposal the council is moving forward with will align city elections with the state at least through the 2022 elections, but how it goes about shaping the future schedule of elections in the city will be decided at future meetings where it builds any proposed charter amendment. ■



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# Office, retail real estate battered by pandemic while industrial thrives

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Reporter

Each of Long Beach's commercial real estate markets—office, retail and industrial—were impacted by the coronavirus in different ways. For now, the office market has taken the brunt of the hit but the future of the retail market remains in question, according to industry experts. Meanwhile, the industrial sector was bolstered by the dramatic increase in online shopping brought on by COVID-19.

## Office

Long Beach's suburban office market did not weather the pandemic well, with overall vacancy during the first quarter shooting up to 20.9% in the first quarter compared to 13.2% during the same period last year, according to data from Cushman & Wakefield. Vacancy in the Downtown market during the first quarter also increased, up nearly 3% to 21.5%.

Many companies are rethinking the work-from-home dynamic and how much space they really need, according to Jason Fine, managing director of commercial real estate firm JLL. The shift could mean many companies downsize the amount of office space they lease.

"I think a majority of companies want people to come back to the office most of the time," Fine said. "A lot of companies are making decisions about real estate now but it's definitely not one-size-fits all."

Historically, every employee would have a designated desk within an office space but under new models, companies may have more employees working alternate schedules in the office and at home, Fine noted. He said reconfigured offices would likely have more open seating, more space between desks, collaborative areas and more circulation.

"The pandemic taught us we don't have to have six or seven people per 1,000 square feet lined up ... elbow to elbow doing work," Fine said. "And that's a good thing."

On the flipside, companies that did well during the pandemic—such as e-commerce and streaming services—are actually expanding, which will offset some of the downsizing of other companies, Fine said.

While the first quarter of 2020 saw a combined positive absorption—or the amount of office space that is leased—of over 70,500 square feet in Long Beach, the markets experienced a negative absorption of 127,607 square feet during the first quarter of this year, Cushman reports. Leasing activity also was down 10,803 square feet year-over-year to 59,530.

Overall asking rent in the office markets also dropped, according to the Cushman report. The sharpest decrease was in the suburban market, which fell 9 cents to \$2.52 per square foot during the first quarter compared to the same period last year. In the Downtown market, overall asking rent decreased 3 cents to \$2.54 per square foot.

All things considered, Fine said the market is "stronger than expected." Later this year, when more kids are back in school and more people are vaccinated, he said markets should rebound. While employees have already begun trickling back into the office,



A shuttered Sizzler restaurant on Del Amo Boulevard is fenced off and has been tagged. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Fine said the majority of people won't be expected back until the third or fourth quarter.

## Retail

The retail market has stalled with eviction moratoriums and financial assistance programs propping up many businesses, according to Noel Aguirre and Sean Lieppman, principals with Lee & Associates Commercial Real Estate Services. Because of the city, state and federal assistance, vacancy in the city's retail markets has not taken much of a hit—yet.

Suburban retail vacancy is 5.5% as of the first quarter compared to a historic vacancy of 4%, according to CoStar data. Meanwhile, Downtown vacancy is 5.4% compared to a historic vacancy of 5.1%. However, the eviction moratorium expires at the end of June.

"The full extent of the effects on our local market, the pandemic's effect on vacancy, we won't see until after the moratorium ends," Lieppman said.

Many tenants have been paying 25% of their monthly rents but eventually the full amount will come due, Lieppman added. Depending on agreements with landlords, many businesses could be forced to close or look for a new space when the moratorium expires.

"It'll be interesting to see how it plays out," Lieppman said.

Restaurants have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, with multiple larger spaces shuttering their doors. Also, multiple large restaurant spaces that went on the mar-

ket prior to the pandemic still remain vacant.

"The challenge is to figure out whether to find another similar type of restaurant to backfill or transition them into another use such as medical," Aguirre said, noting that property owners are taking their time in filling vacant space. "Instead of ... a temporary fix, there is more planning out a strategy for the long-term."

Many large spaces have recently—or will soon—come onto the market, including Sears, Kmart, Food 4 Less and Ralphs locations. Lieppman noted that large spaces are becoming increasingly difficult to backfill, which will likely lead to property owners breaking them up into smaller storefronts or redeveloping the property entirely to include housing with ground floor retail where residential density is allowed such as Downtown.

Rent growth in both markets has been negative over the last 12 months: -2.6% in the suburban market and -3.2% in the Downtown market. Each area historically sees more than 1% of rent growth. Suburban rents decreased by 1 cent to \$2.30 compared to 2020 and Downtown rents decreased 2 cents to \$2.62.

While vacancies did not see drastic change, absorption in both markets was down significantly over the last 12 months. The suburban market saw a negative absorption of 147,000 square feet, while it historically would see a negative absorption of just over 7,000 square feet. The Downtown market saw a negative absorption of 18,600

square feet compared to a positive absorption of nearly 8,400 square feet.

Because of the economic uncertainty brought on by the pandemic and the shifting political climate, lease lengths have gotten shorter, Lieppman noted.

"I'd say two- or three-year leases have been more prevalent than is typical. They are kind of like the new five-year lease for smaller shops," Lieppman said. "Everybody is just trying to figure out the new rules to the game."

## Industrial

The industrial market remains the least volatile real estate sector in the region, with online shopping and increased port activity keeping demand high.

"The industrial market was not impacted by COVID the way that some other markets were," said John Eddy, executive vice president of Coldwell Banker Commercial BLAIR WESTMAC. "In some ways, the pandemic strengthened the industrial market."

With families staying home—and adults working from home—internet shopping skyrocketed. Consumers spent \$861.12 billion online with U.S. retailers last year, up 44% from 2019, according to data from media and research firm Digital Commerce 360. The boost in sales drove demand for warehousing, distribution centers and other goods movement operations that utilize industrial space.

One area of concern, Eddy said, has been the ability for smaller industrial tenants to pay their rents—particularly those in fields not related to port activities. However, he said landlords and tenants have been working together, making deals for making up back rent.

Vacancy decreased from 1.8% in the first quarter last year to 1.7% during the same period this year, according to data from Lee & Associates. Year-over-year, average rent increased 2 cents to \$1.11 per square foot.

While millions of square feet of new, Class A industrial space has come on the market over the last few years, high demand has resulted in most of that space being filled—some even before it was completed. At Douglas Park, only two buildings remain vacant but negotiations are underway with potential tenants, according to a spokesman for Sares-Regis Group, which developed and manages the property.

"Having higher-class industrial product in town has definitely had a positive impact on the city of Long Beach," Eddy said, noting the recent influx of aerospace companies.

Sales transactions were down by nearly \$60 million during the first quarter compared to the same period last year, Lee & Associates reports. Average sales prices also decreased year-over-year from \$196.93 per square foot during the first quarter of 2020 to \$180 per square foot. However, the average sales price was up 12% from \$166.31 per square foot in the fourth quarter of last year.

"It's hard to say what will happen in the future—political moves, restrictions, that's a little bit uncertain," Eddy said. "But in the immediate future we're going to ... continue with the upward trend." ■



A man walks into the World Trade Center office building in Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



## Single-Family Market

(Continued from Page 1)

median sales price of Long Beach homes is over \$800,000, he added.

Condos, meanwhile, have seen demand fall slightly and median prices decreased 3% to \$450,000, according to Jones. The decline could be attributed to the shifting working habits of people brought on by the pandemic.

“This flight from urban to suburban—people have found their condo isn’t enough for them,” Jones said. “The condo market has a decent amount of inventory but [sellers] are not buying other condos, they are moving into suburban areas.”

Time on market—the period from when a property is listed to when it sells—in Long Beach was 21 days in March, a 31% decrease over the last 12 months, Jones said. A driving force behind the decrease is that most sellers are receiving multiple offers quickly. Jones noted that 63% of sellers statewide are receiving multiple offers, which has pushed the average for original list price to over 103%, meaning sellers are frequently getting over their asking price.

“Everything is selling over list,” Jones said. “Most agents are putting a definitive time on how long a property is shown ... and we’re still getting a large number of offers. We’ve seen 20-22 offers on a property.”

The lack of affordable housing continues to plague Long Beach and the state as a whole, Jones said, citing a Wall Street Journal and realtor.com survey that shows 40%

of Californians have considered moving out of state due to housing costs. And construction of new housing annually has consistently been tens of thousands of units short for years, Jones said, adding that NIMBYism has been a persistent roadblock for housing development.

“It will be interesting to see how Southern California weathers the decrease in net migration that is taking place,” said Stepp Commercial President Robert Stepp. “California ... has been pricing people out of the housing market for quite some time now and this only appears to be getting worse.”

Corporations moving out of the state has caused real estate investors to shift their focus away from Southern California to other areas such as Texas, Florida and Arizona, Stepp said. In the multifamily market, the buyer pool for properties has transitioned from syndicated investors seeking value-add buildings to private investors seeking turn-key assets for long-term holds, he added.

“We have never seen a buyer pool transition as it has over this past year,” Stepp said.

Property owners and tenants alike have faced severe challenges over the last year—from layoffs and furloughs to deferred rents—which persist today, Stepp said. While some tenants were able to transition to working from home, many others have had to rely on unemployment benefits and rental assistance programs.

Some owners have experienced a 10% reduction in rent coming in, while others have had reductions of 40-50% for months,



Time on market for single-family homes has plummeted and prices continue to climb, according to real estate experts. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Stepp said. Fortunately, the CARES Act has helped mitigate some of the economic impacts for landlords and tenants, he said, adding that recent reopenings will further stabilize the market.

Housing advocates have voiced concerns about mass evictions when the city’s eviction moratorium expires at the end of June, but Stepp said the majority of landlords would prefer to keep good tenants in place as opposed to trying to find replacements.

Appreciation for multifamily properties continues to trend upward but at a slower

rate than previous years, Stepp said. Asking rents have increased 1.5% over the past 12 months, despite vacancy increasing slightly to 5.2%.

Like the single-family housing market, Stepp said the multifamily market will likely experience a shift in expectations from tenants working from home.

“We expect to see higher demand for larger units,” Stepp said, “as well as more on-site amenities and conveniences, such as in-unit washer/dryers, dog washing stations, and fitness centers.” ■



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Project Homekey

(Continued from Page 1)  
where Sesson now lives, puts it simply: “Their lifespan is shorter because of how hard their life is.”

In Los Angeles County, 1,625 units have been created at 25 locations, according to the most recent numbers published by the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

In Long Beach, besides the Best Western, a former Holiday Inn and Motel 6 have been converted into housing for homeless individuals. At a total cost of \$49 million, the three city sites added approximately 280 units with a variety of supportive medical and social services.

At the moment, the Best Western is at 90% capacity. The county-owned Motel 6 is at 93% capacity and the Holiday Inn is at 68%. The latter site was previously used to quarantine people infected with coronavirus, thus making it slower to fill up, according to a county spokesperson.

The pandemic created a new sense of urgency and funding to rehouse those most at risk and drew attention to the already precarious condition of homeless people’s health.

Being placed in clean, safe housing, with three meals a day delivered to their door, has made an immediate difference for some of the formerly homeless clients who are now Project Homekey clients, Ahlstrom says.

“I can’t tell you how many people I’ve had come to me and say: I feel better than I’ve felt in a year or two years,” she says.



Katina Holliday, executive director at Holliday’s Helping Hands, hugs Undre Porter after he talked about his life journey of being homeless, Thursday, April 15, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

“That ability to just lay down and let your body rest is huge.”

A place to rest

Jerome Kincaid, 54, a fellow resident of Ms. Beverly’s at the hotel-turned-housing site owned by the city, uses a walker to steady himself, dragging his leg with visi-

ble discomfort with every step. The walker and the slow, painful progression of his steps betray Kincaid’s otherwise youthful appearance—his smooth face, his tall and lean frame.

Kincaid sustained the leg injury while incarcerated at Ironwood State Prison in Blythe, near the Arizona border. Since then, manual labor with a moving company and, later, the restrictive sleeping space in the cabin of his truck, have made the pain worse. To walk normally and possibly work again, Kincaid said, he’ll need a hip replacement.

After bouncing around a series of halfway houses in Los Angeles and Long Beach for several years since his release from prison, Kincaid got into an argument with a fellow resident at a transitional home in Los Angeles and left in June to live in his Dodge Ram pickup.

In July, he reached out to the Long Beach Multi-Service Center, which he had heard of years before, while living in transitional housing.

Located in West Long Beach, the cen-

ter for more than two decades has served as a first point of contact for people experiencing homelessness, helping them access housing, medical care and social services.

At first, Kincaid said the paperwork and sitting around waiting for his application to be processed—it all seemed overwhelming. But after two months of using the center’s facilities to shower and driving others there to access services, Kincaid began the application process himself.

It took several months for him to be moved into housing because he didn’t want to stay at a congregate shelter. A group of men, cooped up in a small space “can become volatile real quick,” he explains.

Just weeks after moving into the hotel, Kincaid says, the pain in his leg and hip has already eased. “I’m able to stretch out and take a hot shower,” he says. “The water relaxes the muscle and I can just lay on the bed and say: I don’t have to move anywhere today.”

And it’s not just his physical wellbeing that has benefitted from being indoors,

(Please Continue to Page 12)

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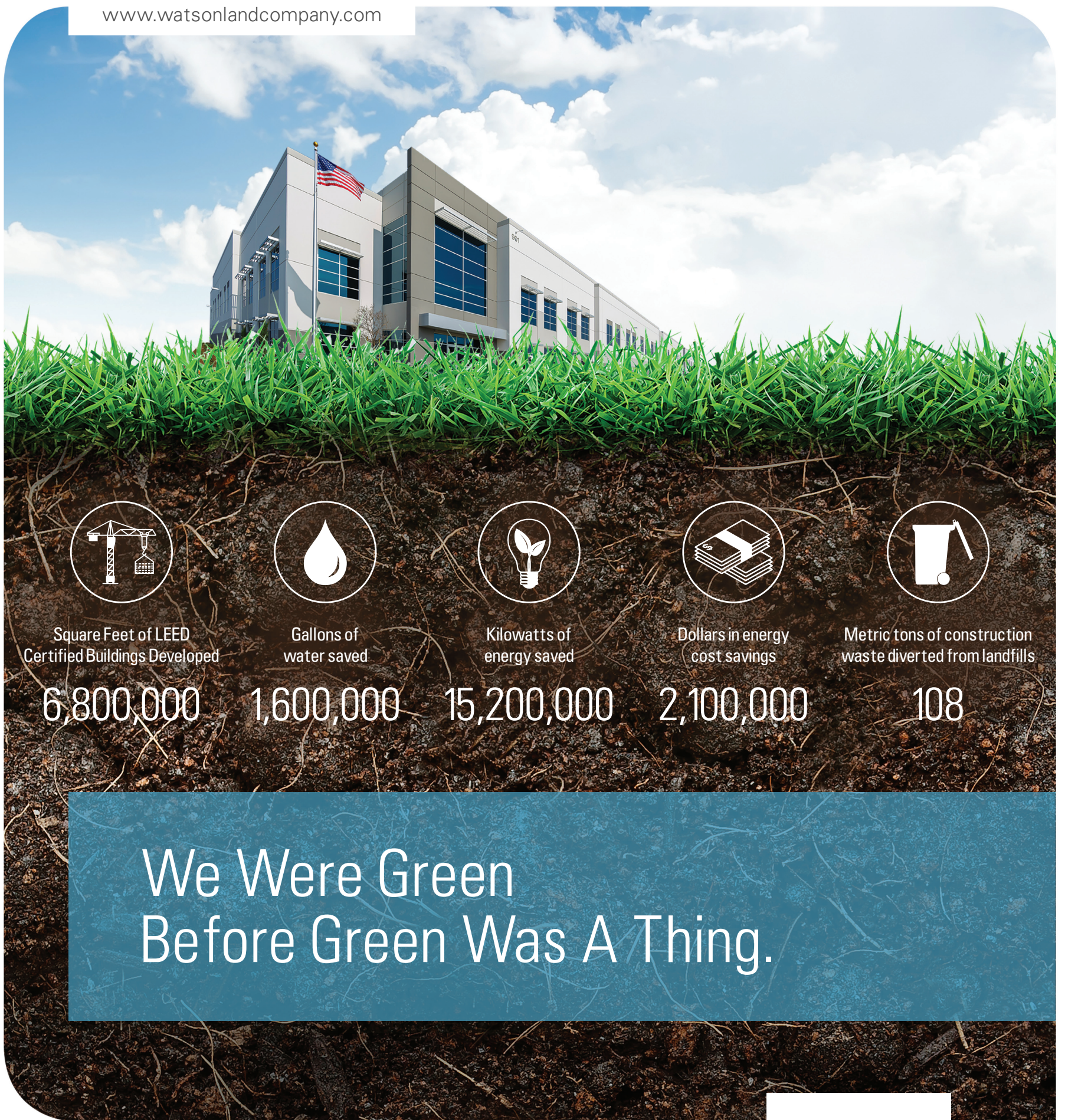
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(Continued from Page 10)

Kincaid says. When Kincaid speaks to his children or his brother over the phone, he says they can hear the changes. “My family feels that energy coming from me: you’re more at ease now,” he says. “I said: Yeah, I can think!”

Once his damaged hip has been replaced, Kincaid hopes to work again, buy a home, maybe get married again one day. He wants to work as a social worker, to help people, a tradition he says was passed down from his grandmother, who worked as a nurse at the LAC+USC Medical Center near Downtown Los Angeles.

### A place to call home

According to the city’s homeless counts, the number of people living on Long Beach streets increased from 771 to 1,031 between 2015 and 2020. The city did not conduct the January count this year, so it’s unclear how that number may have changed during the pandemic.

The most common reason those interviewed during last year’s count gave for being homeless was insufficient income, followed by family problems and job loss.

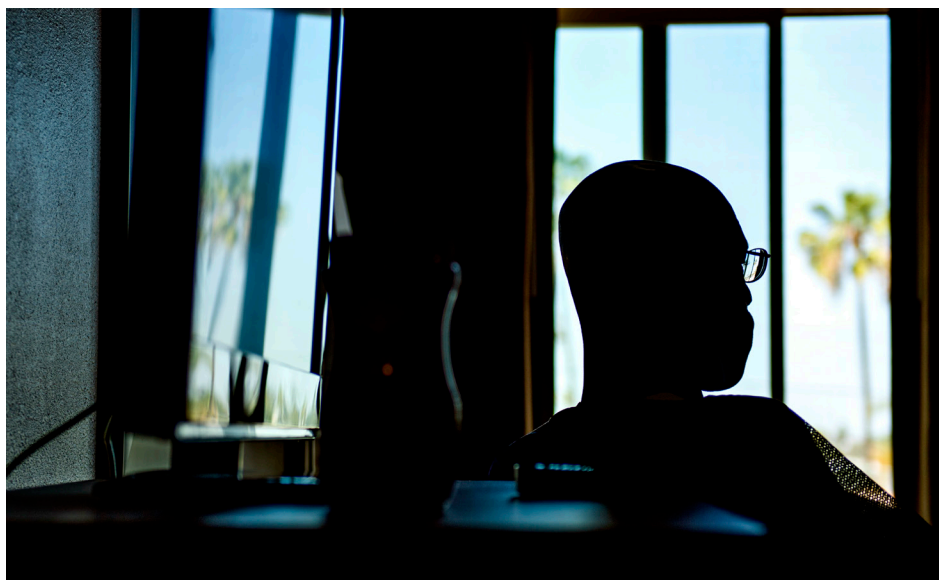
For Beverly Sesson, all three came together to conjure up a perfect storm that led to her homelessness in January.

After running her own licensed daycare at her North Long Beach home for nearly 15 years, Sesson was left with a bad back and pain in her legs and knees. Caring for more than 20 kids every day became impossible, she says. Even when the children were gone for the day, she couldn’t find rest.

“Because I lived there—it never ended,” she remembers. “The work never ended.”

Eventually, it had to. In 2013, Sesson closed down the daycare center. After that, paying the mortgage on her home became increasingly difficult. For years, she held on, sustaining herself by renting rooms and working as a caretaker on the side.

But it wasn’t enough. In 2019, Sesson lost her home. She briefly moved in with her sister, but the two couldn’t get along. After renting a room from a woman she met at the thrift store, with whom she lived for the majority of 2020, she decided she couldn’t stay there either—too many vis-



Jerome Kincaid is silhouetted against the only window in his Project Homekey room in Long Beach, Monday, April 5, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

itors, too much chaos. So she moved into her car.

Trying to stay warm through the cold winter nights in her car, using public restrooms to stay clean, the experience still leaves her shaken.

“It was horrible,” Sesson says. “When you leave a place and get ready to go home, your home is wherever you decide to park.” She asked for help from some friends, but hid her situation from most, she says. “I was ashamed.”

At the end of January, Sesson came to the Long Beach Multi-Service Center for help. In February, she received a voucher from the city that allowed her to stay at the Coast Motel on Pacific Coast Highway until she was able to move into the newly-opened Project Homekey site in mid-March.

Since then, she has made the room—furnished with a queen-sized bed, a table with two chairs, a TV set and a small fridge—her own.

Planters in different sizes sit atop every surface, the entryway is adorned with wall decorations she found on a trip to the thrift store, a journey she makes sure to find time for every week. She even decorated the hotel lobby with lilies, just in time for Easter last month.

### A permanent solution?

Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia says

the city’s three Homekey sites represent an important step forward in the fight against homelessness. Funds permitting, he says, he’d like to see more of them.

“It’s been one of the best things that the state, in partnership with our county partners and the city, has done,” Garcia says.

If approved as proposed, the state budget for the upcoming fiscal year would provide an additional \$750 million to support the creation of more Homekey sites. “We would love to do more and we’re currently looking at funding,” the mayor said.

Los Angeles County is planning to turn its two Long Beach Homekey sites into permanent housing by the end of 2022, and the city is currently exploring options to do the same in the upcoming years.

Once turned into permanent housing, residents would pay a portion of the rent and cook their own meals inside the units, while still receiving some supportive services onsite.

“With Project Homekey, the County has seized an opportunity to meet both the immediate and long-term needs of the most vulnerable members of our community, the vast majority of whom are medically vulnerable and desperately in need of the safety offered by non-congregate shelter in the midst of the pandemic,” Homeless Initiative Interim Director Cheri Todoroff said in an email.

The conversion of these sites into permanent supportive housing in 2022 will provide stable housing for hundreds of people, Todoroff said, adding that she was grateful for the support and resources provided by state and federal sources.

Securing funding for remodeling and continued services at the former Best Western will be a key step in this process, says Long Beach Homeless Services Officer Paul Duncan.

“It should be pretty quick and cost-effective, the transition, but it’ll still be a good chunk of money,” he said. “Our goal is still to work toward permanent housing outside of this site in the meantime.” Residents who are still at the hotel-turned-Homekey site by the time units are remodeled would take priority for permanent placement onsite, Duncan noted.

Beverly Sesson said she would like to stay, if possible. “I feel comfortable here,” she says. “I really don’t like the thought of leaving.” ■



Anna Isabel Lopez is grateful for her Project Homekey room after being homeless, Thursday, April 15, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.





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**FOR LEASE**

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9,000 SF Office Condominium



## Former Belmont Heights home of the ‘Flying Bixbys’ is on the market for \$4 million

■ By **TIM GROBATY**  
Columnist

A historic Long Beach property once owned by a married couple of famed aviators, Robert and Dianna Bixby—no relation to the pioneering Bixbys of Long Beach—has just hit the market with an asking price of \$3,999,999. Throw in another buck to make the paperwork easier.

Dianna Cyrus met her second and last husband Robert Bixby up in the clouds, in the cockpit of a twin-propeller DC-3 in 1948.

It was, realistically, the only logical place for the couple to meet. Both were accomplished aviators with thousands of miles already logged. They were paired up to fly cargo in the DC-3 by an air freight company, and six months later they were married. The new Dianna Bixby—whose first husband, a pilot as well, died on a mission in the Battle of the Bulge in World War II—and her husband Bob spent their honeymoon aloft, taking a trip flying around the world in a converted British Mosquito bomber.

In 1950, the couple made a run at a round-the-world speed record, but the quest was thwarted by engine trouble, forcing the plane to set down in Calcutta, India for repairs.

They didn’t set any records, but they continued their global flight, and Dianna, who also competed in speed races and aviation exhibitions, quickly became one of America’s most notable aviatrixes, with her name often and inevitably associated with that of her idol, Amelia Earhart.

In 1949 and 1950, Dianna flew the New-ark-to-Boston route for Flying Tiger Air Freight as a captain. At the time, she was the only woman to fly as captain for a commercial airline.

In 1953, Bob and Dianna had opened their business Bixby Airborne Products at Long Beach Airport and were flying produce and fish to Southern California from Las Cruces, Baja California. And they had moved into a large and beautiful home built in 1930 on a



This nine-bedroom 1930s built home in Long Beach is listed at \$3,999,999. Monday, March 29, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

third of an acre at the corner of Second Street and Bennett Avenue in the heart of Belmont Heights.

It’s a neighborhood graced by impressive homes in a variety of architectural styles, including Craftsman, Spanish Colonial Revival Tudor, and a smattering of Mediterranean influence, which can be found in the old Bixby place today.

The home, at 4235 E. Second St. has had just two owners in the past 60 years. The current occupants, who have put the house up for sale are Dr. Craig Brown and his wife Sue who raised five children in the nine-bedroom, seven-bath house, and now that the youngest is graduating from high school, the couple is relocating to a residence on the Palos Verdes

Peninsula.

Listed by Spencer Snyder, the residence is a truly old-school elegant home, with virtually every room, from the bedrooms to the upstairs and downstairs studies, holding at least one impressive piece of antique furniture shipped over from Europe: elaborately carved armoires, gothic cabinets, bookcases, display cases—each, even those tucked away in a guest room, could be the centerpiece of most homes.

Similarly, almost every one of the home’s non-master bedrooms is more lavishly appointed than most houses’ master bedrooms. The collection of antiques borders on staggering. The Browns hope to sell the furniture to the home’s next owner, which would have to add considerably to the home’s current asking price.

The property includes a guest house in the back that could serve as income property. It’s about 900 square feet and includes a kitchen, bedroom, bath and living room.

Another rarity in the house is a full, finished basement which currently holds a pool table and chairs as well as a bathroom and the home’s gravity heating system, which is original to the house.

The backyard features a large slate-bottomed saltwater pool and a koi pond.

The home’s seven bathrooms are mostly all original save for upgraded fixtures; most have the Art Deco-style tile work lending a bright and sunny atmosphere compared with the dark and masculine stone and granite walls and floors that you’ll find in many modern homes.

The woodwork in the house is original and in great condition after the Browns had its 107 solid-mahogany doors and 80 mahogany-trimmed windows all stripped and refinished. Also kept in great condition are the original rare tiger’s eye oak floors.

The house has three upper-floor balconies; two in the back of the house overlooking the grounds and the front one, added by Brown, off the master bedroom, giving pan-

oramic views down the coast, looking out over Belmont Shore.

“When you’re a business owner, you do a lot of pacing,” said Brown. “This is where I do my pacing.”

He said he has mixed feelings about selling the house. “There are a lot of memories in this house. I raised a family here,” he said.

As did Dianna and Robert Bixby, however briefly. The couple’s family included a daughter, Lillian, and three years later, a son, Robert.

Lillian was 5 and Robert 2 on Jan. 2, 1955, when Dianna, 32, and Bob, 41, were flying in separate planes out of Long Beach Airport on a routine flight down to La Paz on the Baja California peninsula to pick up produce.

Well down the peninsula, near their destination, Dianna radioed Bob to say she was running out of gas and was going to attempt to find a place to land. Bob was about an hour behind her and he advised her to locate a field to set down, before he lost radio contact with his wife.

He spent the balance of the day flying over her last known location, but could find nothing and returned to Long Beach, where he set off once again in the morning to continue the search.

A Navy diver, flown in on a Coast Guard plane to assist in the search, brought up Dianna’s body from the converted A-20 Havoc bomber submerged in the rocky waters of the Gulf of California, about 150 yards off the southern tip of Lower Baja.

Her lifeless body had been found still strapped in the pilot’s seat.

Her tragic death was reported on the front page of newspapers across the country.

Dianna Bixby was survived by her husband and their two children, Lillian, 5, and Bob, 2. She was buried in the family cemetery at her parents’ ranch in Santa Paula, where she was born.

Robert died on Oct. 30, 1993 in Sanford, Florida. His obituary in the Orlando Sentinel noted, simply, “Mr. Bixby was a pilot.” ■



A 25-year-old Dianna Cyrus, before she married Robert Bixby, at the controls of her converted A-26 bomber. Courtesy photo.



# A couple of Kirtland Cutter's Country Club classics hit the market at \$3M-plus each

■ By **TIM GROBATY**  
Columnist

Casa el Sueño (“The Dream House”), as a plaque out front declares it, is at the northern end of Los Cerritos’ Pacific Avenue before the street T-bones into Country Club Drive. Pacific is a wide and quiet avenue at this point, lined by super-tall palms and eucalyptus trees and elegant estates. The money in this neighborhood is old money, passed down from 1930s oil families, doctors, bankers and senior law partners.

Casa el Sueño, at 4282 Pacific Ave., was built by famed Pacific Northwest architect Kirtland Cutter, who designed scores of buildings and residents in the Spokane area as well as a number of homes in Palos Verdes and Long Beach, in the Bluff Park and Los Cerritos neighborhoods, including the John Clock House at 525 Devon Place, and the Thomas Rowan House on Linden Avenue, which was once owned by Gemini/Apollo/Skylab astronaut and McDonnell Douglas vice president Pete Conrad.

Cutter built the home on Pacific for Donald P. Condit, the son of Fillmore Condit, a wealthy businessman, former mayor of Long Beach and founder of Community Hospital.

If your dreams run along the lines of an Andalusian villa, or perhaps a Tuscan country estate, you’ll be happy in this home, listed by Robert Martin, of Compass, for \$3.295 million.

Cutter’s timeless architecture remains intact after all these years and much of the interior of the home has original details. Most of the hardwood plank flooring is original, says Martin, as are the solid mahogany doors and other wood trimming.

“It was originally a seven-bedroom home, but two of the rooms were converted into a family room,” he said. So now it’s a five-bedroom, five-bath house in 4,462 square feet on a half-acre lot.

The reception courtyard and gardens lead to an open-beam foyer, and the formal dining room takes you to a private fireside terrace.

There’s a lower-level guest bath and a guest room with its bath. A gourmet kitchen with top-dollar appliances and custom cabinetry opens to the family room.



Casa el Sueño, a Kirtland Cutter-designed circa-1930’s home on Pacific Avenue in Los Cerritos, Wednesday, April 7, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

On the upper level, one bedroom features an elevated library, and two bedrooms open to balconies overlooking the grounds. The hall leads to a coffee/beverage lounge, and one of the home’s two laundry areas. The master suite has a private bathroom, a dressing room, two closets and the bedroom chamber with views of the golf course. The rear yard features a fountain koi pond, pool, patio, a wet bar, cabanas and a vegetable garden.

Further, the home comes with a pedigree. One of its earliest owners was a man whose name isn’t well known these days, but in his prime, which would’ve been in the late 19th century. Elon Carlton Denio was regarded as “Mr. Long Beach,” a title that was devoid of hyperbole. Today, the title is handed out like chewing gum, but Denio was undeniably deserving of it.

He was the city’s first attorney and its first city attorney. He was elected to the City Council in 1891, was chairman of the board of trustees (the equivalent of mayor) and a charter member of Virginia Country Club. (The law firm he founded in 1891, is still in operation as Taubman, Simpson, Young & Sulentor, at 1 World Trade Center.)

As an attorney and city leader, Denio negotiated for Long Beach’s first City Hall, drafted plans for its first municipal pier and its first municipal auditorium, directed

the first paving of the city’s sidewalks and streets and issued the first electric, water and telephone franchises.

Denio died at his home on Pacific on July 27, 1952, at the age of 87. At his funeral, Rev. William Harrison Meyers, pastor of the First Methodist Church, said, “He belonged to a generation of rugged individualistic Americans who built cities and pioneered the west.”

## Another Cutter next door

Turn the corner at Pacific Avenue and Country Club Drive, and you’ll find another Kirtland Cutter classic home for sale at 4286 Country Club Drive —apparently, there’s never been a better time to buy a Cutter casa.

This one’s arguably fancier and inarguably larger and more expensive than its Cutter cousin on Pacific.

Listed by Spencer Snyder at \$3.6 million, the spacious six-bed, five-bath 6,600-square-foot villa stands on a tad more than a half acre of land that’s beautifully and companionably landscaped, divided into separate yards, enough to hold a couple of kids’ sports fields with plenty left over for a saltwater swimming pool and a secret garden with a fountain and a couple of chairs to escape the outside world for an hour or three. The home was built as an early-California style residence in 1929 at a cost of about \$30,000—that’s a bit more than \$400,000 in today’s money, which shows that investing in real estate is more

lucrative than burying your money in your yard in coffee cans.

An early longtime resident of the house was Leland Edwards, who lived there with his wife Katharine from the 1930s through his death in 1963. Edwards achieved fame, and a little pocket money, by drilling, with his partner C.C. Rogers, the second oil well in Signal Hill before developing the early Seal Beach oil field.

The current owners are Jim and Renetta Haas, who raised two children in the home, “along with all their friends,” laughed Jim. “It’s really an entertaining house; we’ve had many, many parties here, and it was always filled with my children’s friends. A house is just a bunch of sticks until you get a family and a bunch of kids running around filling it up and enjoying it.”

The house has been well cared for, with many original details still surviving, although the kitchen has gone space-age with above-top-of-the-line appliances, including several Viking ovens, there’s one in the butler’s pantry, too, not that the Haases employ a butler. In older times, wealthy homeowners had live-in help, and this house has bedrooms that at one time were used by maids, cooks, drivers, a butler and even a wet nurse.

For the most part, the home is largely how Cutter designed it. “We’ve tried hard not to change the house,” said Haas. And it only takes a bit of imagination (as long as you stay out of the kitchen) to sense what it must have been like living there nearly a century ago.

With an eye toward entertaining, Haas said, “I wanted to create a lot of conversation areas.” There is the living room/music room, the secret garden, little pods of chairs, lounges and benches in various spots outdoors, all in an exceedingly serene setting.

The house, like many of Cutter’s homes, has a basement. This one’s semi-finished with room for some gym equipment and floor-to-ceiling racks holding some 900 bottles of wine.

Soon, Jim and Renetta Haas will move into a new home in Rancho Santa Fe in San Diego County. Will he miss this place? He takes a moment to think, reflecting on his children and their friends and the near constant activity that’s prevented the home from becoming just a bunch of sticks.

“I’m going to miss what we did here,” he said. ■



A beautiful circa-1930s Kirtland Cutter home at 4286 Country Club Drive is listed for \$3.6 million. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



Hundreds of bottles of wine line the walls of the basement at this circa-1930’s home on Country Club Drive in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



# The home—or the office—is where the heart is



The Insurance Exchange Building in Downtown Long Beach, which opened in 1925 at 207 E. Broadway. Photo by Thomas R Cordova.

■ By **TIM GROBATY**  
Columnist

The office used to symbolize a drab, Drabble-esque existence, in which you sat in an austere cubicle with drawings your kids made when they were little, and did some sort of brain-dissolving drudge work.

In many cases, the office is still like that, because there'll always be a need for office workers to deal with scraps of tin, or whatever other sort of widgetry still requires data entry and the stapling of invoice forms to work their way into the pipeline.

During much of the COVID era, corporate bosses were somewhat obliged to send their office workers home for great stretches of time, and in much of that time things went rather swimmingly for companies. Turned out that oftentimes people working in sweatpants and fuzzy slippers were at least as productive, if not more so, than when they were told to dress professionally before being stuffed into cubicles where no one could see them.

With the coronavirus restrictions roll-

ing back to something resembling normalcy, some workers are happy to get out of their families' hair and head back to the office. Others, perhaps, are less enthusiastic.

One of the determining factors regarding how workers feel about returning to the office, is, in fact, the office itself.

A colorless (unless you consider greige a color), ugly, cramped, soul-crushing environment may be met with the same despondency as a dog being sent back to the kennel. OK, not that sad; now I'm depressing myself. But certainly something south of happy.

On the other hand, a pleasant—dare we say fun?—workplace can be a nice change and a welcome return to what you might generously consider civilization.

Which brings us to this office in Long Beach's historic Insurance Exchange Building.

Trial attorney John S. Hinman recently purchased the entire second floor of the eight-story building at 205 E. Broadway, at The Promenade.

The beautiful 1925 Beaux Arts building was built by Lorne and Way Mid-



The inviting grand centerpiece of the Hinman Law Group office in Downtown Long Beach, Friday, April 9, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

dough, who put their Middoughs' Boys' and Men's Shops on the first floor and rented out the building's upper floor. The city's first municipal court rented the third, fifth and sixth floors from 1925 through 1930.

The Insurance Exchange (as it would become known in 1931 when the clothing store closed and the court moved to the Jergins Trust building and the space became occupied mostly by insurance companies) popped up during an incredibly busy time for construction in and around Downtown Long Beach.

In just five years, between 1924 and 1929, some of the city's finest and most notable buildings sprung up: Farmers & Merchants and Security Pacific banks, the Jergins Trust, the Villa Riviera, the Breakers, the Cooper Arms, the Kress Department Store and the Pacific Coast and Ebell clubs.

The office that will be home to John S. Hinman's team was designed by an engineering firm that bought the second floor space in May 2019.

"And then COVID hit and they all went home," said Sage Group's Juan Huizar, who, with Caleb Baldwin, represented the seller. Both are with Sage Real Estate. Realtor John Lindberg, of Re/max Real Estate Specialists represented Hinman in the sale.

Thousands of other workers in the Long Beach area, too, went home, and only recently have some of them come trickling back, though not in numbers large enough to refill all the office space they abandoned during the pandemic.

All of the Realtors involved in the sale acknowledge that office space in general may never return to pre-COVID numbers, but, they agree, swankier spaces will thrive.

"Top shelf offices are doing well," said Baldwin. "It's the lower-end spaces that are taking a hit."

The Insurance Exchange office of John H. Hinman is certainly top-shelf. It's an open space with the sort of exposed-brick-and-steel-earthquake-reinforcement beams look that's associated with lofts, and it's got the serious appearance of a law office, perhaps more so than an engineering workspace. Dark, polished wood abounds on the trim and floors,

along with original masonry while large windows soften the seriousness of the woodwork.

The space is dominated by a centrally placed coffee station/bar with leather-upholstered stools. It gives the place an upper-class coffee house vibe and lets you know that the tenants take their caffeine seriously.

The space is broken into separate offices and meeting rooms, some of which Hinman may sublease until his staff returns in enough numbers to fill the 2,730 square-foot space.

Oddly, Hinman won't enjoy the new digs as much as his associates will. He and his wife and three small children live in Bend, Oregon, and he works via Zoom most of the time, traveling to Long Beach a couple of times a month for trials and to check in with his co-workers.

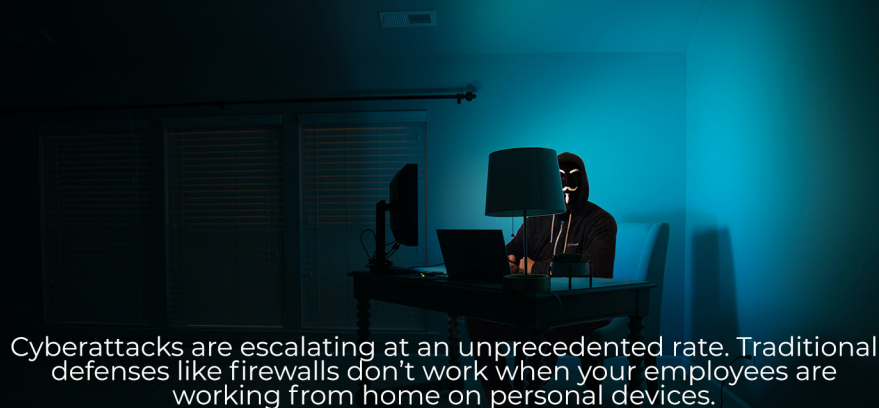
Still, he looks forward to visiting his new office. "It's such a cool location," he said. "I had my eye on it when it sold before, but I couldn't rationalize it at the time. I had a big office, about 3,300 square feet in the Circle Business Center, then the pandemic came and everyone went home except for one person, so I downsized to a tiny, 300 square-foot office on Naples Plaza."

Now, Hinman anticipates a bit of a rebound in terms of people coming to the office. Especially a nice one.

Alan L. Burks, president and director of architecture at Long Beach-based Environ Architecture, whose work includes designing work spaces, says that the enthusiasm workers have regarding a return to the office "depends on each person's situation. If they have an hour or two commute every day, they might prefer working remotely, whereas I live and work in Long Beach and only have a short drive to the office."

But the office itself should be pleasant. "Office design is directly related to productivity," he says. "A good office environment is very, very important. But it may not be important five days a week. And working remotely doesn't mean you have to stay home. You could go to a work-sharing space or a coffee shop with WiFi." ■

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## Reality TV's hotel savior, Anthony Melchiorri, is bringing his expertise to Long Beach's Breakers Hotel

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Reporter

For 110 episodes spanning eight seasons from 2012 to 2016, Anthony Melchiorri and his team traveled the country giving struggling non-chain hotels extensive makeovers on Travel Channel's "Hotel Impossible." Now, Melchiorri has partnered with developer Pacific6 to reinvigorate the historic Breakers Hotel in Downtown Long Beach.

"The Breakers Hotel has a character and soul that cannot be replaced, and we are working together to design an experience and respite that is one of a kind in Long Beach," Anthony Melchiorri said in a statement.

Outside his show, which spawned two spin-off series, Melchiorri's hospitality experience is extensive. Early in his career, he worked at New York City's historic Algonquin and Lucerne as well as the iconic Plaza Hotel, where Kevin McCallister, played by Macaulay Culkin, can be seen outsmarting a hotel manager played by Tim Curry in the 1992 film "Home Alone 2: Lost in New York."

Melchiorri also spearheaded the complete turnaround of Florida's Nickelodeon Resort, developed a \$150 million hotel in Times Square and has worked on numerous boutique hotels across the country.

John Molina, founder partner of Pacific6, said in a statement Long Beach has always been his home and that reopening the Breakers is his gift to the city he loves.

"Every great city needs a crown jewel hotel, and for Long Beach, that is the Breakers," Molina said in a statement. "My father used to say, 'If you are going to do something, do it right.' I can't imagine doing the Breakers right without Anthony and his team coming on board. You need to have the best team, if you are going to have the best hotel. And there is nobody better."

Originally built in 1926, the 15-story tall Long Beach landmark ceased hospitality operations over 30 years ago when it was converted to senior housing in 1990. Over the years, the facility fell into a state of disrepair and in 2015 was shut down when state authorities revoked its license.

The hotel is slated to reopen in 2023 with 185 guest rooms and suites with numerous amenities—some new and some old—for guests and the general public. The Breakers will tap into Long Beach's history of jazz with The Six, an intimate jazz club and whiskey bar.

A new pool is being added to the hotel's third-floor terrace, which overlooks the fountains of the Performing Arts Center. The Breakers will also be home to the city's only luxury hotel spa, which will feature nine high-end treatment rooms and a two-level fitness center.

The building's public Sky Room restaurant and rooftop bar El Cielo continued operating for a few years after the 2015 closure until renovations of the building by Pacific6 began in 2018. Both spaces will be reimag-



Construction continues on Long Beach's historic Breakers Hotel, which is slated to reopen in 2023. Friday, April 23, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

ined and reopened with the hotel. The Sky Room's menu is being overhauled by Michelin Star Chef Joe Isidori, who also will oversee the hotel's other dining options.

Construction is well underway on the \$150 million renovation of the hotel, with Melchiorri's company, Argeo Hospitality, and Pacific6 working to preserve the building's unique history. Designated a historical landmark in 1988, many of the building's original elements are going to be restored to their former elegance, including the lobby's opulent columns and ornate plaster ceilings.

"We're taking the history of this iconic location, giving it a revamp worthy of the 21st century, and matching it with a level of service and comfort that can only be found in the most luxurious of destinations," Melchiorri said. "The end goal is to leave an indelible impression on everyone who walks through the door. Each guest will feel different when they leave."

*Editor's note: John Molina of Pacific6 is the primary investor in the parent company that owns the Long Beach Business Journal and the Long Beach Post.* ■

## The once-doomed Petroleum Club is back and slowly re-opening

■ By **TIM GROBATY**  
Columnist

Even if you missed the Long Beach Petroleum Club's glory days of the 1960s and on into the '70s, you can still sense the history of the place as you walk through it a couple of decades into the 21st Century: Old money. Ladies in gowns and furs. Strains of swing music wafting from the ballroom. The tinkling of highballs from the circular bar in the Linden Lounge. The smell of cigar smoke from the Red Room mixing with the scent of chlorine drifting indoors from the mammoth patio pool.

The club, which opened in Bixby Knolls at 3636 Linden Ave. in 1954, was teetering on extinction and, in fact, closed for good in March 2019 when it was purchased by Realtors Bill Larson and Steve Hyde, ostensibly for a condominium project.

But now, against all odds and expectations, the Petroleum Club is bouncing back and in a big way, with all of its original trappings extant, to be used at first for meetings and special events. And soon, for the public to enjoy lunches in the Red Room and cocktails in the Linden Lounge, with pool memberships a bit further in the future.

And what about the condo project, which was met with disappointment and anger from fans of the historic club that was built in chiefly for oilmen and their families?

Turned out that project was a nonstarter.

"The city said no to condos," said op-

erating partner Dan D'Sa, who is basically the boss of the place, running all the food and beverages as well as managing all the events. "They put that idea to bed pretty quick."

With no other good option, the owners retreated to a nostalgic-laced future for the club, and if you have memories of its old days, you'll feel at home in the thoroughly freshened up building.

"We're open now to start having events, with restrictions," said D'Sa, referring to COVID-19 restrictions.

"It's up to the state and the city as to when we can come all the way back," he said. "Right now, we're limited to 33% ca-

capacity, no dancing, no buffets."

Still, D'Sa, who is also vice president of The Grand events center, said, "we've been booking some corporate holiday events, meetings and some other parties."

The rooms at the club are rented out separately, with the big ballroom, with a capacity of about 780 people, going for \$1,500 to \$2,000, the smaller Terrace Room for \$1,000 to \$1,500 and the Red Room and/or Linden Lounge, "I'm not 100% sure yet, they kind of go together," said D'Sa.

The swimming pool and its patio is what the public is most concerned about, "and also the most expensive," he said. "I want the pool area to look really nice, so

we've gotta demo the deck and everything around the pool and get new furniture and really make it like a country club out here."

Which means no swimming this summer while the work is being done. D'Sa anticipates selling pool memberships in the summer of 2022. Those memberships will likely cost about \$1,500, with a food and beverage minimum, per season, which will run from June to the end of August with the pool open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, when a Cabo-style Mexican grill will be set up poolside.

For the more immediate future, D'Sa says the Red Room will be open for lunch, by reservation, on Thursdays with a limited prime rib menu. And soon, the public will be able to drop by for a cocktail or a beer Monday through Thursday. "We're still in the process of getting all the licenses in order, and we're almost done," said D'Sa. "COVID has really slowed the process down."

He says perhaps in six months, the thawing of restrictions should allow the club to host full-on weddings and receptions, perhaps with a face-mask requirement.

As for food, D'Sa said he's looking for some throwback items, "but Long Beach throwback. Maybe the salad recipe from the Northwoods Inn or the warm salad that Kelly's of Naples used to serve."

To book an event or to make a reservation for the Thursday prime rib lunch, call the club at 562-427-7966. ■



The famed Red Room at the newly reopened Long Beach Petroleum Club, Tuesday, April 20, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



## The 1890 Bixby home on La Linda: A lot of history in a lot of house for \$3.2 million

■ By **TIM GROBATY**  
Columnist

Let's try this again. Once again on the market, listed, again, at about \$3.2 million, is the historic George Hathaway Bixby Ranch House at 11 La Linda Drive in Los Cerritos.

It's beyond me why no one has snapped this place up. It's listed this time by Spencer Snyder and Bobby Bowden of Nationwide Executives. I first wrote about it in October 2018, when it had already been on the market for four months, and it remained on the market for a few more months, with not so much as a nibble, according to its owner of about 25 years, Duane Rose.

OK, sure, there are a few reasons why no one's "snapped it up." The price tag, while the world is neck deep in billionaires, and millionaires are as common as kittens, may be off-putting to some buyers. And imagining the upkeep of the eight-bedroom, seven-bath and God-knows-how-many-other-miscellaneous-rooms home, to say nothing of the 30,492-square-foot lot upon which this mansion sits, makes me want to take a long nap.

But that's a problem for the attendants, who would be a built-in expense for whoever buys the ranch house. There's plenty of room for them and the house, at almost 7,000 square feet, is so large, with so many rooms and nooks, studies and libraries, a banquet-ready dining room and a dedicated music room—there's a good chance you'll never even see the help, or anyone else living in the house. On a recent visit, I was forever losing track of our photographer and Duane Rose, who pointed out, whenever we happened to stumble upon him, various points of interest in the home.

And the house is a story in itself. It's quite possibly the most historic home in the city, standing comfortably alongside, in status if not location, the Greene and Greene Adelaide Tichenor residence on Ocean Boulevard, or the Bembridge House in Drake Park.

Jotham Bixby, owner of Rancho Los Cerritos and generally considered to be the father of Long Beach, gave his son George the 10-acre parcel on which to build his family home. And the house built in 1890 by George and his wife Amelia, who had enough children and workers to fill the place with their four boys and three girls and sev-



Through the front gates of this private community is the Bixby Ranch House, built in 1890 in Long Beach. Tuesday, April 20, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

en servants, is essentially the home that's for sale now, with a few upgrades over the years—electricity, for instance—but also more modern touches such as an upgraded kitchen and forced-air HVAC.

When the house was built it was the sole structure in the area, which was still a working rancho and the home served as a sort of ranch headquarters. It might've looked like Andrew Wyeth's Christina's World painting, rising above the fields of the rancho.

While the Dutch Colonial residence is huge and, perhaps, imposing, it is comfortable inside, with window seats in virtually every room, and six fireplaces scattered about, including one that's bracketed by massive Bernini-style Baroque spiral wood columns. Original leaded-glass windows and bookcases, mellowed oak flooring, exposed redwood beam ceilings, imported English oak paneling, intricately carved concealed cabinetry, bay and dormer alcoves in the upstairs bedrooms are just a few of the features.

The grounds are expansive with tow-

ering eucalyptus and plenty of spots large enough for a pool or three. The most striking area outdoors is a pair of reflecting ponds that were formerly lily ponds.

The Bixby family lived in the home until George's death in 1920, when Tulsa oilman Thomas Gilcrease purchased the house and its surrounding acreage.

Thomas Gilcrease was, in fact, a more notable figure than George Bixby, at least outside of Long Beach. One-quarter Creek Indian, he was born in 1890 in Robeline, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, but his family, as a part of the American Indian resettlement program, was moved from Louisiana to the Tulsa suburban town of—get this: Bixby, Oklahoma.

Because of Gilcrease's Creek heritage, he received 160 acres of land near Tulsa and, when oil was struck in 1905 in the area, it made Gilcrease a multi-millionaire by the time he was 20.

In 1920, Gilcrease and his wife Belle and their two sons moved to Long Beach and bought the Bixby House and settled in to make more money not only from the newly producing Signal Hill oil field, but also in real estate as Gilcrease subdivided the 10 acres of ranch land around his house into 45 parcels which would eventually include the La Linda neighborhood.

He didn't hang around to watch the neighborhood grow, though. His heart was in Tulsa, perhaps in more ways than one.

Gilcrease divorced his wife Belle in 1926 and moved back to Oklahoma where he married again, this time to a 20-year-old former Miss America named Norma Smallwood. That marriage ended in a spectacular and well-publicized divorce in 1934.

Meanwhile, ex-wife Belle stayed in the house until 1929, after which the house stood vacant for years until it was purchased by the Kameroff family in the 1940s.

In 1989, Drs. Sam Piccone and Nancy

Good bought the Bixby Ranch House for \$800,000 and set about restoring the historic mansion to its original glory, with noted preservationist/builder Peter Devereaux, who gave the place a thorough overhaul that included raising the home's crumbling foundation and restoring almost all the rooms.

Twenty-five years ago, Duane Rose became the fifth and current owner of the home on La Linda. He has been a devoted and generous steward of the property, winning an award from the preservation group Long Beach Heritage for restoring the reflection ponds on the property, and he has regularly allowed dozens of civic and charitable organizations, including the Cancer League, Musical Theatre West, St. Mary Medical Center, the California State Floral Association and many others, to use the home for parties, social events, tours and fundraisers.

When I told him he must rattle around living alone in the mammoth mansion, he said that he's rarely alone, thanks to his inviting so many people into the home, and not just charitable and civic groups, but also neighbors and friends.

He currently lives in a home he designed and had built next door about three years ago, and he also owns a third house in the 35-home La Linda neighborhood that's been a gated community since 1979.

As for the Bixby House's future, Rose said, "I just want it to be a good home that's appreciated by good people. Whoever buys it can make changes, but I'd hope they'll love it for its history and for what it is."

Thomas Gilcrease died in May 1962. During his lifetime he spent millions of dollars amassing art and artifacts from the American West, all of which is contained in Tulsa's Gilcrease Museum, considered to be among the world's largest and most comprehensive collections of fine art, artifacts, and archives dealing with the American West. ■



The dining room at Bixby Ranch House, Tuesday, April 20, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



# Airbnb, Long Beach work together to shut down unregistered short-term rentals

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Reporter

The deadline for submitting an application has passed but hundreds of unregistered short-term rental units continue to operate in Long Beach. Now, the city has teamed up with Airbnb to enforce compliance.

Over the last several months, Airbnb has worked with city officials to share information with hosts about the new rules, regulations and deadlines as part of the city's short-term rental ordinance. Despite that effort, many hosts remain non-compliant.

There are around 900 short-term rentals in Long Beach, according to city data. Scott Baldwin, an administrative analyst with Long Beach Code Enforcement, said a third-party vendor tracks short-term rental hosting platforms such as Airbnb and Vrbo and provides data to the city.

Since the application process to register with the city opened in October, Baldwin said the city has received 260 applications as of April 22—the deadline to submit before enforcement began. Of those applications, 190 had been approved and 11 had been denied. The most common reason an application has been denied is if the unit in question is not legally permitted through the Building and Safety Bureau, Baldwin said.

Originally passed in June of last year and expanded in December, the city's ordinance requires all short-term rentals to be registered through the city. Using Airbnb's City Portal tool, officials can better understand users' profiles and ensure listings are in compliance with the local ordinance, according to the announcement.

"Airbnb is committed to being a good partner to the [city], that includes



Hundreds of unregistered short-term rentals are listed on hosting platforms such as Airbnb. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

doing our part to promote and support compliance of the recently adopted short-term rentals rules," John Choi, public policy manager for Airbnb said in a statement. "The City Portal tool will help the City of Long Beach enforce [its] short-term rules and help protect short-term rentals as an economic lifeline for residents and the local economy as the city ushers the safe return of travel."

About one-third of short-term rental units in Long Beach are in the coastal zone, Baldwin said, which means the ordinance will not apply to them until the California Coastal Commission approves the ordinance. That leaves more than one-third of hosts who have not registered or submitted an application to the city.

Now that the April 22 deadline has passed, the city can begin enforcing the ordinance, but it is not an easy task, Baldwin said, noting the city does not

have the manpower to track every listing in the city and crosscheck compliance.

"I just don't have time to go through all these listings and do all this detective work," Baldwin said.

But enforcement on the two most popular sites will become automatic on June 1 when Airbnb and Vrbo will require hosts to provide a registration number for each listing. Any listing that does not include a registration number will be automatically removed from the site.

For unregistered rentals discovered on other sites, Baldwin said hosts will be given 30 days to register. If the host fails to do so, a fine of \$1,000 would be issued. Registered hosts who violate the ordinance, including exceeding maximum occupancy limits and not providing guests with a local contact person, among other things, are subject to the same fine.

Airbnb's City Portal was launched last year by the hosting platform using numerous pilot cities and tourism organization partners. Tools include a dashboard with local and global Airbnb data insights on short-term rental markets and remitted tourist tax revenue, resources such as hotlines and a law enforcement portal and direct access to Airbnb staff for one-on-one support.

The announcement comes weeks after allegations from regional union Unite Here! Local 11 that there is a "near complete lack of compliance" with the city ordinance. Citing an analysis by community group Better Neighbors, the union claims 93% of short-term rentals in Long Beach are not permitted.

The groups did not mention the coastal zone exemption or elaborate on the analysis methodology.

"We can't reasonably expect compliance to happen on its own," Norberto Lopez, project director for Long Beach Residents Empowered, said in a statement. "We're in the middle of a housing and health crisis, we cannot afford to shelve vital housing stock in favor of illegal short-term rentals. The City must dedicate additional resources to increase enforcement."

Better Neighbors and the union claim 1,767 Long Beach rentals are listed on Airbnb alone as of March 25, a figure that far surpasses the city's data.

Airbnb declined to comment on the discrepancy or provide listing data for Long Beach.

Unite Here! stated that one-third of all short-term rentals in Los Angeles are listed on platforms other than Airbnb, which means non-compliance is likely even higher. However, Baldwin said Airbnb and hosting site Vrbo account for over 90% of all short-term rental listings in Long Beach. ■

# 3D printing company relocating headquarters to Douglas Park

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Reporter

El Segundo-based Morf3D Inc., a metal additive manufacturing company, announced recently it will relocate its headquarters to Long Beach, having claimed one of the last available industrial buildings in Douglas Park.

Commonly known as 3D printing, metal additive manufacturing is the process of creating three-dimensional objects out of metal from a digital file. The company specializes in aerospace and defense manufacturing but is using the move to expand its operation.

The new headquarters at 3550 Carson St. is nearly 90,000 square feet and will house the company's business operations as well as its manufacturing facility.

"It's been a long-term vision of ours to position Morf3D as an innovation

partner versus a parts manufacturer," CEO Ivan Madera said.

Nikon, the Japanese company best known for its cameras, announced it acquired majority ownership of the Morf3D earlier this month as part of its Next Generation Project Division.

"The recent strategic investment by Nikon Corporation affords our customers access to cutting-edge technology that will create an entirely new value chain that reinvents aerospace manufacturing," Madera said.

The opening of the new headquarters will mark the launch of Morf3D's Applied Digital Manufacturing Center. The new department will use research, advanced engineering and application development, serial production and new industry partnerships to drive digital manufacturing in high-growth markets, the company stated.

"[The center] will go beyond adding



The new Morf3D headquarters at Douglas Park. Photo courtesy of Morf3D.

capacity or capability, we're focused on solving the problems related to manufacturing and qualification of AM flight hardware across multiple disciplines," Madera said. "This will be a game changer."

Only two buildings remain vacant at Douglas Park, a more than 260-acre in-

dustrial, retail and hotel center adjacent to Long Beach Airport, according to Larry Lukanish, senior vice president of development for Sares-Regis Group, the developer of the area. But the company is negotiating with potential tenants for both buildings, he added. ■



# As restrictions thaw, Long Beach's gay bars are coming back after a dark year



Michael Romero, owner of The Crest, works behind the bar at his North Long Beach establishment, Wednesday, April 28, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **CHEANTAY JENSEN**  
Reporter

On a brisk Monday evening at the Mineshaft, a 43-year-old gay bar situated on the Broadway Corridor, the slow business hours of the establishment belie the boisterous jubilation inside—if only celebrated by five men.

The men laugh and converse as they sip beer and vodka cranberry cocktails. They've got a lot to catch up on; for several of the men in attendance, it's the first time they've seen one another in over a year.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic put immense strain on communities across the board, for the Long Beach gay community, 2020 was especially isolating.

"I feel like we've lost a lot of connection, and this year has made it worse," said 46-year-old Ryan Schroeder, who lives near the bar.

With restrictions on public gatherings especially stringent on enclosed spaces like bars, many of the city's gay bars were closed through the bulk of 2020 and into this year.

Many owners feared for the survival of their businesses, not just for their own livelihoods, but for the sake of the gay community, which has historically found sanctuary and community inside their establishments.

"It's a place where you can go and be yourself and not be ridiculed by anybody. You can show PDA and not be afraid that somebody is going to

hurt you," said Michael Romero, who owns The Crest in North Long Beach.

Last year was especially tough for Romero, he said, as it marked not just his 60th birthday but the 25th anniversary of his bar in Long Beach. His plans to celebrate were throttled.

Pride week, and the annual parade that is traditionally celebrated in mid-May, was always a joyous and lively period, drawing in huge crowds to his bar and others in the city.

The city announced that it would not host the annual Pride parade in-person this year and opted for a virtual celebration as a safety precaution since the event would draw tens of thousands of people. Though it was already a blow for the gay community to forgo last year's celebration, this year is just as demoralizing.

"It's definitely put a strain on me just being a gay person and not being able to partake," Romero said. "I love decorating the bar for it, meeting all the new people, to see everybody so happy."

Though Romero said his bar will be open for Pride Week, he won't be advertising any special events and will be operating in accordance with the city's guidelines. The boisterous nature of Pride isn't conducive to county health precautions, which require patrons to stay seated at their tables with their respective parties.

"Everybody wants to go from table to table and socialize and meet people," he explained.

There may be some relief soon, however. Los Angeles County qualified for the "yellow tier" the week of April 26—which is the least restrictive in the state's "blueprint" for COVID-19 metrics. If the county reports low numbers again on Tuesday, May 4, health officials could move to open bars indoors at 25% capacity for the first time in more than a year.

And if the state maintains its current trajectory on COVID-19 numbers, the governor has said everything will open back up on June 15.

That doesn't however, diminish the disappointment over this year's Pride celebration.

At the Mineshaft, the five men who recently gathered echoed similar sentiments of dismay regarding the news of a virtual Pride, and wistfully recalled past celebrations. The liveliness, seeing rainbow flags on every corner, watching thousands of people blissfully "just being themselves," Dan Nakori, 72, said.

Rob Ramone Flores, who lives across the street from the Mineshaft, said he made sure to celebrate last year's Pride in his own way at home with a couple of cocktails and some Zoom calls. Though Flores said he frequents other bars in the city, gay bars like the Mineshaft feel like home.

"There are certain times when I just want to be around gay people," he said. "Whenever I walk into a gay bar, yeah, I want to have a good time and be silly, but when I walk into these

doors, I'm walking on the shoulders of people who have paved the way for all of us to feel free to come to a [gay] bar."

Long Beach has a long history with gay bars dating back to the 1970s, said Carlos Torres, the new executive director of the LGBTQ Center Long Beach on Retro Row. Ripples, one of the first and longest-running gay bars in the city opened in 1972 and after 47 years closed its doors in 2019. Que Sera, the city's first lesbian bar, opened in 1975.

"In the early days, some of these businesses were started underground, like speakeasies where you had to have their own password to enter because of harassment, particularly by police," Torres said. "Police would frequently raid known gay establishments because for the longest time homosexuality was considered a mental illness, in Europe and the U.S. as well."

Though historically Long Beach has been progressive and open-minded of its queer residents, during the '70s and '80s the Long Beach Police Department was notorious for entrapping members of the LGBTQ community, particularly gay men in bars and at "cruise spots" where they frequently met for sexual encounters.

Even the inaugural Long Beach Pride Parade in 1984 was a hard-fought win for the gay community and lasted only 30 minutes despite drawing thousands.

The following year, Judi Doyle, the Long Beach Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade president, said she was threatened with violence in the weeks leading up to the 1985 march, as reported by Los Angeles LGBTQ newspaper, The Pride.

Long Beach has certainly made strides since and is lauded for its inclusivity and celebration of the queer communities. But this doesn't detract from the relevance and necessity for spaces like the Mineshaft, The Falcon, The Brit, the Silver Fox and other gay bars in the city.

"Considering all the legislation that is before state houses right now regarding access to sports by transgender individuals, I think spaces like gay bars continue to be ground zero for that community to be able to employ that sense of belonging," Torres said.

Torres also pointed to the recent destruction of the rainbow-painted lifeguard tower near 12th Place as an example of why safe spaces are still needed for the LGBTQ community.

"Despite the progress, there is still a lot of a lot of bias out in the world," he said. ■



# ‘More outreach, more presence, more inclusion’: LGBTQ Center’s new director plans to reopen bigger and better

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**  
Reporter

When Carlos Torres’ husband finished graduate school six years ago and went on the hunt for a research position at different universities across the country, Torres said he had only one request.

“I will move anywhere you find a job; as long as that place is San Diego,” Torres said, laughing. Instead, the couple moved to Pittsburgh, where they lived for five years before Torres was hired as the new executive director of the LGBTQ Center Long Beach this spring.

The couple didn’t make it quite as far south as Torres had hoped, but he said he’s happy to be in a city that made an impact on him decades ago, when he used to travel from the Fort Irwin Army Base in Barstow to Long Beach to feel free from the restrictions of Army life—including on the expression of his sexual orientation.

In the late 1990s, Torres remembers, the Long Beach Pride festival and parade was his first “big city Pride,” as he called it. “It was mind blowing,” he said. “Being surrounded by people from your community...I know that sounds cliché, but I was like: I can be myself.”

Returning to the city over two decades later, Torres was recently hired to helm the Center, replacing former director Porter Gilberg, who staff members had accused of racist and sexist behavior last year, and who was ousted as a result.

Torres said that improving access to the Center’s services in underserved communities, especially communities of color, is one of his primary goals as director.

“We have to go to those communities and we have to make sure that the community is represented in our staff,” Torres said. “I want people to join our organization or to reach out to us for services or connections because we are the right place.”

That includes working with community partners active in areas like housing, combating food insecurity and faith-based organizations, and taking a proactive approach to building those partnerships.

“I can build a table and ask people to join me at the table. But if they’re not willing, then I ask them: Can I join your table?” he said in his own riff on the famous “Field of Dreams” “build it and they will come” quote.

Born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and raised as the oldest of seven children by a single mother, 48-year-old Torres said he feels especially qualified to help create an environment that is inclusive to all, regardless of race, gender, faith or language skills, and said he’s excited to start working on making the Center more inclusive and transparent.

“I really feel that I’m in the right place,” he said.

Torres was heading the Persad Center in Pennsylvania, an organization focused on the wellbeing of the LGBTQ and HIV/



Carlos Torres, executive director of the LGBTQ Center, stands in front of the Long Beach nonprofit, Wednesday, April 28, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

AIDS-positive communities, when he saw an ad for the position at the Center in a newsletter. He remembers telling his husband: “I think I want to apply.” Two months later, he was hired.

Since starting his job on March 22, Torres has overseen the slow thawing of the Center’s programming, much of which had been on hiatus as a result of restrictions on in-person meetings and services during the pandemic.

“We have been dormant and now it’s like spring season, and we’re coming out too,” Torres said. For the past two weeks, the Center has been offering in-service counseling again, as well as outdoor painting classes and walks for elders in the community.

“It’s helping with the social isolation for the seniors, who are—just like many of us—just fed up with video conferencing,” he said. Many young people, in turn, have struggled to access services from afar, especially those living with their family who have not yet expressed their sexual orientation or gender identity to family members.

To unite those two groups, the Center is planning to hold its first in-person community event in June, which is internationally recognized as Pride month, a time for the LGBTQ community to come together and celebrate.

“It’s just an opportunity to bring joy after such a devastating pandemic,” Torres said of the event, which he said will focus on promoting connections between youth and elders in the community and celebrating “families of choice.”

“As LGBTQ people, we have families of birth, but we also have families of choice,” he said. “A lot of those individuals that we consider family are not related to us by blood, but are related to us by their deeds.”

A date or location for the event is yet to be announced.

Torres is also planning to expand the Center’s service offerings. Most notably, the Center is currently working on setting up a PrEP clinic.

PrEP, which stands pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a treatment aimed at people at a higher risk of contracting HIV—such as gay men with HIV-positive partners—consisting of a daily medication and supervision of patients’ health metrics.

“HIV is a lifelong medical condition and it requires rigorous medical attention,” Torres said. “So preventing someone from acquiring it is a big deal.” The Center is planning to start operating a PrEP program in July.

To fund its programming, the Center relies primarily on donations and event sponsorships, which have fallen short over the past year as events large and small were prohibited to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The Center, however, didn’t suffer as much as others, Torres said, thanks to a combination of generous sponsors and assistance from the federal Paycheck Protection Program. “There’s a gap, but it’s not as big as it could have been,” he said, estimating a 10% shortfall in the organization’s annual budget of approximately \$2 million.

“We’re very fortunate that members of our community really stepped up to help us financially,” he added. When the Center had to cancel last year’s annual Black & White Ball, scheduled for April 4, at the last minute, Torres said most sponsors decided not to pull their sponsorship dollars.

This year, the fundraising gala will take place on New Year’s Eve, something Torres considers turning into a tradition if the inaugural event goes well. Anticipating further reopenings in the fall, the Center is also planning to once again host its queer film festival, offering access virtually, in person and through a drive-in show.

The Center can use all the funding it can get, given that it’s currently in the market for a new space. The staff has outgrown its offices on Fourth Street’s Retro Row, something that was less apparent while everyone worked from home during the pandemic, but would likely become a problem soon.

“If I were to bring in every member of our team today, we’d be hanging from the rafters,” Torres said, laughing. The Center is currently looking for a location in North Long Beach, close to public transportation.

Torres said he plans to lead the Center pushing for “more outreach, more presence, more inclusion.”

In the end, he hopes that it will be the Center’s clients who will prove that his approach is working. “People’s experiences,” he said, “will speak for what the Center is doing.” ■



# New rainbow lifeguard tower to reiterate pride of Long Beach’s LGBTQ community, mayor says

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**  
Reporter

A rainbow-colored lifeguard tower that burned down in March is scheduled to be replaced by the end of May, the month Long Beach traditionally holds its Pride festival and parade.

Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia, who is gay, has been vocal on the importance of swiftly replacing the rainbow-colored tower. “The gayer, the better,” the mayor said about the replacement at a vigil held shortly after the tower burned down for reasons still undetermined.

What exactly that will look like is still being hammered out, said Garcia, but additional signage, flags and an “activation of the space” through events are all options currently considered.

“The lifeguard stations themselves

are pretty standard,” Garcia said. But, he added, “what we’re hoping for is to create a space that celebrates that kind of pride even more than it has before.”

Most of the state’s lifeguard towers are made by a single company, Laguna Beach-based Industrial Design Research, which sells them across the world, from Oxnard to Okinawa.

Dave Stollery, 80, still runs the company, which he founded in 1983 and which has prevailed as one of only two main suppliers of lifeguard towers in the country.

Stollery said the Long Beach Marine Safety Bureau asked him to recycle the remains of the burned-down tower to build a new one.

New lifeguard towers like the ones deployed in Long Beach cost between \$35,000-\$40,000 and typically last 20-30 years. ■



Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia speaks at a Unity Rally on Wednesday, March 24, 2021, in support of the LGBTQ+ community at the site of the rainbow-painted Pride lifeguard tower that was destroyed in a blaze in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

# With large gatherings still restricted, Long Beach Pride moves virtual

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**  
Reporter

There will be no Long Beach Pride festival and parade this year, mark-

ing the second year in a row that the third-largest Pride celebration in the country has been canceled as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

While the city recently eased re-

strictions on outdoor and indoor gatherings, it’s still unclear when large events like the 80,000-strong Pride celebration will be able to resume.

But unlike last year, there will be

some programming for those eager to celebrate.

Long Beach Pride, the organization behind the parade and festival, is currently in the process of putting together a virtual event that will feature videos from previous pride celebrations, testimonials from attendees and performances from local entertainers.

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“We want to tell our community that we are here and that we want to show our pride,” said Elsa Martinez, the organization’s president.

A virtual event, Martinez acknowledged, can’t quite compare to the experience of celebrating in the street with tens of thousands of people—but it’s something.

“All of us want to be out, we want to be proud and we want to show our colors,” she said. “It’s something to look forward to, but it’s definitely not the same as in-person.”

That’s why some members of the community have taken to organizing an informal car parade in lieu of the real thing on Sunday, May 16.

“I thought it was important to see each other and be seen and to remind ourselves that, even though we’re taking a break from the event, it’s still one worth having,” said Steve Gillis-Moore, who is organizing the car parade.

The Pride-along came together as a result of conversations with friends, including members of several car clubs Gillis-Moore is a part of. It will commence on the corner of Cherry Avenue and Broadway, move west along Ocean Boulevard and circle back on Elm Avenue. Participants are encouraged to decorate their cars in as simple or extravagant a way they desire, the event page notes.

“Our goal is to be together and to be on the circuit,” Gillis-Moore said. ■



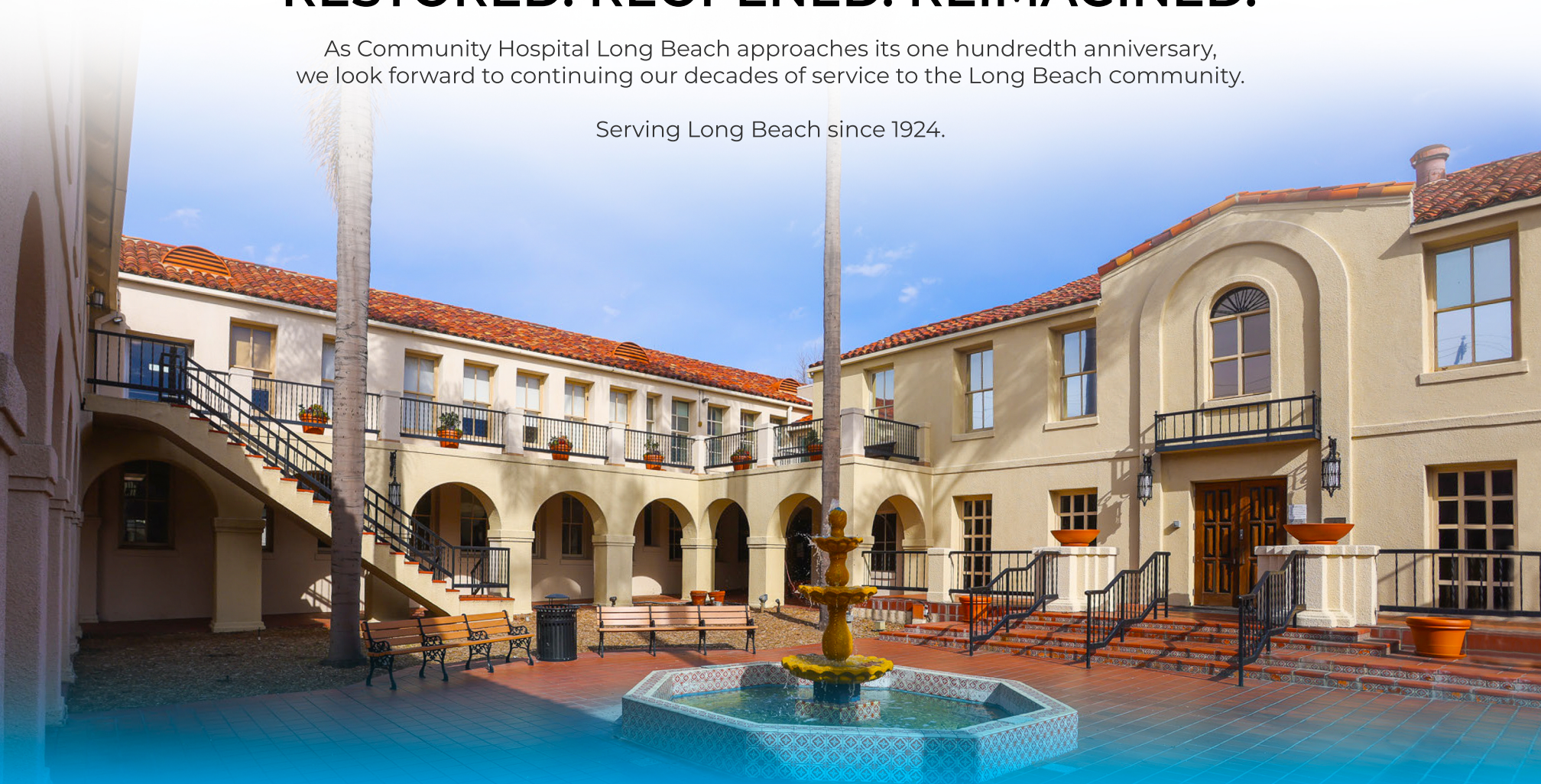


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