

Long Beach Business Journal

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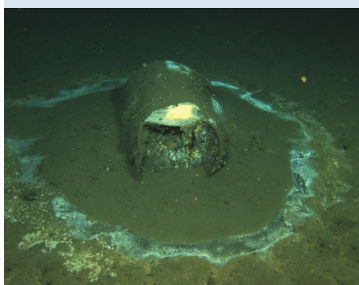
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‘They barely survived’: Catalina businesses are reveling in increased visitor counts after catastrophic year



Children play in the water while diners eat and drink on the beach in Avalon on Catalina Island, Friday, May 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Muriel Willhite purchased the Pancake Cottage on Catalina Island in 1984. Under her leadership, the business became one of the most successful breakfast and lunch spots on the island, eventually expanding into a new, larger location.

But the Pancake Cottage was not well positioned to weather the unforeseeable tribulations of the COVID-19 pandemic—including public health orders—because it offered no outdoor dining. Willhite was forced to shut her doors in March of last year, along with almost every other business on the island. She was never able to reopen.

“Muriel built a booming

business, put her blood, sweat and tears into it, and loved it more than life itself,” said Megan Wright, a 36-year-old Catalina resident who bought the struggling restaurant from Willhite, who is in her 80s. “The pandemic hit and it was just too hard to keep the doors open.”

When coronavirus swept across the globe in early 2020, Catalina’s tourism economy was decimated. Since 2014, the island getaway has consistently welcomed more than one million annual visitors. But last year, that number was cut in half to just over 500,000, according to Love Catalina Island, the island’s chamber of commerce and visitor’s bureau.

The sharpest decline in visitor numbers was in April 2020, when just over 2,000 people

ventured to the island, a 98% decrease from the same month in 2019. From May through August, crucial months for the island, visitor numbers were down anywhere from 42% to 93%.

“We all thought we were going down,” recalled Love Catalina President and Chief Executive Jim Luttjohann.

The island saw some reprieve from the impacts of COVID-19 in September and October. But the respite was short-lived when the pandemic took its most drastic turn in November. Hospitalizations and deaths skyrocketed.

On the island, visitor counts sank once again following a fresh round of shutdowns.

Luttjohann called the situation psychologically “cata-

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Pandemic dealt blow to arts, culture nonprofits, while basic needs providers flourished

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Nonprofits have played a significant role during the pandemic by delivering food to those in need, spreading the word about support programs for small businesses and helping quell concerns about the coronavirus vaccine.

But when it comes to the wellbeing of nonprofits themselves, some have been hit hard or languished during the pandemic while others have thrived, depending on the nature of their services.

“With the pandemic, the need increased so significantly that our partner agencies were just inundated with people,” said Diana Lara, executive director of Los Alamitos-based Food Finders, which partners with local nonprofits to provide food to those in need.

Food Finders staff reached out to foundations, individual donors and corporations to pull in additional donations—and received an outpouring of support in response.

The organization raised an added \$300,000 from various sources for its coronavirus relief efforts and procured 17 million pounds of food in 2020, compared to roughly 11 million pounds in 2019. Volunteer sign ups reached record highs, with 400 new volunteers joining last year.

“So many people just went out of their way to do what they could,” Lara said. “We were very blessed.”

Overall, projections for charitable giving continue to be positive after a year that saw plenty of needs—and the donations to

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Community Hospital emergency room department opens 3 years after closure



Local government and hospital officials unveil Community Hospital’s emergency department sign, Wednesday, May 12, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

By BRANDON RICHARDSON Reporter
After nearly three years, the Community Hospital Long Beach emergency department opened at noon on May 12, marking a crucial turning point for the facility, operator Molina, Wu, Network announced.
Community, the only hospital in East Long Beach, was shuttered close to three years ago by its former operator over seismic safety concerns, which the new owner must still resolve.
But in January, during the height of hospitalizations due to COVID-19, the hospital won emergency approval to receive transfer patients from other facilities.
State officials on April 29 gave the facility permission to now accept walk-in patients for the first time since being closed in summer 2018.
The emergency department reopened with 20 beds, new medical equipment, a revamped facade, a redesigned lobby, new furniture and a new electronic patient tracking system, according to the announcement.
Over the last two years, MWN has invested millions into the facility, including deferred maintenance, equipment replacement, supplies, utility system, and facade and interior room updates. Fourth District Councilman Daryl Supernaw’s office pitched in \$250,000 for critical elevator repair.
After months of delays at the state level, the nearly century-old hospital finally gained state approval to receive non-COVID-19 transfer patients, the first of which arrived Jan. 5. Less than three weeks later, the state allowed the hospital to reactivate its behavioral health department.
In addition to its 20 ER beds, Community Hospital is approved to operate 40 medical/surgical beds, 11 intensive-care unit beds and 28 behavioral health beds.
The hospital has over 210 staff, according to spokesman Brandon Dowling. Staff dedicated to the ER will fluctuate based on patient volume, he added.
“We, along with countless residents and first responders, are thrilled for this reopening,” Community Hospital operator John Molina said in a statement. “Three years was far too long for East Long Beach to go without these necessary, vital, life-saving services and our team couldn’t be prouder to serve our community once again.”
While patients may be transferred to or check themselves in at the newly reopened department, 911 ambulatory and paramedic services will not begin

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using the facility until later this month pending approval from Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services, according to MWN.

In April, after only a few months of operation, the hospital's acute-care license was up for renewal, a date established with its original license years before MWN took over the facility. The renewal process was completed without the need of additional surveys, Dowling said.

All hospitals must renew their acute-care license annually.

The hospital was closed by its pre-

vious owner, MemorialCare Health System, when a fault line was discovered and the necessary retrofit was deemed too costly. While the facility is currently up to code, MWN is working with state regulators to meet more comprehensive seismic standards that take effect Jan. 1, 2025. The city will reimburse MWN up to \$25 million for seismic related work over the next 15 years.

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



Hilda Manzo takes a selfie with her ER coworkers as staff celebrated the opening of Community Hospital's emergency department, Wednesday, May 12, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

City official admits building permit delays are failing customers

■ By ANTHONY PIGNATARO
Reporter

During the COVID-19 pandemic, permit approval delays at the city's Building and Safety Bureau have gotten so long even city officials are admitting it's a major problem for anyone wanting to do even a simple remodel job to their home.

"During this period, permit turnaround times, customer communication, and overall development review process have not met the City's goals nor the needs or expectations of our customers," Oscar Orci, Development Services director who oversees the bureau, wrote to City Manager Tom Modica in a May 11 memo.

When asked to comment on the memo, Development Services spokesman Rick de la Torre said "it speaks for itself" and referred questions to the Bureau of Building and Safety website.

According to that website, the current permit response times range from three to six weeks for "express permits" (roofing or a new electrical panel, for instance) to two to three weeks for "general inquiries." Taken individually, the times don't seem too bad. But when put together, and inspections are added, the delays can stretch into months or even longer.

"You're lucky if you get a permit in five months," said Al Sanchez, who owns Long Beach Building Contractors.

Sanchez said one recent client who wanted a room addition nearly gave up on the project because of the delays. Another client, who just wanted to replace an electrical panel, was finally approved in April after waiting since October.

Sanchez estimates that the delays in permitting have cut his business in half over the last year. In fact, he said he recently applied for a federal disaster loan to cover the losses.

"In the application, I specifically explained that the permitting process here has not allowed us to do business legally," Sanchez said. "The bigger jobs that put food on the table just ar-



A small crew works on a house remodel in the Lakewood Village neighborhood of Long Beach, Thursday, May 13, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

en't happening."

Alex Cornejo, who owns Cornejos Builders in Downey, has experienced similar problems.

"I don't even want to do business there anymore," Cornejo said. "I turn down clients in Long Beach."

Cornejo said one client who wanted to convert their garage to a liveable unit had to wait 13 months for approval.

Sanchez and Cornejo both say they're not experiencing similar permitting delays in smaller cities like Downey and Lakewood. "Nothing as bad as Long Beach," said Cornejo.

Like all city departments, the building bureau has been closed to the public since March 2020. The office partially reopened on May 10, though it was by appointment only and just for express permits.

Throughout much of the pandemic, all permitting was only done by phone and email, which caused delays

in permit intake and approval, according to the memo. Making matters worse, the city imposed furloughs in October. In January, more key personnel left the bureau, leaving the office understaffed.

"Since January 2021, the Bureau has experienced a 50 percent vacancy rate, up from 27 percent vacancy overall in 2020," Orci wrote in his memo.

Orci's memo outlined a number of moves to address these issues. To plug staffing holes, the bureau has relied on overtime, consultants, staffers from other departments and additional people from Pacific Gateway Workforce Development, a public job assistance agency.

"Department management have taken an all-hands on deck approach to focus on improving the Permit Center customer experience," Orci wrote, adding that managers and supervisors have begun working on permitting as

well.

But Orci's memo states that "incomplete applications"—caused in large part by moving the permitting process to a digital system—are also responsible for some of the delays. Staff are spending more time collecting required information than issuing permits, Orci said in his memo.

According to Orci's memo, new software upgrades should improve the online application and payment process by this summer. His office expects that the Permit Center will expand in-person services sometime by late summer or early fall.

All of this isn't lost on the contractors, who said they understand that all city departments are closed. And at least one has already spotted signs of improvement. "They seem overburdened," Sanchez said. "But it does seem like last month they've stepped up. Just this month, it's getting a little better." ■

Federal regulators' demand for pollution study could derail 710 widening project

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

A long-running project to widen the 710 Freeway hit a new hurdle with the EPA requiring planners to conduct a detailed pollution study that is likely to show added truck traffic will increase pollution in an area already burdened by bad air.

The Environmental Protection Agency issued a letter in March requiring that officials behind the 710 Freeway widening project—which would add two lanes of truck traffic on either side of the freeway—perform a particulate matter “hot-spot” analysis. Not completing the analysis would put the project in non-compliance with the Clean Air Act, federal officials said.

The project area spans from Long Beach to East Los Angeles near the 60 Freeway. The existence of the EPA letter was first reported May 4 by StreetsBlogLA.

The project could increase truck traffic by 6,900 trips per day in addition to the 50,000 trucks and 165,000 commuter vehicles that use the freeway daily already, according to a technical analysis from the EPA.

The EPA’s letter said a plan to require and help pay for cleaner-burning trucks as part of the project wouldn’t do much to improve existing pollution issues.

“In fact, we expect increases in the severity of existing violations even if the proposed I-710 Clean Truck Program were to be fully implemented given dust, tire wear and brake wear,” Elizabeth Adams, the EPA’s director of Air & Radiation Division, wrote in the letter.

Metro’s Board of Directors unanimously approved a \$6 billion version of the widening project in March 2018. However, a lack of funding and the finalization of environmental documents have put much of the project on hold.

The March 25 letter sent to LA County Metro CEO Philip Washington and Tony Tavares, CalTrans’ director



Vehicles enter the 710 Freeway from Harbor Scenic Drive and Downtown Long Beach Thursday, May 6, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

of the district that includes Los Angeles, said that the program’s proposed \$200-million clean-trucks program is a mitigating factor, but does not excuse officials from having to conduct the hot-spot analysis.

That analysis would estimate the future pollutant concentrations and the air quality impacts of the project. Long Beach and other cities along the 710 Freeway have some of the worst air quality in the United States and larger percentages of respiratory disease than other parts of the country.

“LA Metro is in the process of evaluating the I-710 Corridor Project and the timeline based on the EPA letter, in consultation with Caltrans,” a spokesperson for Metro said in an email Friday.

A spokesperson from Caltrans said that Metro is the lead agency on the

project and Caltrans could not comment on any impacts to the schedule.

There is a chance the project could move forward without completing the analysis, but it would open it up to legal challenges.

Adrian Martinez, an LA-based attorney who has been representing community groups opposed to the current project, said the project in its current form is a “1950s solution to a modern problem” that would just make the public health situation worse.

Martinez explained that unlike the state’s air quality laws, which allow projects to move forward even if studies show that they could make pollution worse, the federal Clean Air Act does not.

“I do think the days of this project are numbered,” Martinez said. “And this effort shows an incredible story of perseverance, organizing and community empowerment.”

Community groups have fought the expansion of the freeway for years and demanded that any project benefit the communities surrounding the 710 and the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach that are already burdened with pollution.

Organizers view the EPA’s letter as an encouraging sign that the project could be brought back to the table for public discussion, if not outright blocked by the federal government.

“EPA articulated and came to the conclusions the community had known all along that a project adding diesel truck lanes would be bad for air quality,” a statement from the Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice said, which includes groups represented by

Martinez.

“As a result, this EPA letter provides the perfect opportunity to stop this harmful project proposal, which is pushing forward decades-old thinking of how to solve our transportation and air quality problems.”

The coalition includes community groups in Long Beach and other cities that sit on either side of the 710 corridor.

Laura Cortez, an organizer for East Yards Communities for Environmental Justice, an advocacy group representing cities in Southeast Los Angeles that is part of the coalition, said she’s hopeful that Metro and Caltrans will reopen discussions for the project.

“This specific process wouldn’t have taken 20 years if they got it right and listened to the community,” Cortez said.

The coalition of nine community groups is calling for the project to be renegotiated with benefits like better public transit options along the 710 corridor.

Opponents are also calling for the project to eliminate any displacement that might result from construction. Over 100 residential and commercial properties were at risk of displacement due to the project adopted in 2018.

Among the things the coalition called for in a statement issued this week, Cortez said she’s hopeful that any project uses the same footprint of the existing 710, and that could include adding elevated truck-only lanes, but making the 710 corridor less polluted is the highest priority.

“However you move [cargo], it needs to be zero emission,” Cortez said. ■

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Long Beach may let restaurants keep temporary outdoor-dining areas longer than planned

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Mayor Robert Garcia is pushing city officials to let restaurants keep their temporary outdoor-dining areas in place past June 30, which is when the city's current authorization for them expires.

The patios, or parklets, allowed over 100 Long Beach restaurants to expand dining capacity during the pandemic. They have been an economic lifeline for the businesses, Garcia argued in a letter to the City Council.

The council is expected to vote on the item on May 18. Garcia asked members to consider both a permanent and temporary extension option for individual patio areas across the city.

Garcia wrote that some business owners have asked to keep the spaces in order to grow economically and some residents remain hesitant to eat indoors despite state and local rules that currently allows 50% capacity for indoor-dining.

"Our open streets and patio dining program has been a huge success, Garcia said



A man drinks a beer in a parklet outside of Shannon's on Pine, Thursday, May 6, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

in a tweet Tuesday, May 11. "It's provided spaces for folks to enjoy and helped restaurants survive the pandemic."

There are 107 temporary patios in the city and 12 are currently under consider-

ation to be permanent, a Public Works official told the Post in early May.

While certain sections of the city, such as Pine Avenue, have been identified by city leaders as spaces that could be blocked off

permanently to allow for increased pedestrian traffic, other corridors with parklets were intended to be temporary.

With the expiration date looming, a coalition of restaurateurs have been circulating a petition to keep the patios and parklets open past June 30. They've collected over 500 signatures so far.

It's unclear how state laws, which were amended during the pandemic to allow service of alcoholic beverages on public property, might affect the city's decision to extend the parklet program.

State COVID-19 restrictions are largely expected to be lifted June 15, but regulatory agencies like the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control have not signaled when they will rescind temporary rules for bars and restaurants.

Keeping the parklets longer also creates other potential problems, such as Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility, declining parking-meter revenue and blocked parking spaces. How the city will charge businesses to set up tables on formerly public spaces is also likely to be a topic of debate. ■

The Beacon, an affordable housing project in Downtown Long Beach, finally celebrates its completion

■ By **CRYSTAL NIEBLA**
Reporter

The Beacon, an \$85-million affordable housing project in the Downtown area, now serving more than 200 veterans and seniors, many of whom have experienced homelessness, celebrated its opening last week, nearly a year after its completion.

Century Housing, an affiliate of Century Villages at Cabrillo, a supportive housing community in West Long Beach, premiered in a virtual grand opening last week announcing the completion of its Beacon complex on the corner of Long Beach Boulevard and Anaheim Street.

The opening celebration by Century Housing and the long list of partners that helped with the project came nearly a year after it began admitting residents due to delays from the COVID-19 pandemic, Bartek Malecki, assistant vice president of marketing for Century Housing, said.

The Beacon, a 160-unit housing complex, broke ground in 2017 and was completed in early 2020. It's made up of two buildings, the five-story Beacon Place and the seven-story Beacon Pointe, and is mixed-

use, affordable and permanent supportive housing community, according to the Century Housing website.

Beacon Place offers 39 permanent supportive homes (one- and two-bedroom) for disabled and homeless veterans. The more visible building, Beacon Pointe, offers 121 apartment homes (one- and two-bedroom) with 61 units reserved for formerly homeless seniors and 59 units reserved for low-income seniors. Each building has one on-site manager unit occupied, and residents are provided with free mental health services, according to the website.

"The completion of The Beacon represents an extension of our work in West Long Beach..." Darroch Young, Century Housing board chair, said in the virtual grand opening.

Beacon resident Kevin Snow, who has experienced homelessness for 14 years, moved into a Beacon unit in January 2020 and said it's been a "godsend." He said he pays \$177 per month for rent.

"I'm off the street," Snow said in a statement. "I have security, it's quiet, it's clean."

Currently, there are just three vacancies at Beacon Place for veterans, who are

instructed to sign up with the city's Coordinated Entry System, which is run by the city's Multi-Service Center, according to Andrea Santana, development coordinator

for Century Housing. Two other vacancies at Beacon Pointe are currently being filled by the Long Beach Housing Authority, Santana said. ■



The Beacon, an affordable housing development for low-income veterans and those experiencing homelessness, is now open at the intersection of Anaheim Street and Long Beach Boulevard. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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Life expectancy for Latinos in Long Beach dropped by 4 years in 2020 because of COVID-19, health officials say

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

COVID-19 killed so many people in Long Beach last year that it cut the city's average life expectancy by a little over two years, according to recently released statistics from the Long Beach Health Department.

But one specific population group felt the effects of the pandemic even more dramatically: Average life expectancy for Latino residents dropped by about four years in 2020, according to a recently released memo from health officials.

The pandemic affected life expectancy because it caused so many more residents—especially Latino residents—to die at a younger age. Currently, the average life expectancy for Latinos is 74. For Black residents it's 69, and for Asian and White residents it's about 78.

Out of the over 900 people who have died as a result of the pandemic, 43% of them were Latino, according to numbers from the city.

To address these health inequities, Long Beach Health and Human Services Director Kelly Colopy said the city used about \$1 million of federal CARES Act

funding in late 2020 in partnership with nonprofit groups to host local health drives, vaccination clinics in the fall and other health awareness events for their Latino and Black neighbors. However, their efforts have proven to be insufficient.

Infection rates, particularly during the peak of the pandemic in December and January, placed a spotlight on areas of the city that suffered the most. In Long Beach, it was mostly low-income communities of color that accounted for hospitalizations and deaths, many of them frontline workers who could not work remotely and those living in tightly-packed multi-generational homes with elders who were more susceptible to the virus.

"We started that process but realized it didn't go far enough to meet the needs," Colopy said. "Council asked to develop a plan very specifically for Latinos around issues like food security, health conditions and different pieces to create a plan going forward."

In March, Councilwoman Mary Zendejas called for the creation of the Mi Vida Cuenta, or my life matters, Latino Health initiative during a council meeting with a goal to find funding for the initiative as well as create a comprehensive plan to specifi-

cally address Latino health needs.

The goal of the initiative is to fund health education, vaccine distribution, food distributions and mental health care for Latinos and undocumented residents through local nonprofits.

Colopy said the city is expecting to use money from the Long Beach Cares Act to fund this Latino health initiative but is not sure how much would be allocated. Part of what it will fund is a contract agreement with Cal State Long Beach researchers to develop a community needs assessment specifically for Latinos in Long Beach.

While the plan calls to highlight socioeconomic disparities among communities of color beyond COVID-19, the plan will also push for vaccination awareness. As of Friday, the city had vaccinated about 96% of seniors, which Colopy said is a great success.

But vaccination data from the city shows that there are still a number of people in communities of color who have not been vaccinated. Latinos in Long Beach make up about 40% of the population but account for just 27% of the population that has been vaccinated.

Where vaccinations are starting to drop off is among young adults ages 21 through

39. There are varying factors as to why young adults are not being vaccinated.

A report from the New York Times shows that vaccination enthusiasm took a dive after Johnson & Johnson had to stop distributing its vaccine over reports of rare blood clots. The company has since been given the green light to continue using its vaccine, but the trust in communities already skeptical of the jab may have already been lost.

While Colopy suggests that may be the case for a dip in vaccinations locally, she believes that younger people fear the virus less because it's mostly caused the death of older people or because vaccination clinics have not been set up in places they frequently visit.

A push for more vaccinations, as well as other health awareness campaigns, will all be outlined in a plan that is expected to be brought to the City Council sometime in July, Colopy said.

Currently, officials are in the planning stages of the community needs assessment that Cal State Long Beach will lead, but there is no clear date when that report will be complete.

"We anticipate for it to start quite quickly," Colopy said. ■

City Council starts process to create COVID-19 memorial in Long Beach

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Long Beach will officially start designing a COVID-19 memorial after the City Council voted unanimously May 11 to begin a visioning process.

The design process could take six to 12 months and include input from a community advisory group. The memorial's location and how much it will cost are also questions the city will have to work out.

The memorial would honor all those who died from the virus, which includes over 930 Long Beach residents and more than 62,000 Californians.

"The truth is that not every city is going to have a memorial," Mayor Robert Garcia said. "There will probably be few of them in the states, so it's an opportunity for us to provide this feeling of special space for those of us in the city, but also we need to be prepared that many others will visit this memorial from across the state and other places."

Details on what the city would like to see out of the memorial are still sparse, but Garcia said he wants

the city's former health director Ron Arias to help lead the project because he steered the design of Long Beach's health department.

Garcia said the memorial should also recognize health care workers' heroic deeds.

Members of the council supported the project, saying it should be a place to heal from the trauma of the past year. Others said it should simply serve as a reminder of a tragic time in the city's history.

"We went through a pandemic in 1918 and unless we read the newspapers and go into the archives we would have forgotten about it," Councilman Roberto Uranga said. "I think this event in our history needs to be memorialized and never forgotten."

The city's plan includes assembling an advisory board for the design process, but it's not yet clear how members will be selected. How much the memorial will cost is also unclear. Garcia mentioned the possibility of using city reserves to pay for the project as well as potential fundraising efforts and outreach to the state and federal government for assistance. ■

HydraFacial merges with Vesper Healthcare to form new, publicly traded company based in Long Beach

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Long Beach-based beauty health company HydraFacial has merged with Miami Beach-based Vesper Healthcare Acquisition Corp., a publicly traded special purpose acquisition company, to form The Beauty Health Company.

BeautyHealth will be headquartered in Long Beach, the company confirmed with the Business Journal. HydraFacial already had two Long Beach facilities totaling more than 130,000 square feet. Of the company's 480 employees worldwide, 239 work in Long Beach.

The company, which offers patented facial technology meant to cleanse and hydrate skin, also has experience centers in Chicago, Dallas, Orlando and internationally.

HydraFacial's senior management team, including CEO Clint Carnell and CFO Liyuan Woo will lead BeautyHealth. Vesper CEO and co-founder Brent Saunders will serve as executive chairman.

"The added resources from this transaction will allow us to expand HydraFacial's footprint in the large

and growing beauty health category, as well as drive growth in the U.S. and internationally," Carnell said in a statement. "I look forward to our next chapter."

The merger was approved by Vesper's stockholders on April 29, with 96% of the votes cast in favor, according to the announcement. Prior to the combination, HydraFacial was owned by two private equity healthcare firms: Linden Capital Partners, which will continue as the largest shareholder of the newly formed company, and DW Healthcare Partners, which will retain a significant stake in the firm.

The merger will allow the company to "expand and accelerate growth" and invest in "innovation, geographic expansion" and acquisitions, the company said.

"HydraFacial is an impressive category-creating product in an attractive and growing market and provides the perfect platform to achieve our goal of building a premier company in beauty health," Saunders said in a statement.. "We anticipate more opportunities ahead and are excited about the potential to create a valuable, industry-leading, global company in beauty health." ■

A \$1.4 million property in Signal Hill with a honky-tonk history

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

In 1969, when Bonnie Price decided to have a home built for herself behind her legendary honky tonk, the Foothill Club in Signal Hill, she acquired the services of New York-based architect Rudolph A. Matern.

And maybe Matern—who had developed a bit of a reputation for building and writing about how to build—1950s-style homes, might have been a touch insulted when Bonnie handed him a picture of renowned Long Beach-based architect Edward Killingsworth’s “Spaulding Residence,” a mid-modern home Killingsworth designed for a client in Piedmont in the East Bay near Oakland. It remains the only residence Killingsworth designed outside of Southern California.

Price told Matern, “I want one like that.”

The house, at 1905 St Louis Ave., was just a small portion of Bonnie’s empire on the hill. As owner of not just the Foothill, but the Hillside, another nightclub on Signal Hill, and Algiers Bar on First Street in Downtown Long Beach, she amassed enough money to purchase some 30 homes on Signal Hill.

With the Foothill being demolished in 2000, the former Price place may be the closest thing the city has to Country-Western-Swing-Rock shrine, just by a glance at the talent that may have visited the home before or after their set in the cavernous club.

For decades it was a Western and Country-swing dance hall and bar with a stage that’s been used by a staggering roster of world-famous musicians: Johnny Cash, George Jones, Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, Patsy Cline, Jerry Lee Lewis, Tanya Tucker, Willie Nelson and many, many more, along with a sturdy house band, Billy Mize and the Tennesseans, with the late Blasters pianist Gene Taylor playing blues and boogie-woogie tunes between sets.



A mulberry tree frames a home that was built in 1969 in Signal Hill Thursday, May 6, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

In its later years, talent buyers like Steve Zepeda, who booked Bogart’s and Mondays at the Blue Cafe, began hiring rock bands to play the Foothill, bringing in groups like Sublime, Frank Black of the Pixies, the Low and Sweet Orchestra, Link Wray, Southern Culture on the Skids, the Geraldine Fibbers and stalwart rockabilly regulars Big Sandy and His Fly-Rite Boys.

By that time, Bonnie’s health was failing and the club was being run by her husband Ron and grandson Ronnie, who closed it for good in 2000. Bonnie died eight years later.

The home, now owned by the owner of a glass company, who runs his business out of the home’s adjacent gallery/office building that is part of the property, is listed by Realtor Mike Norton at \$1.4 million.

The split-level home does, indeed, have traces of the Killingsworth touch in terms of winding paths outdoors surrounded by foliage, Oklahoma Stone facades on the exterior and interior walls and relentlessly horizontal lines. But Bonnie Price liked her privacy, which does not fit comfortably with the Killingsworth look—the house lacks the overly generous use of glass that marks Kill-

ingsworth’s homes—including the Piedmont Spaulding Residence upon which the St. Louis Avenue home is modeled—and perhaps that was Bonnie Price’s call. Maybe she told her architect to toss in a little more stucco, wood and plaster, informing him that she runs a honky-tonk, not a Windex plant.

Inside the home is a blast of eye candy, thanks to the eclectic art collected by the current owner (who did not want his name used, preferring

his privacy). Among the displays of his extensive collection of modern art is a triptych by Cuban artist Gilberto Ruíz Valdéz, placed in a massive aluminum marquee frame from the old Fox West Coast Theater on Ocean Boulevard.

The owner admits that there’s a lot of “not Killingsworth” evident in the house; no water elements, no floor-to-ceiling entry door, no marriage between the indoors and outdoors of the structure—and a serious shortage of glass.

Still, it’s an interesting place—and a large one, with four bedrooms and four baths in 3,829 square feet.

Further, the property includes a separate 1,720-square-foot art gallery/workspace with two separate units, each with its own bedroom, bath and kitchenette, facing 19th Street. The owner uses it to run his business and to store his prodigious art collection.

Among the other touches in the main house are a tiki bar, with large carvings he purchased in Hawaii; a game room with a pool table, a couple of libraries and a kick-back room for listening to music or watching TV.

The owner laughs. “It’s a great entertainment house. We’ve had some incredible parties here.” ■



A tiki-themed bar at a home that was built in 1969 in Signal Hill Thursday, May 6, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Long Beach kicks off solar canopy installation on public parking structures in Downtown

■ By **CRYSTAL NIEBLA**
Reporter

Solar canopy installations on three designated public parking facilities in the Downtown area are now being built, marking the first of two phases of a solar project series throughout Long Beach, the Public Works department announced May 7.

This project’s first phase is part of the city’s solar energy Power Purchase Agreement with PFMG Solar

Long Beach, LLC, a renewable energy company, for the construction and operation of 10 solar arrays at various public facilities across Long Beach—all of which are estimated to be completed by spring 2022, officials said.

Phase one of the city’s solar energy PPA includes installations on the rooftops of public parking facilities at City Place A (50 W. Sixth St.), City Place B (50 E. Fifth St.) and City Place C (50 E. Third St.), offi-

cials said.

The solar energy system totals 415.2 kilowatts, capable of generating electricity equivalent to power 60 homes. Officials say the project will reduce the city’s carbon footprint by an estimated 530 tons while the city’s utility partner, Southern California Edison, transitions to green technology to meet its goal of 80% renewable energy by 2030. The solar arrays will also provide covered parking for approximately 130

parking spaces, officials said.

“The installation is part of the largest solar installation effort by Public Works to date, with seven more locations in the permitting phase of construction,” Public Works Director Eric Lopez said in a statement.

Phase two of this project is expected to begin later this year, officials said. ■



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City of Avalon still reeling from pandemic revenue losses, expects more budget deficits this year

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

A global pandemic is one of the worst-case scenarios for an economy dependent almost entirely on tourism like that of Catalina Island. While the financial struggles of the past year for the city of Avalon have not been overly devastating, staff said the city only avoided budgetary deficits by tapping into its reserve funds.

Over the last 12 months, visitor-driven revenue was down \$5 million compared to the 12 months leading up to the pandemic, Avalon Finance Department Director Matthew Baker said.

“That \$5 million represents roughly 25% of our general and harbor fund revenues,” he said.

Prior to the pandemic, the city’s general fund had a reserve of \$5 million and the harbor fund had \$2 million in working capital, according to Baker. The harbor capital—which pays for all maintenance and city-funded services along the waterfront—was entirely depleted, while the general fund reserve only decreased to \$4.5 million.

Avalon’s fiscal year runs July 1 to June 30, and the months leading up to the pandemic were strong, Baker said, which is why the reserve was not drained more significantly.

“It could have been worse but it’s definitely a challenge,” Baker said, noting the city expects to need another \$1.5 million in reserves to cover this year’s general and harbor fund deficits.

Transient occupancy tax revenue, which comes from hotel stays, was down nearly 30% in 2020 compared to 2019, according to city data. Similarly, local sales tax was down nearly 20% year-over-year, cross-channel wharfage fees were down 43% and cruise wharfage fees were down nearly 80%. Overall, total visitor-driven revenues were down 33% in 2020 compared to 2019.

Last year started off strong, with



The city of Avalon nestled into the hills of Catalina Island’s northern coast, Friday, May 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

January and February revenue up across the board compared to 2019. The most severe decreases came in April when only about 2,000 people visited the island.

After a slow summer season, September and October saw a dramatic increase in visitors, with revenue actually surpassing 2019 figures. But the winter surge of COVID-19 brought numbers back well below the norm. All revenue streams remained far below normal levels in January and February of this year, according to city data.

It was difficult to create the 2020-2021 budget, Baker said, because visitor counts must be taken into consideration.

“We were nervous about a second shutdown and one did occur,” he said. “Fortunately, it was during our slower season, so the scale of impact wasn’t as bad.”

Before the pandemic, at least two cruise ships would call on the island

every week and pay a wharfage fee as well as a disembarkment fee for every passenger that ventured onto the island. The city also receives \$3 each way for every passenger that travels to the island aboard the Catalina Express. These fees account for about half of the harbor fund revenue, Baker said.

Annually, cruise passengers normally account for about a quarter of visitors to the island, Baker added. With Carnival calling on Mondays and Tuesdays, he said the cruise industry essentially extends the weekend for island businesses when it is operating.

The majority of sales tax generated in Avalon is through food and drink purchases at the numerous restaurants and bars, Baker said. But sales at these businesses were abysmal compared to a normal year, with most businesses barely surviving the pandemic.

The city received just under \$900,000 in federal assistance through the CARES and American Rescue Plan acts. But compared to the revenue loss of \$5 million, Baker said the island was shortchanged. With less than 4,100 permanent residents, funding based on population size unfairly minimized the impact of the pandemic on the island, he said.

“We are grateful because those weren’t revenues we were expecting,” Baker said. “But anytime there’s federal funding done on a per person level, it doesn’t take into consideration our unique situation where we [normally] cater to over a million visitors per year.”

To offset revenue loss, the city made significant cuts to labor, contract services and deferred maintenance

when possible. Further cuts are simply not feasible because certain work must be done whether visitors come to the island or not, including maintenance on the pier, which sustains most of its wear and tear from the elements, not foot traffic, Bakers said.

Public safety—police, fire and life-guard—accounts for more than half of the city’s expenditures and also could not be greatly reduced, Baker added.

The city did reduce its full-time equivalent staff by about 25% through a combination of retirements and layoffs, Baker said, bringing it down from about 85 to 64. All city contracts were examined and either reduced or eliminated entirely, absorbed by city departments when possible. For example, beach showers and restrooms did not have to be cleaned as regularly when people were not visiting the island in large numbers, so the contract was reduced, Baker said. Trash collection along the waterfront was similarly reduced.

As tourism returns to the island in the coming months, staffing and contracts will be reexamined and increased as needed, Baker said. However, he added that the city is reevaluating how it operates overall to be more efficient and to soften the blow of any future economic crises.

“Hopefully the next COVID—knock on wood—doesn’t happen for a long time. But I don’t see a scenario where we are operating like pre-COVID,” Baker said. “We will just change the way we do things and make sure we’re in a better position to weather it ... and not make the hard cuts.” ■



People drink at a beachside bar on Catalina Island, Friday, May 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Half a century after it was first proposed, kelp fuel is making a comeback thanks to new technology

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

The future of eco-fuel production may be growing in the ocean between Long Beach and Santa Catalina Island.

Researchers of the Kelp Biofuel Project, a collaboration between USC's Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies and La Cañada-based Marine BioEnergy, are investigating the potential of kelp for large-scale cultivation. Grown at industrial scale, the plant could become a source of food and fuel, providing an eco-friendly alternative to crude oil.

Kelp is already grown for food on a smaller scale in many Asian and some European countries. Some, like Norway, have also started to experiment with kelp-based fuel production.

"The U.S. is actually lagging far behind in seaweed cultivation, for any purpose, even though we certainly have the personnel with expertise, the technology, the resources," Diana Kim, who has a doctorate in biology and is the project's lead scientist, said.

"We are an ocean nation," she said. "We're grossly underutilizing that re-

source."

With fresh water considered to be a scarce resource in the near future, growing techniques that can function without it—whether it be for fuel or food production—will be crucial, said Brian Wilcox, co-founder of Marine BioEnergy.

"People have said that fresh water will be the oil of the 21st century," Wilcox said. "What we have is a way to do agriculture without fresh water."

Kelp's potential to be used for biofuel production in particular has long been known; Dr. Howard Wilcox, Brian Wilcox's father, first pitched a kelp-to-methane project in the early 1970s.

Kelp and other plants can be turned into fuel through either fermentation or a process called hydrothermal liquefaction.

Fermentation produces ethanol, an alternative fuel commonly produced from corn in the continental U.S.

For their kelp project, the Wilcoxes focus on the hydrothermal liquefaction process, the result of which is a fuel that functions much like regular gasoline.

In this process, the kelp is put in a hot, pressurized water environment with a temperature of roughly 660 degrees Fahren-

heit, to break down its solid structure. The result is a liquid called biocrude, which, just like the crude oil from fossils, can be refined and delivered through regular fuel pumps.

Because they don't have to fight gravity like their terrestrial counterparts, kelp plants' molecular structure is easier to break down, making it particularly suited for biocrude production. Kelp's fast growth rate of up to one foot per day makes it a prime source material.

"Because it grows so big, it grows so long and it's a perennial plant," Brian Wilcox said. The plant's perennial nature means it can be cut and doesn't have to be replanted after each harvest.

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Navy—where the elder Wilcox worked as a civilian staff researcher—was looking into alternative fuels because of the 1973 oil embargo, which highlighted the country's discomfiting reliance on foreign oil, which made it vulnerable to the whims of foreign powers.

But when the oil embargo was lifted, interest in alternative fuels waned. "People were not as excited about energy as they were in the early '70s," Wilcox said.

The younger Wilcox went on to begin a career spanning nearly four decades at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, relegating his interest in reviving his father's project to the weekend and evening hours. Last year, he retired. "Now I'll be able to give it my full attention," he said.

At the same time, a looming climate crisis is driving interest in alternative fuel sources once again.

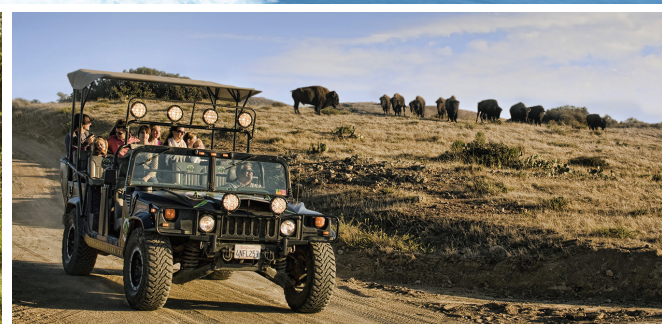
The main challenge to overcome in order for any large-scale kelp production to take place in the open ocean is how to provide plants like kelp with both nutrients and sunlight on a consistent basis. Sunlight is found in the surface layer of the ocean, while most nutrients are found in deeper layers.

Wild-growing plants find the necessary combination of those resources in coastal areas where water depth fluctuates and nutrients are washed in from deeper levels of the ocean. But to grow kelp at the scale necessary to make a dent in the country's energy needs, the Pacific's rocky coastline simply doesn't offer enough space that provides those conditions.

That space is only found in the open

(Please Continue to Page 14)

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Visitors are flocking back to Catalina Island



Visitors disembark a Catalina Express in Avalon on Catalina Island, Friday, May 7, 2021.

■ Photos by **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

After one of the most challenging health and economic downturns in history, visitors are returning to the island for an outdoor getaway. Visitors are enjoying the fresh air and sunshine of island life. After the pandemic, the island’s recreational offerings are booming with ropes course, tours and more. ■



Two people hike on Catalina Island.



People chat on the beach on Catalina Island.

A zip liner flies through the air above Catalina Island.



People kayak near Little Harbor on Catalina Island.

l for outdoor adventures and fun in the sun

e crises in Catalina Island's history,
From the water to the sky, adven-
e. Unavailable through much of the
g, including kayaking, zip lining, a



A group sets up camp at Shark Harbor after day two of hiking the Trans-Catalina Trail.



People get scuba lessons off the Catalina Island coast.

Passengers wait to board the Catalina Express in Avalon for their trip back to Downtown Long Beach.





Diane Kim, lead researcher on the Kelp Biofuel Project, examines the frond of a giant kelp plant at the USC Wrigley Marine Science Center on Catalina Island, Thursday, May 6, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.

(Continued from Page 11)

ocean, the depths of which have so far proven prohibitive to significant plant growth.

To overcome this challenge the team behind the Kelp Biofuel Project developed

a “kelp elevator,” which pulls the plants—tethered to a buoy located off the shore of Catalina Island—up and down between the respective nutrient- and sunlight-rich levels of the ocean every day.

In a difficult fundraising year, Catalina Conservancy’s ball ‘Under the Stars’ nets \$230,000

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

The coronavirus has put a damper on fundraising for many nonprofit organizations, including the Catalina Conservancy, which is tasked with the upkeep and conservation of the majority of the island.

But despite the challenges, the conservancy’s annual “Under the Stars” fundraising event, which took place virtually last month, netted \$230,000 to go toward expenses like infrastructure maintenance, educational programming and preservation efforts. Over the past 25 years, the annual event has raised a net total of \$7.8 million.

The conservancy had seen an increase in funds raised from the ball in the years just preceding the pandemic, a momentum that its chief development officer, Suzy Gardner, fears may have been lost due to the limitations the pandemic placed on the conser-

vancy’s outreach efforts.

The past year has been difficult, Gardner said, especially because the conservancy’s guided tours were prohibited. “Not just because you lose revenue, but because you lose that in-person connection,” she noted.

April’s event provided an opportunity for the conservancy to re-establish that connection. A total of 450 attendees from 20 states attended the event, which featured charitable auctions and a live musical performance.

“This digital adventure provided a great way to connect with those who love Catalina and we look forward to being able to celebrate in person sometime soon,” President and CEO Tony Budrovich said in a press release.

Donors, he added, were key in fulfilling the conservancy’s mission of being “responsible stewards of Catalina Island, keeping Catalina Island accessible for future generations.” ■

The question was: How would the plants handle the change of environment that would come with this daily trip?

“There were some people who were sure that the kelp would not survive. There were others who were very optimistic,” Kim said. The results after 100 days of piloting the kelp elevator were promising: “the kelp, actually, are doing just fine.”

Not only did they survive just fine—they grew at a faster rate than their counterparts in natural kelp fields used for comparison.

Now, the next steps will focus on the technological side of the project. While the kelp elevator simulated the depth-cycling

the plants would have to endure, buoys near the coastline won’t be a practical solution for large-scale production.

Instead, Marine BioEnergy—led by Wilcox and his wife, Cindy—is developing a design concept for a massive grid, dragged on each corner by underwater drones and held stable by programmable floats, allowing it to move toward the light in the daytime and to nutrient-rich lower levels at night, and out of the way of ships and storms at the surface like a marine magic carpet.

“We’re closing in on a really nice system for the kelp farm,” Wilcox said. The patented system, he noted, would be using only existing technology, but will have to be tested for functionality in an open ocean environment.

Once perfected, the underwater kelp farms have the potential to cover roughly 10% of the nation’s energy needs utilizing an ocean area the size of Utah, according to Marine BioEnergy’s projections.

Kelp fuel would be competitive with crude oil at an average price of \$60 per barrel. Subsidies, such as climate tax credits, could help the industry get an easier start, Wilcox noted.

“The governments of the world have to decide: we’re not going to wait until tomorrow, we’re going to start today,” he said. “We’re actually not going to burn fossil fuels any longer.”

Growing kelp at a scale that would make it as economically viable as this latest project promises has been the main challenge in bringing kelp fuel to market so far, said Kim, the researcher.

“The biology of it, to be honest, is not that complicated,” she said. “But creating buy-in, creating the market that—at this point—doesn’t exist, that’s the challenge.” With the results of the pilot project in hand, the possibility of kelp fuel stations finally seems within reach.

“Now we have the technology to realize the potential of kelp at the kind of scale we’re talking about,” she said. “I can just imagine, one day, pumping kelp fuel into my car and remembering when this all started.” ■



Senior Scientist Diane Kim and postdoctoral researcher Andy Navarrete inspecting a naturally occurring kelp bed at Parsons Landing, Catalina Island. Photo by Maurice Roper / USC Wrigley Institute.

Now-banned pesticide discovered in barrels off Catalina Island is a ‘problem we still don’t understand,’ scientist says

■ By **TESS KAZENOFF**
Reporter

A Los Angeles Times investigation last fall showing as many as half a million barrels of a now-banned pesticide are sitting on the ocean floor off Catalina Island has led a local assemblyman to propose a new resolution calling on the federal government to take action to protect the island’s ecosystem.

The resolution, AJR 2, authored by Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell, D-Long Beach, does not specify what action exactly should be taken regarding the toxic waste, nor is any specific funding attached.

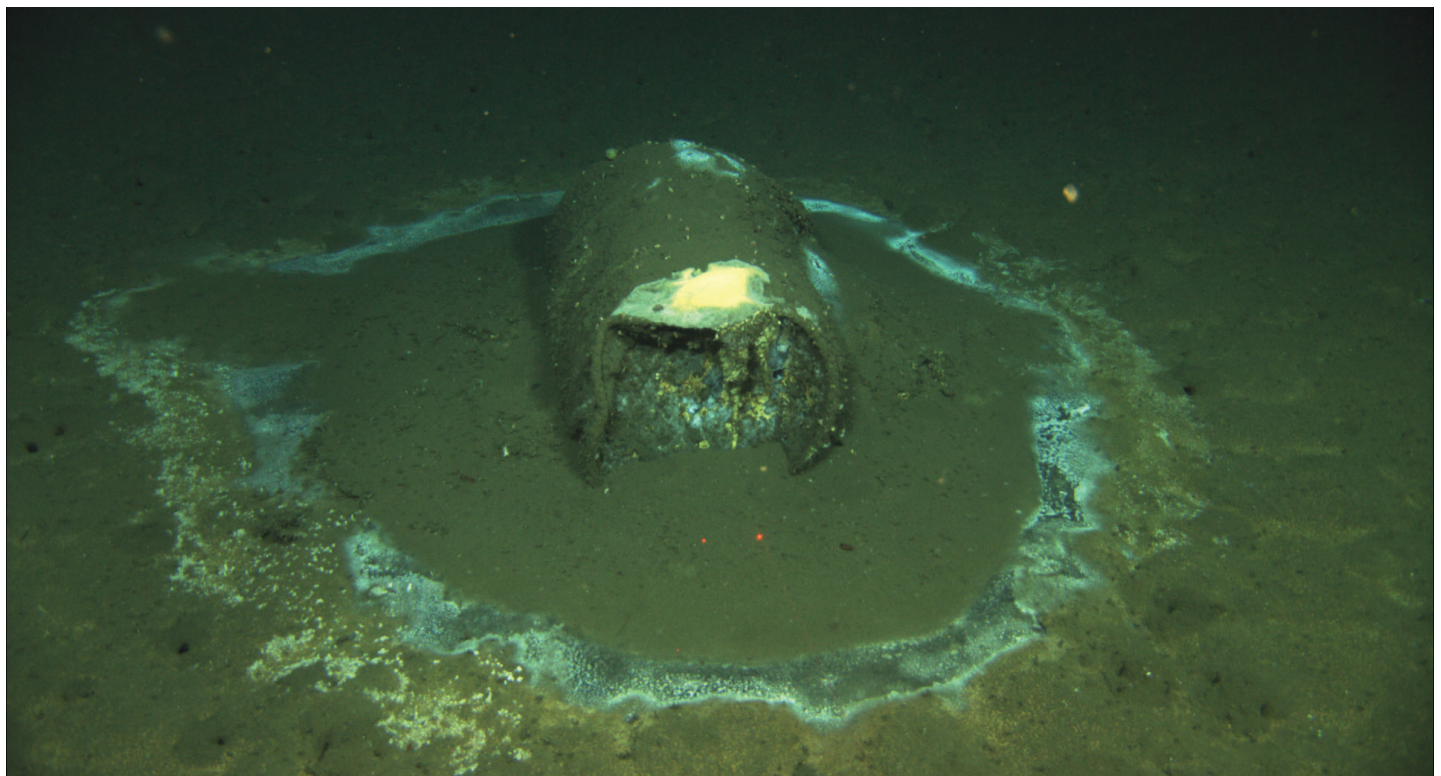
The chemical DDT, or dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, has long been known as a cause of a host of environmental problems: sea lions have contracted an aggressive cancer, brown pelicans’ and California condors’ eggshells have thinned, and a significant accumulation of the chemical has been found in bottlenose dolphins, in comparison to dolphins around the world.

The chemical, banned in 1972, was thought to be contained to shallow waters off Palos Verdes. But the Times investigation, based on the work of a UC Santa Barbara scientist, reported DDT contamination in sediment near Catalina to be 40 times greater than that initial area, which was designated a Superfund site.

“There’s a lot that we still don’t understand,” UC Santa Barbara scientist David Valentine said in a recent interview. “We really need to wrap our head around how much is there, and what is it. We don’t know the magnitude of the problem yet.”

Valentine has so far identified 60 barrels of leaking sludge from DDT, which was manufactured by a Los Angeles company. The Palos Verdes site was identified decades ago as a hotspot for the chemical because the company disposed of DDT byproduct through sewage pipes that led to the ocean.

But the barrels of the chemical that were hauled out to sea and disposed of was a new discovery that may have contributed to the long-lasting effects of the chemical, accord-



A discarded leaking barrel sits 3,000 feet deep on the ocean floor near Santa Catalina Island. Photo courtesy David Valentine / ROV Jason.

ing to Valentine’s research.

“In order to be proper stewards of our natural resources, we must wrestle with the mistakes of the past and address the damage before it gets worse,” said O’Donnell during a May 3 California State Assembly presentation.

First introduced in December, the legislation passed the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee on April 21, before heading to the Assembly floor for a full vote.

According to Valentine, there is still uncertainty regarding how the material transports itself and the extent to which it attaches to animal tissue. Once these issues are addressed, Valentine said the next step would be determining an appropriate course of action.

Valentine said that lack of knowledge may be partially to blame for the government’s inaction, “But this problem falls be-

tween a lot of cracks. There’s no single entity charged with dealing with this thing.”

However, Valentine said that he thinks elected officials intend to address the issue.

On April 26, Sen. Diane Feinstein announced that the DDT around Catalina Island was a public health hazard, potentially propelling action forward.

“That was very refreshing to hear, and I hope that that’s enough to generate real action,” Valentine said.

Research has since built upon Valentine’s findings: scientists at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at University of California San Diego recently discovered over 27,000 “barrel-like” objects in the San Pedro basin, which although not tested yet, are suspected to contain DDT.

Over 90% of the surveyed area (which was roughly double the size of Manhattan, for reference) contained these barrels.

“We were very surprised at the extent of them,” said Erik Terrill, director of the marine physical lab at Scripps, during a media conference on April 26. “Looking at the historical records, all of this has occurred for decades on a monthly basis, it shouldn’t have been a surprise to us. But it was still just not anything I had really wrapped my head around in terms of envisioning what we might actually find.”

“It’s just shocking that this was considered OK,” said Lihini Aluwihare, professor of the geoscience research division at Scripps.

As for possible ways to better protect the marine life that has been exposed to DDT, Aluwihare said it’s not that simple.

Aluwihare said there could be a possibility that these organisms, based on their high intake of DDT, have adapted to have some sort of detoxification mechanism due to their long-term exposure.

“I think a lot of people want to know, can we protect these organisms? But it’s a little bit different from something like the Gulf

Oil Spill where it’s happening right now and you’re trying to figure out what to do with these organisms. These populations have been exposed to this issue for decades. And I think it’s an interesting question, what the long term impacts are but also what the resilience is in these populations as a result,” said Aluwihare.

A lot remains unknown, said Eunha Hoh, professor and division head of environmental health at San Diego State University. She said that while research indicated high quantities of DDT, it was unclear how much of this could be traced to the barrels.

There is also the issue of funding. According to Hoh, the Environmental Protection Agency has had “limited or diminished” funding over the years, with not enough to “support the research and environmental investigation,” but she hopes the situation will improve.

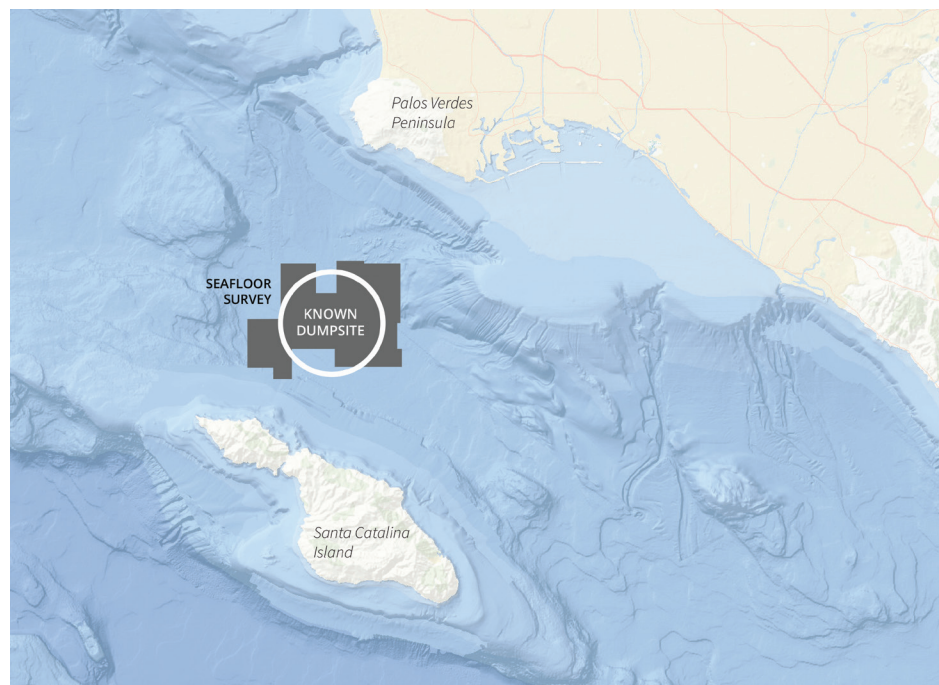
Although O’Donnell’s legislation may provide hope to some, skepticism surrounds the resolution’s effectiveness.

Peter Sharpe and Linda Chilton, co-chairs with the Los Angeles MPA Collaborative, which focuses on building ocean resilience and protecting marine life, have expressed concern that the removal of the waste will re-suspend the DDT in the water column, aggravating all of the negative consequences of DDT.

“I really doubt they would be able to do much to clean up the site in 3,000 feet of water without distributing the pollutants over a larger area,” said Sharpe in an email.

Due to these concerns, the resolution does not specifically call for removal of the waste, but instead remains neutral on what specific action should be taken as further information is gathered.

“I think that this is yet another reminder of the dangers of how our society treats the environment and our waste. Somebody thought that was OK, so it’s a reminder that we have to do better,” said Valentine. ■



A map of the DDT dump site in the Pacific Ocean near Catalina Island. Graphic by Dennis Dean.

Why the military keeps fixing Catalina Island's infrastructure

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

From early April until just last week, 45 Marines were shoveling dirt and digging ditches on Santa Catalina Island, just across the channel from Long Beach.

The road improvement project, which involves repairing and improving existing roads on the island, as well as installing culverts and other drainage systems, will prevent sediment from washing off and regulate stormwater flow, which in turn reduces the need for road maintenance in the future and helps maintain soil native plants need to grow.

The Catalina Island Conservancy spends roughly \$500,000 per year on road maintenance, according to Chief Operations Officer Tim Kielpinski. The project, he estimates, will save the nonprofit \$1 million in maintenance costs.

So what do the Marines get out of it?

The road improvement project is part of the Department of Defense's Innovative Readiness Training program, which sends military units across the country to build roads, assess cyber threats and even dive for old fishing nets—all in the service of training their members in “mission essential” tasks.

Catalina, it turns out, is a perfect training ground.

“It’s an austere, remote location away from all your gear, away from all the maintenance you would normally have,” said Maj. Alex Lim, director of communication strategy and operations for the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. “We’re training for the future operating environment.”

That future operating environment might very well be a remote island location, the local commanding lieutenant said.

“The military, the [Department of Defense] in general, has been looking east at some potential tension in the Second Is-

land Chain, the South China Sea,” said Lt. Bailey Sheppard, the engineer officer who supervises the unit. The Second Island Chain is located in the South Pacific and includes the U.S. territory of the Mariana Islands.

The program was created in the early 1990s and receives over 200 applications from nonprofits all over the country each year. Once applications are received, program managers representing each branch of the military select the projects they think would provide the most training benefits to units within their branch.

“We attempt to mimic deployment as much as possible,” said Capt. Kelly Machado, the program’s public affairs officer. “It’s a great exercise for them to do it in the United States. It’s a safe space to train.”

The number of projects selected each year depends on the funding available—the program is funded year-by-year—as well as the military’s training needs and external circumstances like the current coronavirus pandemic.

In 2019, a total of 30 projects were completed by military units deployed in 23 states and territories, including an airport improvement project on Catalina Island. In 2020, the number of projects completed shrunk to 12.

Catalina, however, already had a foot in the door when it came to securing a unit to work on the island this year. Many of the Marines currently on the island had already participated in a months-long project to replace the Catalina airport’s crumbling asphalt runway with concrete that was completed in April 2019.

It was at the island’s Airport in the Sky that the conservancy first got wind of the military program, according to Kielpinski of the conservancy.

While the details of the military’s involvement on the island are a little murky, Kielpinski said a former member of the Navy’s construction battalions—com-



Overcoming logistical challenges, such as transporting heavy equipment onto the island via barge, is one of the training goals of the Innovative Readiness Training project on Catalina Island. Photo courtesy of the Catalina Island Conservancy.

monly referred to as “Seabees”—landed on the airport and told local staff about a

military program that could help fix the rocky runway.

Inspired by this possibility, Kielpinski and a member of the conservancy board attended a Navy event at Port Hueneme, the Seabees’ home base near Oxnard, to introduce themselves and find out more.

“We crashed the party,” Kielpinski remembers.

He’s not sure whether the personal introduction had any impact on the successful application for runway repairs to be completed—it was mostly Marines, not Navy members who ended up working on the project—but the event was the first time he heard about the Innovative Readiness Training program. He submitted an application shortly afterward.

At the end of this first project, Kielpinski said the unit encouraged the conservancy to seek out their help again in the future.

“The Marines got so much training value out of the airport project and it was so successful,” he said. “They said: if you’ve got other projects, you oughta submit them.”

Kielpinski said he’d like to keep the collaboration going in the future. “They’re motivated, they’re hard workers,” he said. “We’ve got plenty of work and every time they’re here, we think of other ideas.” ■



Marines grading roads in the interior of Catalina Island as part of a month-long infrastructure repair project. Photo by Glen Gustafson/Catalina Island Conservancy.

Catalina Recovery

(Continued from Page 1)

strophic” for most of the island businesses. “They barely survived.”

Under normal circumstances, Carnival Cruise Line calls on the island two times per week, with other carriers such as Royal Caribbean, Disney and Alaska calling on the island sporadically throughout the year. They drop off thousands of passengers to feed the local economy. But the cruise industry came to a screeching halt in March 2020 and no vessels have arrived since.

During off-season months, cruise passengers account for up to 40% of visitors to the island, according to Tony Budrovich, president and CEO of the nonprofit Catalina Island Conservancy. In April, the CDC announced that cruises may return to service as early as mid-July.

“Cruise ships are really the saving grace through the difficult winter months,” Budrovich said. “Prior to the vaccine, locals were worried about cruises but I think people are feeling pretty good about ships returning.”

Wright, who has lived on Catalina for 10 years, owns another business on the island—Cafe Metropole. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, her sandwich and juice bar was able to remain open and was successful throughout the pandemic by securing a



Visitors relax on the beach and in cabanas on Catalina Island, Friday, May 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

catering contract to supply 30 sequestered Southern California Edison staff with breakfasts, lunches and dinners daily during the first and second stay-at-home orders.

A frequent Catalina visitor since she was a little girl, Wright said the

Pancake Cottage was a favorite of hers and she was determined to save it. She reopened the business on May 1.

“There’s a lot of excitement buzzing around the island because we see a light at the end of the tunnel,” Wright said, citing rising visitor numbers. “I’m

getting great feedback from the locals saying they are excited to see [Pancake Cottage] back in action. I just hope I live up to Muriel’s legacy.”

Wright said the continued 50% capacity restriction for indoor dining is actually beneficial for her reopening because it allows staff who have not worked in over a year to get back into the swing of things and to become accustomed to revamped systems. But she said the capacity limits are not sustainable for hers or any other restaurant on the island that does not offer outdoor dining.

Last year, private boaters and campers were among the first to return to Catalina seeking a secluded escape from the pandemonium of the mainland amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The trend has continued with many of the Catalina Island Company’s roughly 700 moorings seeing frequent use, according to President and CEO Geoff Rusack.

The company also operates 123 campsites—some of which it administers for the conservancy—that can accommodate hundreds of visitors per night, and reservations are filling up throughout the summer, Rusack said.

Hotels, rentals and recreational activities are now being booked further in advance, according to Love Catalina’s Luttjohann, demonstrating that people are more confident and comfortable with travel. Early bookings also make it easier for businesses to plan, he added.

Steven Hoefs, a lifelong islander, owns eight businesses on Catalina, including a laundromat, retail shops, restaurants and the island’s only arcade. Hoefs, who previously worked for the city of Avalon for 25 years—first as fire chief followed by a four-year stint as city manager—said the

(Please Continue to Page 18)



A couple eats ice cream from Scoops in Avalon on Catalina Island, Friday, May 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

(Continued from Page 17) sharp decline in tourism made for a rough year. "I would say the arcade was by far the most impacted," Hoefs said, adding that he reopened the business in April after it was closed for more than a year. His retail shops also took a beating but his restaurants were able to survive on takeout orders and, at his fancier M Restaurant, outdoor dining. The laundry business, meanwhile, operated throughout the pandemic, propped up by contracts with three Avalon hotels. "We didn't lose any of our businesses and we've rehired all our employees," Hoefs said. "There's a lot of pent up demand. People are looking to go outdoors for getaways." According to the Island Company, which operates nearly 200 hotel rooms on the island, occupancy has been stronger than expected. The company's historic 95-room Hotel Atwater is consistently operating at about 70-75% capacity, Rusack said. On particularly strong weekends, he said, occupancy will jump to around 90%. Despite the upward trends and the island's slow return to a semblance of pre-pandemic life, business owners are under no illusion they will be able to recoup their losses. "They basically have to draw a line through 2020 and that money will not be recovered," Luttjohann said. "Their



People take an eco-tour of Catalina Island, Friday, May 7, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

version of recovery is getting back to 2018 or 2019 numbers but not to regain losses. That's literally impossible." While businesses across the nation struggle to find workers, Rusack said the island's employment picture is uniquely complicated. About 15% of

the Island Company's seasonal workforce, he said, comes from foreign countries, a hiring model that has been upended because of federal policies halting work visa programs. The company's zip line, rope course and eco-tours are operating, but some of its other activities and businesses remain shuttered, Rusack said, including one of the company's most prominent restaurants, the Avalon Grille, its spa and semi-submersible boat tour. Further reopenings are fully dependent on guidance from the CDC and Los Angeles County, he said.

Last July, the conservancy projected a budget shortfall of as much as \$1.5 million. But through a \$1.1 million federal Payment Protection Program loan, as well as temporary furloughs for 75% of staff and other cost-saving measures, the organization ended the year in the black, according to Budrovich. The organization is currently auditing its finances, Budrovich said, so he can't say exactly how much was netted. Whatever the amount, there is still a lot of catching up to do, he said. The nonprofit owns about 80% of land on the island, with rents being the top revenue source, Budrovich said. Groups such as the Boy Scouts rent space on the island for nature outings and education but those trips have been canceled since the start of the pandemic. Budrovich said they could begin as early as June. But he noted that the visiting groups also have been deprived of revenue so the conservancy is working with them to determine how best to move forward. Island officials will also have to work hard to re-engage its volunteer workforce. During a normal year, Budrovich said, the conservancy benefits from around 10,000 volunteer hours, during which people work in the field doing science, cleanup and invasive

plant removal. The pandemic wiped out those volunteer opportunities. The sharp decline in Catalina's tourism and population did have one bright spot. Flora and fauna flourished during the pandemic, Budrovich said. Scripps's murrelet, a species of bird that breeds on the island, had its biggest nesting season ever because there were fewer people to disturb them, he said. Catalina is home to hundreds of plant and animal species, including 60 that are found nowhere else in the world. Conservation of the island's wildlife and natural beauty is crucial for the environment but also as a draw for tourism. Many staff members were shifted from their old positions to take roles related to conservation, including watching hours of live camera feed footage. As a result, the conservancy spotted a rare shrew on the island after a 15-year search. "We found them in two separate areas, which means there's at least two populations," Budrovich said. Last year, the conservancy discovered a new species of bat living on the island. Now, the organization is working to identify a second bat species, a sighting that likely would not have happened during a normal year, Budrovich said. Even during a time of tumultuous change and challenge for Catalina, its locals, businesses and ecosystems have demonstrated a resilience that has kept the island a beloved destination for decades. "When people come to the island, they feel like they're in another world. Yes, it's Southern California but it also feels like the south of France or some small Italian village," said Rusack, the Catalina Island Company's CEO. "It's just this amazing feeling of 'I got away.'" ■

CITY OF LONG BEACH
BID OPPORTUNITIES

Table with 3 columns: TITLE, BID NUMBER, DUE DATE. Rows include Uninterruptible Power Supply, BMW Motorcycle Parts & Service, Furnish and Deliver Gaskets, Latex Gloves, New Tires, Sewer Lateral Pilot Project, Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Programs, On-Call Services for Emergency Water and Sewer Repair, Construction Management & Inspection Svcs For Equipping of Well Commission 22A, Professional Engineering & Recycling/Solid Waste Management Consultant Services Development Opportunity at the LB Airport, Reconstruct Taxiway L Project at the Long Beach Airport (Re-Bid of R-7178), Special Event Equipment Rental, Colorado Lagoon Open Channel Phase 2A.

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

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Human-I-T expanded amid the pandemic, bringing computers and internet access to families, individuals across the nation



John Murray stands among boxes of electronics that the staff of Human-I-T has to sort through at the warehouse in Bell Gardens Tuesday, May 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

With the pandemic forcing school online, a harsh spotlight was shined on the digital divide, with many children in disadvantaged communities having little to no computer or internet access. Cities, school districts and organizations like Long Beach-based Human-I-T have worked toward digital inclusion but there is still a long way to go.

Founded in 2012, Human-I-T has “one solution for two problems,” according to Director of Programs AJ Middleton. The nonprofit collects electronic waste from across the country—including computers, servers, printers, phones and other electronics. Donations come from large corporations, city governments, private individuals and anyone else looking to get rid of old electronics, Middleton said.

Donations that are in bad shape are disposed of in an environmentally responsible way. Items that can be refurbished are then redistributed back into disadvantaged communities at little to no cost. But the hardware is only half the battle.

“Everything is moving more and more online, even before the pandemic,” Middleton said. “Applying for jobs, school work, telehealth, all of these things live online or are made significantly easier if you are able to access them online.”

One of Human-I-T services is providing internet hotspots for \$15 per month for low-income families and

individuals. But the nonprofit recently announced it is participating in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program to provide internet access for free while funding lasts.

Funded by \$3.2 billion through the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, which established the Emergency Broadband Connectivity Fund after becoming law this year, the EBB program provides eligible households with discounts of up to \$50 per month for broadband services. The program also offers a one-time discount of up to \$100 on a laptop.

Through EBB, Human-I-T is offering a laptop and home internet bundle for as low as \$105. The EBB program runs for six months or until funding runs out, whichever comes first, Middleton said. In California, 25% of school-age students and almost 40%

of low-income students did not have reliable internet access last semester, according to the company.

One of the nonprofit’s most recent local programs was a partnership with the city of Long Beach, which used CARES Act funding to supply Long Beach residents with Microsoft surface tablets and mobile hotspots.

“Giving someone a computer really isn’t enough. It’s just a tool,” Middleton said. “So we want to provide them with other resources like literacy training.”

Because of the heightened urgency to connect families to the internet, while most businesses and nonprofits struggled through the pandemic—many not making it through—Human-I-T thrived. Over the past year, the nonprofit expanded, opening a facility in Detroit, its first outside of

California.

Between Detroit, its warehouse in Bell and its Long Beach headquarters, Human-I-T staff has grown to 160. Middleton said that two-thirds of the staff joined the nonprofit amid the pandemic, with more on the way.

Monetary donations account for only 1% of Human-I-T’s revenue, according to spokesperson Padric Gonzales. Upsell services, including data destruction for businesses and agencies that donate equipment, is a major source of income for the nonprofit. Additionally, some refurbished equipment, such as medical, can be sold for a small profit, Gonzales said.

In 2020, Human-I-T generated \$18 million in donations—monetary and goods—and grant funding, according to Gonzales.

Human-I-T does not have any immediate plans for further physical expansion, Middleton said, noting that Detroit was a natural move as it is one of the most disconnected cities in the country.

Literacy training, a service the organization launched a year ago, already has supported about 2,200 people, Middleton said. To date, the nonprofit has helped connect about 68,000 households to the internet and has distributed about 70,000 devices.

“A lot of us take for granted our laptop, home internet, our smartphone, but ... many are not connected,” Gonzales said. “It’s common for people to dismiss, ‘Well it’s only 15% of people who don’t have access.’ But 15% of millions of people, that’s a huge number.” ■



Ruben China fills orders with the refurbished stock at Human-I-T warehouse in Bell Gardens Tuesday, May 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Mentorship nonprofit helps two North Long Beach students graduate from Jordan High with top honors

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Reporter

Jocelyn Felix, 17, and Randy Roman, 18, are two recent success stories for the student mentorship nonprofit CAM-EO after they were selected to lead their graduation as class valedictorians this year at Jordan High School.

“Being a valedictorian at Jordan, I feel, is like a great achievement because it’s such a rigorous program,” Felix said. The students were required to maintain straight A grades their entire time in school, as well as participate in extracurricular activities to make valedictorian.

The two North Long Beach residents were selected out of 24 other seniors with GPAs over 4.0 who are on their way to college. Jordan High will host its graduation ceremony on June 16 at Veterans Stadium.

“It’s pretty remarkable to have so many of our CAMEO students make valedictorian,” Maria Harris, CAMEO’s mentoring chair, said.

A long-time program by the Assistance League of Long Beach, CAMEO has been operating in Long Beach for over 30 years and is funded through phil-



Jocelyn Felix, left, and Randy Roman were selected as valedictorians at Jordan High School. Photo courtesy of CAMEO.

anthropic donations. Students within the CAMEO program are paired with a professional in a variety of industries who

act as one-on-one mentors to help the students cultivate a career path after high school or community college.

CAMEO students are selected based on recommendations from high school counselors. Students are eligible if they meet a 2.7 GPA requirement. The mentorship program focuses on assisting students who come from underserved and low-income communities.

Gail Bradley, CAMEO public relations chair, said many of the program’s students have parents who don’t speak English as a primary language.

“A lot of these students’ parents haven’t gone to college, so that process is not familiar to them,” Bradley said. “Three kids that I’ve mentored—all of those kids’ parents speak a different language.”

In the case of Roman and Felix, the two had parents who struggled to finish college. Their CAMEO mentors helped them navigate the sometimes confusing process of college applications.

Once a month, CAMEO hosts after-school events for the students to complete community service requirements. Both Roman and Felix attended these events at a local YMCA to volunteer in toy drives during the holidays. The students are also taken to museums and art galleries as part of the after-school events the program offers.

“A more affluent child may have gone to the Getty or something,” Bradley said. “We want to make sure these kids have the same opportunities.”

Roman is currently waiting for a scholarship to see if he will commit to Cal State Long Beach or UC San Diego next year, and Felix has her eyes set on becoming a future UCLA Bruin to study biology.

“It was always standard for me—go to school, get good grades,” Roman said. “But being able to walk up there in all white is an exciting thought.” ■

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Executive director of Long Beach Day Nursery steps down—and other nonprofit news briefs

■ By **TESS KAZENOFF**
Reporter

The executive director of the Long Beach Day Nursery, a nonprofit that provides education and early childcare for working parents, is stepping down at the end of the 2020-2021 school year, officials said.

Whitney Leathers joined the day nursery in 2014, having previously served as executive director of the Nevada Association for the Education of Young Children.

“Whitney’s unwavering dedication, passion and forward thinking resulted in new and better ways for Long Beach Day Nursery (LBDN) to prepare children for success in kindergarten and well into their future,” Board Chair Robyn Gordon-Peterson said in a statement. “Her commitment to the children and their families, love of learning, and her capacity to inspire, even in challenging times such as these, are the benchmarks of her leadership. She has continued to build on over 100 years of rich history that will allow LBDN to thrive in years to come.”

The Board of Directors named Jennifer Allen, currently associate executive director of the day nursery, as Leathers’ replacement after a national search.

The Long Beach Day Nursery serves more than 300 Long Beach children and their families each year.

Attend 2nd annual spousal caregivers’ symposium

On May 22, Well Spouse Association, a national nonprofit organization will host a virtual event from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The organization advocates for and addresses the needs of people who care for a chronically ill and/or disabled spouse, while providing support groups and other resources.



Executive Director Whitney Leathers, right, with children at the Long Beach Day Nursery and former mayor Beverly O'Neill. Courtesy photo.

Speakers include Arthur Kleinman, author of “The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and a Doctor,” Cynthia Lim, author of “Wherever You Are: A Memoir of Love, Marriage and Brain Injury,” and Kelly Rees, a sexologist who specializes in sexual issues and alternative relationships.

Attend the crowning of the next Miss, Mr., Ms. and Mx. Long Beach Pride in support of United Waves Scholarship Awards

On Sunday, May 23 at 7 p.m., for a \$10 door donation, join the International Imperial Court of Long Beach in crowning the next Miss/Mr./Ms./Mx Long

Beach Pride to raise funds for LGBTQ+ students living in or attending college around Long Beach. The scholarship is open to graduating high school seniors and current students at an accredited college or university.

In 2020, the organization held its first United Waves Scholarship Awards, awarding \$25,000 to students.

The International Imperial Court of Long Beach is the longest running LGBTQ nonprofit in the Long Beach area. Since its 1971 founding, over \$1 million has been raised for local community causes.

The event will be held at the Executive Suite nightclub, 3428 E. Pacific Coast Highway.

Celebrate Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month with Musical Theatre West

From May 27 to June 6, Musical Theatre West is virtually featuring selections of the musical “Allegiance,” to celebrate the closing of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, with special performances from Broadway and West Coast cast members.

“Allegiance,” with music and lyrics by Jay Kuo and book by Marc Acito, Jay Kuo and Lorenzo Thone, is set during the Japanese internment during World War II, with a framing story set in present day. It was inspired by the personal experiences of George Takei, who starred in the original Broadway production.

Actors who will be participating include Chad Takeda, Scott Watanabe, and Sam Tatsuo Tanabe.

Tickets are \$27.50 per household.

Cruise into a Memorial Day live drive-in concert for Rock for Vets fundraiser

On Monday, May 31 from 1 to 5 p.m. the Rock Club Music Is The Remedy will host a live drive-in concert featuring blues, soul and classic R&B music, headlined by the band Boxcar 7.

Rock for Vets is a program that helps local veterans heal through music.

The concert can be enjoyed from inside your car, or attendees can bring lawn chairs and sit in their designated parking spot. There will be food for purchase from local food trucks and a raffle.

Reservations must be made in advance at musicisitheremedy.org. Front row parking is \$120, general parking is \$80, motorcycle parking is \$20.

The concert will be located at the Long Beach Scottish Rite parking lot, 855 Elm Ave.

Check out a virtual Food & Wine Festival for AbilityFirst on June 6

Support children and adults with disabilities by enjoying a gourmet food and drink event from the comfort of your own home. The event includes live chef demonstrations, drink pairings, an online auction, and stories from AbilityFirst participants and their families.

VIP tickets, private dinner parties, and sponsorships are available for purchase, or just grab a general admission ticket and participate in the online auction. All ticket options can be found at one.bidpal.net/abilityfirst2021/welcome/.

For more information including a list of participating restaurants, sponsors, table host and VIP ticket sales, call 626-243-4845. ■



Lea Salonga and George Takei star in the original Broadway production of “Allegiance.” Courtesy photo.

THE LIST

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Rhonda Love

Executive Director
DreamKreator Studio
dreamkreator.org

Rhonda Love is an entertainment manager, producer, and the Executive Director of Dreamkreator Studio. Rhonda structures partnerships with corporate brands, nonprofits, municipalities, and high-profile public figures. She is currently a Board Member of the Downtown Long Beach Alliance and serves on their Special Events & Sponsorship and Strategic Planning Committees.



Laura Thor

Mgr of Programs & Processes
Shared Science
sharedscience.org

Laura Thor began with Shared Science as a Class Aide in 2014 and we are enthusiastic to acknowledge her in her newest role as Manager of Programs and Processes, in which she oversees staff deployment, program scheduling, and HR processes for the organization. Laura will complete her business degree from CSULB in 2022.



Naomi Rainey-Pierson Erdmann

President
Long Beach Branch NAACP
lbacnaacp.org

Naomi Rainey-Pierson Erdmann is a civil rights activist and social justice consultant with a rich history of community service in Long Beach. A retired educator, she is the trustee of the Rainey-Pierson Trust which funds education, cancer research and the arts. She serves on Long Beach Memorial Hospital's board and is an ambassador for St. Mary's Hospital. Rainey-Pierson also serves as a commissioner on the Long Beach Board of Water.



Michelle Byerly

Executive Director
The Nonprofit Partnership
tnpsocal.org

Michelle Byerly has worked in the nonprofit sector for over 20 years in Southern California. She has had the honor to lead The Nonprofit Partnership since 2016, building the capacity of nonprofits so they can have an impact in their communities. Michelle is passionate about fostering collaborations and advocating for the sector.



Sharon McLucas

Founder/Executive Director
Forgotten Images
facebook.com/
ForgottenImagesExhibit

Sharon McLucas' experience serving her community spans decades and includes coordinating the Long Beach MLK Parade, serving as president of the LB Poly High Football Booster Club and NCNW, as well as positions on committees with the NAACP, Leadership Long Beach and CME Church. In addition to running her nonprofit traveling museum Forgotten Images alongside her husband David, she currently serves on the board of directors for the African American Cultural Center of Long Beach and the African American Heritage Society of Long Beach.



Adrian Rivera

Board Member/Volunteer
Meals on Wheels of Long Beach
mowlb.org

Adrian Rivera has been volunteering with Meals on Wheels of Long Beach since 2013 and became a board member in 2015. "I'm so proud to be part of MOWLb and am a better person because of it. Everyone here is very caring and like one big, happy family."



Volunteers load cars with boxes of food during 9th District Councilmember Rex Richardson's second food distribution for Long Beach families at Jordan High School in response to COVID-19. The event was in partnership with Community Action Partnership of Orange County, Alpha Phi Alpha and Power of One Foundation. May 30, 2020. Photo by Stephen Carr.

State of Nonprofits

(Continued from Page 1)

match.

"Nonprofits have truly filled the gap that the public and private sector cannot reach," said Marcelle Epley, president and chief executive of Long Beach Community Foundation. As a result, the foundation—which provides grants to local nonprofits—has had a "banner year" of donations, Epley said.

According to a preliminary report, the foundation gave \$7.73 million to nonprofits last year, compared to \$4.8 million in 2019, supported by an increase in contributions to its charitable funds. The virtual fundraiser Long Beach Gives raised \$1.7 million last year, more than double the amount raised in 2019.

That trend is expected to continue not just locally, but nationwide.

A study by the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University projects that charitable giving will increase by 4.1% this year, with increased giving by individuals, households and corporations driving the upward trend.

These projections, the research team emphasized, will be highly dependent on overall economic conditions.

Some of that increased giving may go to nonprofits focused on arts and cultural programming, which have suffered significant revenue losses during the pandemic as a result of limitations placed on gatherings and in-person events.

With the focus on organizations providing basic needs services, nonprofits in arts and cultural programming have struggled, especially as fundraising opportunities remain limited.

"Unfortunately those types of programs have not risen to the surface as a [funding] priority," Epley said. "I believe that with summer coming and things opening back up there will be investment into those critical areas that make a community vibrant, thriving."

International City Theatre Director caryn desai, who prefers her name in lowercase, said that after an especially successful financial year in 2019, the pan-

demic ripped a hole in the organization's budget that made its board of directors gasp.

"They're seeing numbers they're not used to," desai said.

The theater's revenues, which consist primarily of subscription fees and single ticket sales, have plummeted, down 90% from the previous year. "I'm taking a beating because virtual performances don't sell," desai said.

Still, the theater director said she's had to invest in some level of virtual programming—or risk losing her audience altogether.

"It's what's available to us to stay connected," she said. "We want to make sure that when we do open, the community is still there, that we're still viable in their eyes."

Other arts organizations have fared slightly better. Stan DeWitt, artistic director of the Long Beach Youth Chorus, said the choir has done fairly well from a fundraising perspective, and because of its small size and low overhead costs has suffered less during the pandemic.

"Being small is like being a sports car in this pandemic," DeWitt said.

For his organization, the choir director said, recruiting new members and keeping them connected to the group has been the biggest challenge.

"Our summer plans are to do as much social stuff as possible to re-engage the kids," he said. "Keeping them engaged has really been priority number one."

Despite the continued challenges the pandemic has dealt to nonprofit organizations, local experts are confident that the city's rich nonprofit landscape will recover.

"The nonprofits we're talking to are ready to go and they're looking for ways to connect to each other," said Michelle Byerly, executive director of The Nonprofit Partnership. "We're resilient." ■

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The List of the June 1 edition of the Long Beach Business Journal will highlight Port industry employees that make a difference in their work. To be included, please email ads@lbpost.com

2021 Celebration of Long Beach Branch NAACP's 80th Anniversary



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