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Fluffy's Sno-Balls brings taste of New Orleans to Long Beach



Kevyn Lee picks out flavored syrup to make New Orleans sno-balls in his Long Beach shop Fluffy's Sno-Balls. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Reporter

As a young graduate from Tuskegee University, Kevyn Lee had just moved back into his childhood home with his grandmother in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit the following weekend.

The house, less than a block from a busted levee in the city's Ninth Ward, filled with six feet of water. The water line stopped just below his college diploma, which he had hung on the wall days earlier.

With his home and most of his belongings destroyed in the hurricane, Lee headed to Los Angeles, with the dream of one day opening his own business.

More than 15 years later, Lee is living his dream with a new business that celebrates a classic frozen treat from his home town of New Orleans.

In a land of mostly ice cream and frozen yogurt spots, Long

Beach now has Fluffy's Sno-Balls, a New Orleans-style shaved ice shop on Long Beach Boulevard near the corner of Anaheim Street. The shop had a soft opening last month and celebrated its grand opening on June 11.

New Orleans sno-balls date back to the 1930s when they were made with the first ice-shaving machines. Unlike a typical snow cone, the ice is fine and fluffy with a snow-like texture. It's topped with sweet syrups and condensed milk.

They're especially popular in the summertime when temperatures top 100 degrees and the air is thick with humidity.

Lee said he learned the importance of quality and authenticity while working at his grandmother's sno-ball stand as a kid.

For his shop, he imported a special shaved ice machine called "Southern Snow" from Louisiana and shaves from a block of ice to get the finest powder. He then layers a fresh ice ball with rich syrup

made from cane sugar.

Fluffy's features 41 flavors, ranging from the classic strawberry and watermelon, to pralines, sangria and candy apple. Those looking for a boost can fill their sno-ball with graham cracker-crusting cheesecake or French vanilla ice cream.

The shop has a Big Easy ambiance with jazz music, colorful Mardi Gras beads and a sweet, powdered sugar smell.

"I wanted it to appeal to all the senses, to be the touch, taste, sound of New Orleans," Lee said.

Lee, a 41-year-old Palmdale resident, said he chose the Long Beach Boulevard location because of its diversity.

"I wanted to be closer to the beach and be in an area that was very eclectic, vibrant and diverse," he said.

Born in New Orleans, Lee was the first in his family to graduate from college and always wanted to

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Businesses are struggling to staff up following pandemic layoffs

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Many businesses furloughed or laid off most or all of their staff when they were forced to shutter indefinitely due to the outbreak of COVID-19. For a year, re-openings and re-closings and re-re-openings were sporadic and wreaked havoc on owners and employees alike.

Now, as the state prepares to fully reopen on June 15, Long Beach business owners are struggling to find workers—a nationwide issue. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 83% of industry association economists say employers are having a harder time hiring today than they did five years ago and 91% of state and local chambers say the labor shortage is slowing economic recovery.

"If this continues, it will prolong the attempt for a full economic recovery and for certain sectors, like hospitality, it will prevent any type of momentum from fully reopening," said Jeremy Harris, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, in an email. "If workers are not available that may slow our local recovery. We take this very seriously and have begun to work with partners to learn more and how we can better address the situation."

On June 1, the U.S. Chamber launched America Works, a nationwide initiative to combat the shortage. The program is advocating for federal and state policy changes to bolster training for in-demand jobs, remove barriers to work and double the number of work visas.

But employers and agencies cannot point to a singular reason for the labor shortage. Some people are not working because of the continued fear of COVID-19, others have lingering childcare issues and, thanks to added benefits that expire

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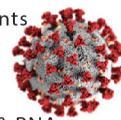
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The state is 'opening up' on June 15; what does that mean for Long Beach?



At Popbar in The Hangar at Long Beach Exchange, employees have disinfectant spray handy at all times and wear face masks, gloves and are separated from customers by a plexiglass barrier, Tuesday, June 30, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

STAFF REPORT

After 15 months of restrictions on how residents work, eat, socialize and otherwise gather, the state is finally shedding most of the measures enacted to stem the spread of COVID-19.

But the regulations from federal, state and local authorities have at times conflicted and changed as this significant date draws near.

Here's what we know about June 15 and how the new rules will affect residents who live and work in Long Beach.

Masking

One of the biggest areas of confusion has centered on masks and whether people still need to wear them.

Long Beach issued guidance on Thursday affirming that it is aligning with state and federal health authorities.

Fully vaccinated people do not need to wear a facial covering except in certain settings:

- Hospitals and medical facilities
- Public transportation (airplanes, buses, taxis, etc.)
- Indoor K-12 schools

- Childcare and other youth settings
- Congregate living settings (such as homeless shelters and detention facilities)

Facial coverings remain required for unvaccinated individuals in indoor public settings and businesses, including restaurants, retail establishments and entertainment centers.

You may want to keep your mask handy even if you're vaccinated, however, as individual businesses may set mask rules if they chose.

And businesses may differ in how they approach verifying whether people who patronize or attend events have been vaccinated.

Dr. Mark Ghaly, secretary of the California Health and Human Services agency, conceded this week that "self-attestation"—essentially an honor system—is not perfect.

"Of course all systems of verification are fraught with challenges," he said, adding that state officials determined "people's sense of being able to protect their own information" and the ability to "operate a business in a certain way" were important goals.

"And then business owners do have




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a choice,” he said. “... Some business owners very well may decide that the honor system ... is not sufficient, and they’re going to require all patrons to their business to wear masks.”

Large indoor gatherings

For indoor gatherings that include more than 5,000 people—such as conventions, concerts, festivals—the following requirements are in place:

- Verification of fully vaccinated status or a pre-entry negative COVID-19 test is required of all attendees.
- Information is required to be prominently placed on all communications and ticketing systems to ensure guests are aware of vaccination requirements.

Large outdoor gatherings

For outdoor gatherings with more than 10,000 people—such as music or food festivals, car shows, large endurance events, marathons, parades, sporting events and concerts—the following requirements are in place:

- Verification of fully vaccinated status or pre-entry negative test result is strongly recommended for all attendees.
- Attendees who do not verify vaccination status should be asked to wear face coverings.
- Information is required to be prominently placed on all communications, including the reservation and ticketing systems, to ensure guests are aware that the state strongly recommends that they be fully vaccinated, obtain a negative COVID-19 test prior to attending the event or wear a face covering.

Workplace settings

Guidance for employers is still in flux.

The state regulatory commission that sets safety rules for employers voted in a policy on June 3, but rescinded that policy on June 9. The commission is expected to vote again on June 17, with any rules taking effect on June 28.

As of now, a strict policy adopted in November remains in place for employers and workplaces: Employees are still required to wear face coverings and socially distance while at work regardless of whether they’ve been vaccinated.

Capacity limits

Aside from restrictions on very large indoor and outdoor events, all COVID-19-related capacity limits on businesses including fitness centers and gyms, restaurants, bars, recreation facilities, retail stores and public facilities will be lifted on Tuesday, June 15.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced in April that if infection rates of the coronavirus remained low, the economy would largely reopen and the state would do away with its “Blueprint for a Safer Economy,” which established color-coded tiers that restricted activity based on a particular county’s infection rates. ■

Relativity Space unveils world’s first fully 3D-printed reusable rocket; announces \$650M in new funding

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Long Beach-based Relativity Space unveiled plans this month for the Terran R, the world’s first fully reusable, entirely 3D printed rocket.

The two-stage Terran R measures in at 216 feet long—about as tall as a 20-story building—with a 16-foot diameter and a 5-meter payload fairing, or nose cone. The craft’s engines, first and second stages, and payload fairing will be fully reusable and capable of launching over 20,000 kilograms to low Earth orbit.

“Terran R is at the cutting edge of rocket innovation and design,” Zach Dunn, senior vice president of Engineering and Manufacturing at Relativity, said in a statement. “[It] will be well suited to serve customers’ evolving needs in the large satellite constellation industry, while also representing a significant leap towards achieving our mission of building humanity’s industrial base off of Earth.”

The Terran R will be outfitted with seven Aeon R rocket engines, each capable of 302,000 pounds of thrust. The Aeon R is a high-pressure version of the gas generator cycle Aeon 1 that will propel the Terran 1. Both engines use cryogenic liquid methane and oxygen.

Beginning in 2024, the Terran R will launch from Relativity’s complex at Cape Canaveral. The firm also announced the recent signing of its first launch contract for the new rocket but did not disclose any details.

Eventually, the Terran R also will serve as a space freighter offering point-to-point service between Earth, the moon and Mars, the firm said.

The new rocket is 20 times larger than the firm’s first design, the Terran 1, which measures in at 115 feet tall with a diameter of 7 feet, 6 inches with the capability of deliv-



Relativity Space’s new fully reusable 3D-printed Terran R rocket. Image courtesy of Relativity Space.

ering payloads between 700-1,250 kilograms depending on orbit. The Terran 1 is still in the development phase with the first launch expected later this year.

The company’s software and data-driven proprietary printing process allows for unique design geometries and production speeds not possible with traditional manufacturing, according to the company. Relativity’s rockets are made with 100-times fewer parts in less than 60 days, the firm said.

“There’s an organic relationship between 3D printing and reusability, and it gives us an unparalleled advantage to design the best fully reusable rocket possible,” Relativity CEO and co-founder Tim Ellis said in the announcement. “Over the last year, we found ourselves being asked by the market to accelerate development of our larger launch vehicle, so we knew it was time to double down on our existing plans and scale the Terran R program even faster and build production capabilities at scale sooner.”

To expedite production on the Terran R, the company raised \$650 million in a Series E equity funding

round led by Fidelity Management & Research Company, LLC. Other investors include Mark Cuban, Jared Leto, Spencer Rascoff as well as funds and accounts managed by Baillie Gifford, BlackRock, Centricus, Coatue, K5 Global, Soroban Capital, Tiger Global, Tribe Capital and more.

To date, Relativity has raised \$1.3 billion and the company’s total valuation stands at \$4.2 billion, according to a company spokesperson.

Founded in 2015, Relativity relocated its headquarters from Los Angeles to Long Beach in summer 2020. The firm occupies a 120,000-square-foot building in the Pacific Edge industrial park at East Burnett Street and Redondo Avenue.

In a February interview with the Business Journal, a company spokesperson said the company is working with city staff to identify opportunities for expansion within Long Beach. Since moving to the city, Relativity has quadrupled its staff to more than 400 with plans to add an additional 200 employees this year.

Relativity has secured multiple private and government contracts, including the U.S. Department of Defense, NASA and global security and aerospace company Lockheed Martin.

“From our founding days in Y Combinator just five years ago, we planned on 3D printing Terran 1 and then Terran R,” Ellis said. “Today we are one step closer to this goal. We were inspired to make this vision a reality, and believe there needs to be dozens to hundreds of companies working to build humanity’s multi-planetary future on Mars.”

“Scalable, autonomous 3D printing is inevitably required to thrive on Mars,” Ellis added, “and Terran R is the second product step in a long-term journey Relativity is planning ahead.” ■



Relativity Space’s Terran 1, left, and Terran R rockets. Image courtesy of Relativity Space.

City Council approves \$2.5M for Queen Mary operations and repair work plans

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Reporter

The Long Beach City Council on June 8 unanimously approved \$2.5 million in funding for the Queen Mary to help plan for critical repair work and operations over the next six months as the city considers the aging vessel's future.

Long Beach recently took over daily operations of the ship for the first time in more than 40 years after its operator, Eagle Hospitality Trust, chose to give up the lease in Delaware bankruptcy court. Long Beach owns the Queen Mary but for decades has leased the ship to a string of operators who have struggled financially.

With the ship in its control, the city is now tasked with deciding how much to invest in critical repairs. An inspection report in April determined the ship would need at least \$23 million in repairs to remain viable in the next two years.

Councilwoman Cindy Allen, whose 2nd District includes the Queen Mary, said the initial funding is the first step to saving the ship.

"It's going to be absolutely critical that we continue regular operations and maintenance on the ship as we take back ownership for the first time in decades," she said.

Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia said the city now has a unique opportunity to focus on short and longterm plans for its historic icon.

"Preservation has to be at the center of what we do moving forward," he said.

The plan includes \$500,000 from Tidelands Critical Infrastructure funds as part of a contract with engineering firm Moffatt & Nichols to begin testing and planning for safety projects. The ship will need a minimum of \$5 million to cover immediate repairs as the city works to identify other funding sources, officials said.

Third District Council Member Suzie Price was the lone council member to express her concerns. While Price said she would vote for the immediate funding to keep operations running, she had concerns about the longterm costs and use of Tidelands funds or taxpayer dollars to maintain the ship.



The Queen Mary off the coast of Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

The council, she said, will have to make tough choices this year.

"There is no doubt that the Queen is an icon for the city of Long Beach," she said. "But the cost of true historic preservation of this ship is significant and it is an unrealistic expenditure for the city at this time."

The five top safety projects include: a bilge pump system to pump out water in the event of flooding in the ship's hull; an alarm system for water intrusion; bulkhead testing and repairs; removal of about two dozen corded lifeboats; and a new electrical generator.

Economic Development Director John Keisler in a presentation said the ship's hull is not currently leaking but is in need of an early warning system to prevent bigger problems.

"The faster we move the more we can prevent," he said.

Depending on construction bids, costs and funding, Keisler said the city is hopeful it can complete the five crucial safety projects by the end of the year and reopen the ship. The Queen Mary in the meantime remains closed until further notice.

The city expects to have a better estimate of repair costs and funding sources that it will present to the city council next month.

The funding also includes a \$2 million contract with Evolution Hospitality, a third-party contractor that has managed the ship's daily operations for the past decade. The contract is for six months with the option to renew and will cover monthly utility fees, security, landscaping and other costs to keep the one-million-square-foot facility running.

Eagle Hospitality Trust filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January with a total of more than \$500 million in debt. The

ship's lease was set to go to auction but did not receive any bidders, while the city had been locked in a legal battle with former operator Urban Commons over a litany of failed lease obligations.

A marine survey released in 2017 found that the ship could need nearly \$300 million in critical repairs to stay viable over the next several years. The city that year issued \$23 million in bonds and Tidelands funds to former operator Urban Commons to fix some of the most critical repairs listed in the marine survey, but the funds ran out before many of the repairs were completed.

And now, a report from a city-hired naval architecture and marine engineering firm called Elliott Bay Design Group, which inspected the ship on April 28, says the vessel is vulnerable to flooding or possibly even capsizing if critical work isn't addressed. ■

Free forum to explore Long Beach's growing space sector

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

From critical World War II aircraft to rockets for blasting into space, Long Beach's role in the aerospace sector cannot be understated. For decades, the city has been integral to the industry and now the space sector in particular is burgeoning.

In a June 17 forum hosted by the Long Beach Economic Partnership, Accelerate Long Beach will examine the booming sector and why space companies continue moving into the city.

"We're rapidly becoming one of the fastest growing space hubs in North

America," LBEP Board Chair Randal Hernandez said in an email. "These jobs are mostly high skilled engineering and design roles, which is perfect since CSULB produces so many graduates in those fields."

Since 2015, Long Beach's space sector has been in a constant state of expansion. First came Virgin Galactic, which quickly became Virgin Orbit. Since then, a slew of space companies have relocated their headquarters to Long Beach, including SpinLaunch, Rocket Lab and Relativity Space. One recent addition to the Long Beach space scene is Morf3D, a company that specializes in 3D printing components for aerospace and defense.

SpaceX also recently leased a portion of Pier T at the Port of Long Beach but the company's headquarters remains in San Pedro.

As of January 2020, Long Beach's aerospace sector accounts for over 6,500 direct jobs, according to the partnership.

The virtual forum will include insights from space and technology business leaders, who will speak about why their respective companies chose Long Beach as their home. The panelists, including Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart, Relativity Space Vice President of Regulatory and Government Affairs Caryn Schenewerk, GXO Inc. founder and CEO Mandy Vaughn, Long Beach Airport Di-

rector Cynthia Guidry, Cal State Long Beach Department of Economics Chair Seiji Steimetz and CSULB Office of Economic Research Associate Director Robert Kleinhenz, will also participate in a live Q&A.

"Attracting companies like SpaceX, Relativity Space, Morf3D and others ensures we don't experience the brain drain that some other cities are facing now," said Hernandez. "It keeps high paying jobs local so we maintain a strong tax base to support the equitable recovery that the city is working hard towards."

The free, virtual event will take place from 10 a.m. to noon on June 17. To register, visit lbep.org/accelerate/. ■

Developer reveals plans for senior living facility in East Long Beach

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Operators of a multinational chain of senior living homes who want to develop a new project in East Long Beach, recently presented their plans to residents for what could be an 86-unit facility if the city approves it.

Sunrise Senior Living, which runs 332 communities across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, wants to build on a site just south of Wardlow Road and Los Coyotes Diagonal.

Phillip Kroskin, senior vice president of real estate for Sunrise, said that the project would consist of 86 units, with 109 beds that would serve seniors who need assisted living help as well as memory care.

Fifty of the units would be for assisted living with the remaining 36 reserved for memory care. The project would be buffered from surrounding residences from existing buildings to the north, east and south of the proposed site.

The two-story project would be built behind the recently closed Ralphs grocery store on Los Coyotes Diagonal and could cost as much as \$50 million. Sunrise has no plans to expand the project footprint to take over the vacant grocery store site, Kroskin said.

“We’re going to stick with the 86 units and let someone else figure out the best use of that building,” Kroskin said.

The project is in the very early review stages required by the city for a project of this size.

It’s currently in the pre-application process and the public meeting came at the request of Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flanigan, who said she encourages all developers to meet with constituents early to get feedback from the community.

“Not every business takes me up on it and, as is the nature of economics, not all proposed projects move forward or are appropriate for any given area,” Mungo wrote in an email to residents. “However, they should do it because it is the right thing to do.”

A housing developer backed out of proposed plans to build residential housing at the site in 2018 after residents opposed the project.

If Sunrise decides to move forward with the project, it will have to submit a full site-plan review to the city as well as apply for a conditional-use permit to operate the senior living facility on that parcel, said Patricia Diefenderfer, the city’s planning bureau manager. Both of those would have to be approved by the city’s Planning Commission.

The project would also require a traffic analysis to determine how it

would affect vehicle flow in the area as well as a noise study and water and air quality analyses.

Kroskin said he was hopeful that the project could get through that process in the next eight months and construction could start in late 2022 or early 2023.

He added that it typically takes about 19 months for Sunrise projects to be built, which means it could open by 2024 if Sunrise decides to move ahead with its proposal and

gains city approval.

Residents were generally supportive of the project but raised concerns about the effect on parking and the city’s emergency response network.

The project currently includes 51 parking spaces, some of which will be used by employees, but Kroskin noted that most of the residents won’t drive. The average age of their guests is 84 or older, Kroskin said.

He said that, on average, their fa-

cilities could see about seven to 10 ambulances per month.

Sunrise operates similar facilities in Seal Beach, Huntington Beach and Palos Verdes. Kroskin said that the price points at the Long Beach site would be comparable to the one in Seal Beach and the region as a whole.

A studio suite at the Seal Beach facility starts at \$182 per day. A two-room suite is \$249 per day. ■

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Permitting delays endanger the city's recovery, but a new initiative could offer solutions

■ By **ANTHONY PIGNATARO**
Reporter

At a time when residential construction is booming across California, Long Beach residents are struggling with ever-rising home prices and a shortage of low- and moderate-income housing.

While some of those problems plague the state and nation as well, paralyzing permit approval delays at the city's Building and Safety Bureau are also contributing to the problem, industry experts, builders and even city officials acknowledge.

"The city can't manipulate hardwood lumber prices, but they can pull the lever on local regulatory infrastructure," said Adam Fowler, director of research for Beacon Economics in Los Angeles. While acknowledging that Long Beach's post-pandemic economic recovery is happening in many ways, Fowler added that "if jobs don't have beds, then you're artificially constraining any sort of growth."

Diana Coronado, vice president of the Building Industry Association's Los Angeles/Ventura chapter, is also unhappy with the permitting delays.

"Our membership has expressed concern with delays in the city's building process," she said. "Administrative delays should not stop critical housing from coming online, particularly during a housing crisis."

Four councilmembers—Cindy Allen, Rex Richardson, Daryl Supernaw and Mary Zendejas—agree with Fowler and Coronado. They've proposed sweeping reforms for the building permit office that include software updates, new hiring priorities and even a "shot clock" with deadlines aimed at keeping city officials on track.

"As the city pursues a robust economic recovery, the ability to receive, approve, and execute building permits in a timely manner will have a significant impact on Long Beach's ability to thrive as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic," states a memo outlining their new "Long Beach BUILD Initiative," which the councilmembers will propose at the June 15 council meeting.

A May 11 memo from Development Services Director Oscar Orci to City Manager Tom Modica stated that turnaround times for issuing even minor construction permits "have not met the City's goals nor

the needs or expectations of our customers."

When asked to comment on the BUILD memo, Development Services spokesman Rick de la Torre sent a statement saying department officials recently began offering limited in-person service, are continuing to improve its permit processing system and look forward to discussing the proposals with the council.

The BUILD Initiative memo highlights a number of potential problems with permitting, which have been delaying developers and contractors from completing even minor home improvement jobs for hundreds of days. Many of the delays stem from a nearly 50% drop in full-time staffing levels at the permit center during the pandemic, forcing the city to use temporary employees and third-party contractors.

The delays, which have hurt local contractors and architects, aren't happening in other Southern California cities.

"We work in several other cities and they're just taking three weeks," said Jonathan Glasgow, principal architect with the Long Beach firm Interstices Architecture. "It's four to five months for the city of Long Beach."

In addition to slowing the economic recovery, the BUILD Initiative memo said permitting delays are also hurting the city's ability to combat homelessness. The

initiative memo notes that one out of every 200 Long Beach residents is experiencing homelessness.

The inability to approve new housing in a timely manner may also be adding to the city's worsening cost of living. A 2019 Smartasset report, which is cited in the BUILD Initiative memo, found that Long Beach was the third worst city in the nation in terms of affordable rent, with average rent rising by nearly 25% but median household incomes increasing by just 12%.

Permitting delays are also exposing the city to "significant legal liability" from its inability to meet state SB 330 mandates that residential, mixed-use and supportive housing developments come up for approval within 90 days of application and affordable housing projects get approved or rejected within 60 days of application, according to the BUILD Initiative memo.

"We are not a city that can afford to merely return to its pre-pandemic pace of housing construction," states the BUILD Initiative memo.

The BUILD Initiative includes three recommendations: a review of hiring practices in hopes of getting the permit center back up to full staff, a report on possible ways to update the city's permit application software and consideration of a "Development Shot Clock" to standardize approval times.

Failure to return the permit office to pre-pandemic staffing levels could "cripple our recovery plans" and keep the city from taking part in the federal American Jobs Plan, which is currently moving through Congress, the initiative memo noted.

Because the permit office was closed throughout the pandemic, all permit applications had to be conducted online, using email. The software used by the city, which hasn't been updated since its introduction in 2008, is problematic for anyone trying to submit plans and files for approval.

"You don't really know if they get something," Glasgow said. "Sometimes there's an automatic response, sometimes there's not."

As for the proposed shot clock, that could radically shorten the time needed to get a project appeal from the city. Texas instituted a regulatory shot clock for most types of land development in 2019, the BUILD Initiative memo notes, granting automatic approval to applications that haven't been approved or rejected within 30 days, according to the BUILD memo.

The council will discuss the BUILD Initiative at its June 15 meeting.

"We need to go back and fix the problem," Councilman Richardson said. "We're not in good times, and we need to fix this to get back in good times." ■



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

Long Beach to offer free block party permits in effort to limit illegal fireworks on July 4

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Long Beach will offer free block party permits for the upcoming Fourth of July holiday, but it's not just to celebrate—it's an attempt to crack down on illegal fireworks, which have stretched emergency resources thin over the past few years.

Under the plan approved June 1, people applying for the \$100 city permit to host a block party can now get the permit for free, but the applicant has to pledge the party will be a fireworks-free zone. All fireworks are illegal in Long Beach.

Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flanagan introduced the idea in hopes that it would create a community approach to stopping fireworks by putting more eyes on the street, which could make it easier to see where the fireworks are coming from and might also encourage people to report the use of fireworks in their neighborhoods.

"It is really unacceptable the lengths that some people go to to break the law and really terrorize our neighbors, our veterans, pets and our families," Mungo Flanagan said.

She said she hoped that the new pro-

gram would help put people on notice that illegal fireworks will not be tolerated in Long Beach.

It's unclear how many free permits could be issued this year, but an official with the city's Development Services Department said on average, the city receives about 70 applications for block party permits, and the elimination of cost this year could push it closer to 100. There won't be a cap on permit applications.

The city has tried to reduce illegal fireworks in recent years but the Fourth of July holiday and the days preceding it

are often filled with increased calls for service for local law enforcement.

During a 24-hour period during last year's holiday celebration, the Long Beach Police Department received 779 fireworks-related calls but issued just 13 citations due to California law requiring officers to witness the fireworks being set off.

The city prosecutor's office has created a portal where video and photo evidence can be submitted, which can be used to file criminal complaints against property owners. ■

Bluff Park plant shop Planted LB offers plants ‘you won’t find in other places’

■ By CHEANTAY JENSEN
Reporter

On a bright Thursday afternoon, Kate Hockett, owner of Planted LB, is in very good spirits. The moon and its “good” placement, she said, had a fair effect on her sunny disposition. But mostly she was still feeling the energy high from her shop’s grand opening party the weekend before.

“I felt almost like it had this energy of my wedding or something,” she said. “I’m not married, but just because it was dusted in magic.”

On Sunday, May 30, several hundred friends, family, neighbors and curious plant enthusiasts celebrated the arrival of Planted LB, a houseplant and flower boutique on the corner of Temple Avenue and Broadway, situated inside a Craftsman-style home turned-business-center. Debra Felipe, the building’s manager, estimates that the home was built in the early 1900s.

“This building used to have an ocean view,” Felipe said, a view now obstructed by newer apartment buildings and houses.

Selling out of nearly all her flower arrangements, potted plants, succulents and other gardening accessories was a promising sign for the first-time retail business owner who admits she had never planned to own a plant shop, but once the idea came to her, everything fell into place.

“I moved back to Long Beach, literally two weeks later decided to open a plant and flower shop, and two months later have this giant party where all my family comes together, all my friends, all my community,” Hockett said. “The next step is just booming success.”

Part of that success Hockett hopes to achieve isn’t a monetary one. Her mission is to help others find the same comfort and spiritual connection she said she’s discovered with plants. Before moving back to Long Beach, Hockett lived in San Francisco and for 11 years worked for social justice and women’s



Kate Hockett in her new store, Planted LB, in Bluff Park. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

empowerment nonprofits. She’s also an astrologer, a practice she said she’s studied for the last decade.

Over time, Hockett fused both passions, leading several international women’s retreats in Costa Rica and Guatemala with a yoga instructor, helping people find inner healing and support through life and relationship transitions with astrology.

The plants, she found, went hand-in-hand with cultivating a spiritual connection and improving self-care.

“A house plant is the greatest reflection of how you’re taking care of your body,” she said. “If you can’t find 30 seconds out of your week to give your plant a little bit of water, imagine what you’re giving your body, your mind, what you’re giving your spirit. It’s an investment and it’s an energetic reciprocity.”

The pandemic put an end to her retreats, but she continued to help others with astrology. Though her services were rendered over Zoom, Hockett said

she never felt too alone, despite the isolation. Tending for her 70-some houseplants, she said, also helped. Not in the sense that her plants provided viable relationships, but that she was showing up, taking care of something other than herself.

“When you show up for plants, you’re showing up for something bigger than you. You’re showing up for nature, you’re showing up for the world,” she said. “And so it just felt so natural to have a store because it’s an extension of that spiritual practice. Although I’ve been into astrology, and the retreats, and the prayer and the meditation, it’s like, houseplants are right up in there.”

Hockett said she’s designed her shop’s offerings toward two market categories she’s defined as the “rich mom avatar” and the “millennial avatar.” The former is geared toward the customer who might be looking for a unique potted gift, with a little more money to spend. Her orchid arrangements, for example, feature a bright orchid potted with an assortment of smaller plants and decorated with moss. Terrariums also fall in this category and feature various rocks, crystals and plant arrangements designed by Hockett.

The millennial category targets those trepidatious first-time plant buyers, who aren’t looking to spend more than \$30 on a plant but are eager to spruce up their home with a new leafy friend they won’t risk killing two weeks later.

“I think us millennials have this theory that if we’re not a green thumb, or if we kill the plant, it’s over, we’re done,” the 30-year-old said. “And I really want to get the message far and wide that you can do it. It’s not that hard, you just have to slow down and be a little bit mindful.”

For the “millennial,” she’s stocked a variety of succulents, snake plants, begonias and other “easy-peasy,” low-maintenance houseplants. Buyers can also peruse a selection of gardening accesso-

ries, such as clay pots, hand-dyed macrame hangers, plant racks and soil.

Though Hockett admits she had never quite envisioned a career of selling greenery, she said plants and flowers have always been a major presence in her life. Growing up in Belmont Shore, and later Alamitos Heights, Hockett described her family’s home as a jungle—plants and flowers on every surface, a leafy green always in eyesight.

For years, Hockett helped with her mother’s local landscaping business, which led to her own side-hustle designing flower arrangements for private events, such as weddings and business parties. Hockett continues this creative outlet on Fridays, where patrons can purchase \$25 grab-n-go flower bouquets arranged by Hockett and sourced from the Los Angeles Flower Market.

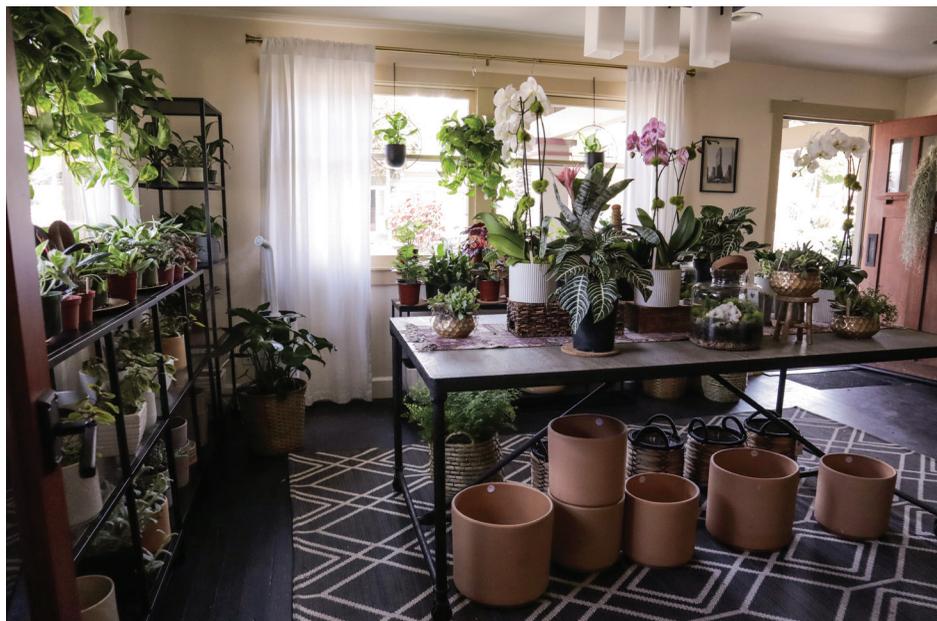
The rest of Hockett’s offerings are hand-picked from wholesalers in Torrance, Whittier and Los Angeles, many of whom are connections she made when helping with her mom’s landscaping business years ago.

“Something that kind of what separates my shop with maybe an Armstrong, or a chain, is that when you come here, you’re really getting not only a personalized experience having me as the owner, obviously, but getting a plant that you couldn’t find in other places,” she explained.

Hockett also offers several home essential items, such as candles and fragrance room sprays and said she’s open to bringing in other merchandise.

“I kind of take the murmur and the messages from everyone around me as sort of messages like from my higher power coming to me,” she said. “I’m opening my heart to let those come through. Is it napkins? Is it crystals? I don’t know.”

Planted LB is at 209 Temple Ave. and is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. ■



Planted LB is inside a 1900s Craftsman-style home-turned-business center. On the second floor is an open-style office space that used to be bedrooms. Photo by Cheantay Jensen.

Live the high life in Seal Beach's historic Water Tower House listed for under \$5M



The historic Water Tower House in Seal Beach is on the market for \$4.95 million. Listing photo.



The deck and view from the historic Water Tower House in Seal Beach. Listing photo.

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

One of the most unique homes in Southern California is on the market now with a \$4.95 million price tag.

The 85-foot-tall Water Tower House in Seal Beach's Surfside Col-

ony has for decades been an object of curiosity and envy for motorists along Pacific Coast Highway.

The water tower was built in 1892 not as a home, but as an actual water tower, servicing steam engines as they chugged along the coastline.

In the late 1970s the tower had out-

lasted the trains and was long out of service and in deteriorating condition and was scheduled to be demolished, a move forestalled by a community "Save Our Water Tower" group that rescued the tower long enough to allow a developer to buy the structure in 1980 for \$59,000 in order to turn it into a residence.

The tower—by then a home—was sold in 1995 for \$800,000 to a buyer who put it up for sale numerous times at a wide variety of prices, ranging as high as \$8 million in 2006 and \$4.5 million in 2008. By then it was little more than an odd home with tremendous views, but was somewhat shy of opulent.

That changed when Realtor Scott Ostlund, principal and senior vice president of Lee & Associates in Ontario, bought the water tower with a partner in 2016 for \$1.5 million and began pouring money into the residence to make it a stunning four-bedroom, three-bath entertaining property with spectacular 360-degree views taking in the Pacific Ocean, Huntington Beach, Huntington Harbour and the surrounding mountains.

"The partners did a lot of work on the place. I wouldn't quite say it was dilapidated, but in addition to making the place as nice as it is now, they had to do a lot of work," said Mike Arnold, Ostlund's longtime attorney. "They had to replace all the steel and wood beams to keep the place safe. Structurally, it was a massive project."

According to Arnold, the partners, who bought and renovated the place with the intent to rent it out, couldn't get a permit from Seal Beach to continue to rent it as a short-term rent-

al. "They didn't want to sell it," said Arnold, "but they can no longer rent it out, so they're forced to sell." The partners had been getting as much as \$990 a night during peak season.

The Water Tower House has always drawn intense interest from people who've seen it. The partners recently offered a public tour of the home which drew as many as 2,500 people, according to Arnold. "We had it open from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and there were long lines outside the whole time."

On the ground floor, there's parking for two cars and the private elevator that takes guests up to the second floor with a Jacuzzi and a seating area.

The third floor, featuring a walk-around deck, has the kitchen, a "Hipolite de Bouchard" (named for California's first and only pirate) bedroom and bathroom with a large porthole window.

Up the stairs are the master bedrooms, two bathrooms, each with sunken showers and stained glass windows. A spiral staircase made of imported oak leads to a rotunda that is completely encircled with large glass windows that open out to let in the ocean breezes. And above that, to top things off, is a stained glass copula.

Throughout the house are some quirky features, including a hidden door that leads surreptitiously to a bonus room, and a train in the top-level party room that travels around on a track near the ceiling.

Ostlund is listing the property himself. You can contact him at 909-989-7771. ■

Port sets new cargo-movement record for 11th consecutive month

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

For the first time in its 110-year history, the Port of Long Beach moved more than 900,000 cargo containers in a single month.

In May, 907,216 twenty-foot equivalent units—the standard measuring unit for containers—passed through Long Beach, the second busiest port in the nation. The movement crushed the previous record, set in March, by nearly 66,900 TEUs.

"We are seeing a demand for more goods as the country continues to open up and people return to work," Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. "Even as we continue to set records during this unprecedented moment in our industry, this is still a fragile moment for the economy and we remain optimistic about our country's continued recovery."

May imports jumped 42.3% to 444,736 TEUs compared to the same month last year, while exports were relatively flat with an increase of 0.6% to 135,345 TEUs, according to the port.

Empty containers moving through port in May skyrocketed 80.7% to 327,135 TEUs.

The port moved over 4 million TEUs during the first five months of 2020, a 42.3% increase compared to the same period last year. Several months in the first half of 2020 were down compared to 2019 due to the pandemic, but July began an 11-month streak of record-setting cargo handling.

E-commerce sales for goods continue to exceed pre-pandemic levels, which accounts for the increased cargo volumes, according to the port. Additionally, demand for lumber, appliances and other durable goods is up due to increased housing sales and remodels.

"We are grateful to our waterfront workers and our industry partners for helping us achieve another significant milestone," Harbor Commission President Frank Colonna said in a statement. "The health and safety of our workforce remains a top priority as we continue to see extraordinary cargo volumes at this vital gateway for trade." ■

Unincorporated 'island' in Carson Park: A 'Leave It to Beaver' neighborhood

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

In East Long Beach's Carson Park area, there are a few hundred single-family homes on avenues that are extensions of roads that begin in Los Altos and stretch four miles across town to this neighborhood that looks for all the world like Long Beach, with tract houses along streets named McNab, Snowden, Faust, Gondar and Senasac.

The residents' children go to Long Beach schools and have Long Beach mailing addresses in the 90808 and some people have bought houses there that they thought were in Long Beach.

The area isn't Long Beach at all, but, rather, an unincorporated part of Los Angeles County. If there's a fire or a medical emergency in the neighborhood, the LA County Fire Department shows up. A crime? LA County Sheriff deputies roll up to investigate, although the Long Beach Police Department regularly cruises through the area while patrolling the adjacent Heartwell Park and the nearby Long Beach Fire Station 18 on Palo Verde Avenue will occasionally respond to emergencies.

On plat maps, the place is called Increment 152, though locals call it Carson Park, which is also what the surrounding Long Beach neighborhood is called. It's Carson Park tucked into Greater Carson Park, bordered by Heartwell Park and Conant Street to the north and south, and Woodruff and Palos Verdes avenues to the west and east.

Architecturally, it is identical to its neighboring Long Beach homes, in an area that was developed in the early to mid-1950s along with virtually all of East Long Beach, where tens of thousands of homes popped up in a period of just half a decade in the post-war boom that saw thousands of new families come to the area to take up good-paying jobs at Douglas Aircraft, the Navy Shipyard and the burgeoning aerospace industries in

nearby cities.

Homes sprang up like mushrooms as the new families waited for the last nail to be driven so they could move in. And because all this building was taking place when the area was almost entirely agricultural, roads needed to be built at a feverish pace as well as churches, shops and schools. Between 1950 and 1955, Long Beach Unified opened 23 new schools, most of them in East Long Beach and nearby Lakewood. A couple years later, Millikan and Lakewood high schools were opened along with a half-dozen other schools.

And during that period, the residents of the new tracts that were built in the hazy area between Lakewood and Long Beach, voted to join one city or the other.

Or, in the case of Increment 152, none of the above. The residents voted 227-202 in 1956 to become the Switzerland of East Long Beach and, so, for almost 70 years, they've been pretty content to live in a hybrid area with the county providing most services, and Long Beach pitching in for others.

"It's kind of a 'Leave It to Beaver' neighborhood," said Realtor Paul Demboski of RE/MAX, who's lived in Carson Park with his wife and four children for about 15 years. "Neighbors get together, kids play in the street or over at Heartwell Park."

There are benefits to living in the enclave. One is there's no street-sweeping tickets. The county sweeps the streets, but they don't ticket cars parked on the street when they sweep. "It's kind of a double-edged sword," said Demboski. "You save a couple hundred dollars a year in tickets, but the streets aren't always clean." He said he sometimes grabs a broom and sweeps up an area that the street-sweepers don't get to.

The neighborhood doesn't look different than those surrounding it in Long Beach, and its homes aren't priced at the starter level that they were back in 1953 when \$595 would be enough for a down



Prices in East Long Beach are knocking on the \$1 million door, such as this home listed at \$930,000 in the unincorporated Carson Park neighborhood near Heartwell Park. Listing photo.

payment on a three-bedroom, two-bath house, with plenty of amenities including hardwood floors, separate dining areas and full professional landscaping. If you were a veteran of World War II or the Korean War, \$295 was your down payment for a two-bedroom, one-bath house, or \$495 for the three-bed, two-bath.

Today, as the million-dollar price tag is creeping northward from the coast, the three homes for sale in Carson Park's unincorporated neighborhood are knocking at that door.

Getting perilously close to seven figures is a four-bedroom, two-bath 1,800-square-foot home at 3731 Senasac Ave., listed by Realtor Jennifer Hosoi of Kase Real Estate at \$930,000.

Again, it's a fairly typical and close-to-original East Long Beach home, with a few mid-modern touches, most noticeably the airy and bright living area with its Palo Verde stone fireplace, exposed-beam ceilings and glass sliding doors leading to the backyard.

It's not totally turnkey and a new owner will likely want to further upgrade the kitchen and tinker with the flooring. If you like it cool during the few sweltering days of summer, you might also want

to install central air-conditioning.

A home at 3810 McNab Ave., listed by Brandon Caldarella of First Team at \$899,000, will hit the market on June 12. This one's a bit more modernized, larger and upgraded than its \$930,000 neighbor, with an open and remodeled kitchen and remodeled bathrooms. It also has hardwood floors, dual-pane windows and central heating and air-conditioning as well as a nicely landscaped front yard with drought-tolerant plants.

Finally, we have a bit more affordable home in the unincorporated area, a three-bedroom, one bath 1,212 square-foot home listed at a bargain price of \$695,000 by Dale Jervis.

As with the others, this one has the original kitchen layout that is long and fairly narrow, not wide enough to accommodate an island. Still, this model's kitchen is clean and light and upgraded as much as possible given its space limitations. You'll likely want to upgrade the single bathroom. The house features a nice dining nook with bay windows.

And the backyard is spacious enough for you and your family and friends to enjoy a nice, legal Safe and Sane party on the 4th of July. ■



Slabs poured and awaiting framing for thousands of homes in Lakewood and East Long Beach in the early to mid-1950s. Archive photo.



Drought-tolerant landscaping gives nice curb appeal to this home at 3810 McNab Ave. Listing photo.

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Kristen Bell showcases Long Beach dog product company ahead of Amazon's Prime Day

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

One minute before an interview about his dog products business, Pawstruck founder Kyle Goguen came face-to-face with his guest interviewer: Kristen Bell. The actress and activist, famous for her roles in “Forgetting Sarah Marshall” and “Frozen,” personally selected the Long Beach-based company to showcase ahead of Amazon's Prime Day, June 21-22.

“I assumed it was going to be an Amazon executive or something and, truthfully, I wasn't overly excited,” Goguen recalled. “Then she hopped on the call, which was unexpected and exciting.”

Though he was admittedly caught off guard by the appearance of Bell, Goguen dove right into the interview without pause.

“I'm a big fan of your work,” Bell said to him. “I have a lot of dogs and we give [them] Pawstruck.”

Goguen recounted the founding of his company for Bell: During his senior year at USC where he studied industrial and systems engineering, Goguen got a dog—Tyson the boxer. Goguen searched for healthy, natural treats and chews for the pup but found the options limited and pricey.

Shortly after graduation in 2014, Goguen, a Seal Beach native, moved to Long Beach and founded his company. After a rocky start, which included a strongly worded cease-and-desist letter over the company's original name—Cannoodle Pets—Pawstruck was off and running.

The business model is centered on sourcing the highest-quality ingredients from around the world. While a large subset of products are made in the U.S.,



Pawstruck founder Kyle Goguen with actress Kristen Bell. Screenshot.

Pawstruck gets its free-range, grass-fed beef from South America, lamb ears from New Zealand, antlers from Canada and the list goes on.

“We hand select and we make sure we're working with partners we can trust,” Goguen said. “We're providing the quality and safety that we are comfortable giving to our own dogs.”

Business has been strong since the get-go and the pandemic actually provided a boost in sales for the company's various products, which include treats and chews, grooming and cleaning, skin care, health and wellness and even monthly subscription boxes.

“A lot of people got dogs during COVID,” Goguen said during his interview with Bell, who added that she took on numerous fosters throughout the pandemic.

While the e-commerce business never had to shut down due to COVID-19, the virus did alter business operations, Goguen said. Prior to coronavirus, Pawstruck had office space near Long Beach

Airport. But with the pandemic forcing people to work from home, Goguen gave up the physical office space.

The combination of growing sales and shifting the company to operating remotely, Goguen has been able to expand his staff with greater ease.

“Our core group of team members is still in Long Beach but we're hiring new people throughout the U.S.,” Goguen said. “We've got people in Washington and Georgia and South Carolina—all over the place.”

Goguen's staff has increased to 30 and further expansion is in the works, he said. The company has a dozen products in development that will be rolled out over the next year. Goguen also is looking into entering international markets.

The Pawstruck team is made up of mostly women, who were elated to hear of Bell's adoration for the company, Goguen said.

“They were going nuts; they were super excited,” he said. “Jokingly asking if they could meet her and saying we

should hire her—just fun stuff.”

Since 2015, Amazon has hosted Prime Day, a two-day event with deals on millions of products from sellers around the world. Third-party sellers such as Pawstruck represent 60% of Amazon sales, according to Dave Clark, CEO of Amazon's worldwide consumer business.

“COVID-19 has created a lot of challenges for these businesses,” Clark said in a promotional video, “and they've shown incredible resilience and creativity.”

In 2020, Amazon invested \$18 billion in its logistics network, tools, services, programs and staff to assist sellers, Clark said, adding that hundreds of thousands of sellers have teamed up with Amazon since the pandemic began.

Over the past year, third-party sellers have sold 3.7 billion products, according to Keri Cusick, head of Amazon's small business empowerment team. The company has introduced 250 new tools and services over the last year, with plans to invest another \$100 million to assist small businesses this year.

Though not all of the company's sales are through its Amazon shop, Goguen said the partnership with the platform has gotten his products more exposure than he could have achieved alone. With 7.5-times normal sales, Prime Day 2020 was Pawstruck's best sales day in the company's history, according to Goguen.

“We're trying to replicate that same success,” Goguen told Bell of the June 21 and 22 event. “We have some of our bestsellers up for deals to get some more exposure and into the mouths of more canine customers.” ■

Property owners, landlords and others will now be liable for those who violate fireworks law

By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

Violating Long Beach's fireworks ban could come with a significantly higher penalty after the City Council approved an amendment June 8 that allows the city to charge the cost of city employees responding to fireworks calls, as well as any damages, to those lighting off fireworks.

The vote does not change the city's maximum fine, which is still \$1,000, but it will allow the city attorney's office to issue municipal citations and seek the cost of recovery for police, fire and other city personnel from those violating the law.

The cost of those services is yet to be determined, but a city official recently said it would likely vary based on the size of the response, any damage caused by fireworks and how long it takes to carry out the investigation.

The changes to the ordinance also adds a “host liability” section in the ordinance that could make it easier for

the city to issue citations in the future because it will allow property owners, tenants, landlords, property managers and other individuals hosting fireworks events to be issued citations.

“If a property owner is in a better position to identify who these individuals are that are setting off the fireworks, then we will take that into consideration, depending on what the information is and how we can identify the individual,” said Deputy City Attorney Art Sanchez. “But as a whole, the way host liability works in this situation is its focus is on being able to enforce against individuals.”

The city's previous policy required police officers to witness the fireworks being lit off, which made it difficult to issue citations. Last July 4, LBPD officers issued just 13 citations while the department received nearly 800 calls regarding fireworks.

But now citations can be issued to property owners if it can be proved that fireworks were lit off on their property or on adjacent property by persons being

hosted at their homes.

There is a provision in the updated language that allows for a property owner to report fireworks activity on their property without being punished.

Council members were supportive of the item as the city has tried to reduce fireworks in the city for years. Some expressed concern that property owners could be penalized for actions of tenants, and that the exact amount of cost recovery has yet to be outlined.

Others said it was important to send a message through the ordinance. Councilman Al Austin likened the changes to the city's firework's ordinance to a law he proposed in 2014 aimed at adults serving alcohol to minors at private gatherings, which also used host liability as an enforcement tool.

“The message to take away from this is that moving forward if you choose to do illegal fireworks in our city you're putting your own housing at risk, and I think that is a strong message to take away from this,” Austin said.

The ordinance update is the latest ef-

fort by the city to try and reduce the use of fireworks in the city. The council has funded public service announcements, looked into using drones to monitor and map fireworks hotspots and most recently said it would offer free block-party permits to help get more residents on the streets in hopes of reducing the issue this year.

An online reporting portal where residents can submit video and photo evidence was created by the city prosecutor's office last year, which resulted in similar municipal citations being issued through that office. While the city intends to create its own reporting portal in the future officials said it would hold off until after July 4 and encourage residents to continue using the prosecutor's portal.

The council will be asked to approve an updated fee schedule at its June 15 meeting where city staff is expected to give an update on additional response-costs that could be charged to people violating the city's fireworks ban. ■

Worker shortage

(Continued from Page 1)

in September, some are making more on unemployment than if they went back to their jobs, said Nick Schultz, director of Pacific Gateway in Long Beach.

For several years before the pandemic, multi-restaurant owner Luis Navarro said the restaurant industry was already in a staffing crunch due to what he calls the restaurant renaissance. New eateries were popping up fast in Long Beach, resulting in challenges staffing up, particularly for the back of the house, Navarro said.

“There was already an employee underground war going on between all the restaurants,” Navarro said. “It was literally a grenade and [COVID] pulled the pin on it. It’s bleak. It’s ugly.”

While the back of the house was challenging before the coronavirus, the front of the house, including hosts, servers and bartenders, are hard to come by nowadays, Navarro said. Restaurants, which are often staffed by younger employees such as college students, face another challenge: previous staff has moved away.

Employees could not afford rent after being laid off and, with their classes moved online, students were able to move back home, many outside of Long Beach, Navarro said. With some in-person classes resuming in the fall and fuller schedules coming back in the spring, Navarro said he is hopeful for an influx of people into the labor pool.

Navarro said he also lost employees to



Server Ruby Garcia picks up a dine-in customer’s order while wearing a face shield and face mask at the Potholder Cafe Downtown, Tuesday, June 30, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

other jobs outside of the industry for positions that seemed more or less invulnerable to the pandemic, including food delivery services and e-commerce such as Amazon.

Throughout the pandemic, delivery of goods and food skyrocketed and people were able to make more money than by pulling a couple shifts at a restaurant with no dine-in patrons, Navarro said.

And as LA County began its slow re-opening in the spring, a new urgency for more staff has exacerbated hiring challenges.

“Everyone is just so tired of being cooped up, so people have been out in droves,” Navarro said. “That presents a huge, perfect storm of a disaster because not only are we not at full strength with our teams, ... we’re getting pummeled by the demand. It’s been pretty gnarly.”

Long Beach hotels also are struggling to fill all positions, including front desk, front and back of house for restaurants and house-keeping, said Long Beach Marriott General Manager Imran Ahmed.

The Marriott currently has just over 70 employees, Ahmed said, adding that pre-pandemic he employed more than 200. Business has not returned to normal levels but Ahmed said he could use a staff of about 120 now.

“Everybody’s tired,” Ahmed said, noting that all staff, including management, have been working long hours to offset vacant positions. “And it’s every hotel that’s going through this right now. It’s a huge challenge.”

But many employers are exploring ways of enticing people aboard. ASM Global, operator of the Long Beach Convention Center, is considering increased pay, bonuses and other programs to bring in staff, according to General Manager Charlie Beirne.

The Convention Center is in the beginning stages of re-hiring staff ahead of the return of conventions in early August, according to Beirne. While he is not sure of the response he will get from staff about whether or not they will be returning, Beirne already

faced difficulty hiring earlier this year when he had to find a chef to feed the migrant children currently housed in the facility.

“I don’t know if the stimulus plays much into it anymore,” Beirne said. “People still may not feel comfortable, ... they can’t find childcare yet and some of our guys may have found other jobs. It’s tough to put a pulse on it, to be honest.”

For staff who are already back to work at the Convention Center, Beirne said they are calling out of work far more frequently than prior to the pandemic. The result is frantically trying to backfill shifts and overtime for other employees, including management, Beirne said.

Excluding food and beverage, the Convention Center would typically have about 135 full-time employees, Beirne said. Currently, the facility is run by a team of 12.

Hiring challenges are not limited to service industries. Traditional office jobs are suffering for similar reasons with the added hurdle of increased demand to work from home. In a February survey by job site ZipRecruiter, 46% of respondents said they want a job that allows them to work from home, even after the pandemic has fully passed.

“Employers are frustrated because labor force participation rates aren’t ticking up,” Schultz said. “Even though businesses are ready to get back online, job seekers aren’t ready to get back in the labor market.”

Wages in the first quarter of this year were up about 3% compared to the first quarter of 2019, Schultz said, which is not enough to entice people back. Large corporations such as Amazon and Walmart have increased starting pay to dollars above minimum wage to boost hiring.

“You’re going to have to pay a premium to entice people out at this point,” Schultz said. “For a myriad of reasons, they’re not ready.”

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Rubber & Paint Removal Airfield Pavements	RFP AP21-056	06/29/2021
Municipal Advisory Services	RFP FM21-070	06/29/2021
Building Resiliency Program	RFP DV21-062	07/08/2021
Equipment at Water Well Commission 22A	WD-31-19	07/13/2021
Web-Based Software as a Solution for Homeless Management Information System	RFP HE21-055	07/13/2021
Development Opportunity at the Long Beach Airport	RFP AP21-042	07/19/2021

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How we eat, drink and meet has changed during the pandemic—these changes are here to stay

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Across the city, hospitality businesses have had to make adjustments to both their physical setup and work protocols to comply with health orders implemented to curb the spread of coronavirus—and stay in business while doing so. Some of these changes are likely to stick around even after pandemic restrictions are largely lifted on June 15.

Restaurants

When the pandemic shut down indoor drinking and dining, restaurateur Geoffrey Rau set about building a plant-enclosed patio in the parking lot behind his two establishments in East Long Beach, the sports bar Roundin’ 3rd and The Hideaway, an upscale steakhouse.

The remodel has been extremely successful and welcomed by guests, according to Rau. “We went from one of the ugliest parking lots in Long Beach to—we call it the oasis,” he said. “It’s been wonderful.”

The pandemic has led to some creative policy approaches in the hospitality space, said Ciaran Gough, owner of The 908 restaurant at LBX and president of the Long Beach Restaurant Association.

The Restaurant Association was founded during the current public health crisis to advocate for the needs of restaurant owners, and has lobbied city leaders to extend relaxed rules allowing restaurant seating in public spaces.

Gough, originally from Ireland, said the new rules have encouraged restaurant goers to eat and drink outside in a way that has long been popular in Europe.

“It’s California, the American Riviera and we’re not really using it like that,” Gough said about the before

times. The pandemic, he points out, “changed people’s perspective on it and they really enjoy it.”

Allowing alcohol sales for takeout and for consumption on public sidewalks, a policy that was recently extended to the end of the year by Gov. Gavin Newsom, is one strategy to help businesses recover from an extremely difficult year, he noted.

“It gives you a chance to recoup some of the lost earnings of the last year,” Gough said. “I think it would be a savior for a lot of restaurants.”

Rau said he’s hoping that the city will continue to allow parking lot patios and parklets. “We hope we can keep this going,” he said. “We lost a lot of good restaurants during the pandemic and I don’t want to see any more close.”

The city is, however, doing away with at least one big change that allowed Downtown restaurants to serve more customers outside. Restaurants on Pine Avenue between First Street and Fifth Street were notified June 7 that the city would be reopening the thoroughfare to vehicular traffic this month.

The city will reopen Pine Avenue between First Street and Third Street on June 18, and June 30 for the rest of Pine north of Third Street.

Conventions

The Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Long Beach Convention Center have had to make drastic changes to their offerings after the pandemic shut down large gatherings entirely.

To keep clients engaged, the bureau began organizing hybrid events—blending both in-person performances and virtual engagement—a concept they quickly began offering to meeting planners, their points of contact for booking conventions and large-scale events.



Gladys Bauer works the front desk of the Hilton in Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

To ease their clients’ way into the new model, the bureau hired and shifted staff to new positions focused entirely on digital production, handling sound, video and online broadcasting.

“We wanted to offer that service to be in a better position than our competitors,” said Charlie Beirne, general manager of the Convention Center.

Although bookings have been slow to come in, Bureau Director Steve Goodling said the hybrid concept is likely here to stay.

“The pandemic changed our behaviors and operating procedures for business,” he said. Having a significant virtual component, he added, is likely to be a baseline expectation for events moving forward, especially among younger attendees.

This doesn’t mean in-person conventions have lost their luster altogether.

“In order to be competitive, you have to have face-to-face meetings,” Goodling said. “You miss all the nuances of humanity, virtually.”

But, he noted, there are some significant benefits the new hybrid model brings. “The outreach for the client is much larger, they’re going to reach a larger audience,” he said. “We believe attendance is going to rebound just as quickly as all other sectors have.”

To some extent, at least, that rebound will likely be seen online.

Hotels

Mostly shut down and short on visitors for a majority of the pandemic, many hotels have used the time to make renovations or otherwise prepare for the post-pandemic world.

At the Hilton Long Beach, renovations to the pool area were already underway, and after a brief interruption in construction at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the new pool reopened to a largely local audience in May.

The hotel swiftly launched a pool-

side movie night series, showing off its newest asset. But General Manager Swietlana Cahill said that wasn’t the only motivation.

“We wanted to make sure that we did something good in the community,” she said. “Give people opportunities to hope.”

The hotel plans to continue the event series, even after guests return to Long Beach in larger numbers, but Cahill said she doesn’t expect locals and visitors to compete for space on movie nights.

“We’ll always have room for our guests as well,” she said. So far, Cahill added, “it looks like there is a good chemistry and a good mix.”

Overall, the Hilton—like many other hotels, large and small—has expanded its contactless services, such as digital keys, where guests use their mobile phones to unlock their room doors.

“We have a lot of digital messaging back-and-forth with the guests,” Cahill said.

That doesn’t mean that personal interactions between staff and guests will be eliminated completely. “We want them to know that we’re here,” Cahill noted. “The hospitality experience is very warm—we don’t want to get away from that.”

“You’re going to see hotels try and provide the same type of experience they did previously,” said Peter Hillan, spokesperson for the Long Beach Hospitality Alliance.

Though the pandemic may be in the rearview mirror for California right now, hotels will likely keep up some of the enhanced safety and cleaning protocols, especially given the state’s popularity with international travelers, Hillan said.

“They will be more attentive to the health concerns that guests and employees are likely to have,” he noted. “We still have a global crisis on our hands.” ■



Roundin’ 3rd Bar & Grill busser and food runner Seth Hall, left, with co-owner Susan Hartert on their outdoor patio in the back parking lot, Tuesday, June 8, 2021. Photo by Stephen Carr.

‘We’re used to the ocean beating us up’: Harbor Breeze Cruises catches a tailwind as passengers return to sea

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Standing aboard Harbor Breeze Cruises’ newest acquisition, the five-deck Sir Winston dinner cruise yacht, the face of company founder Capt. Dan Salas shifts between a variety of emotions as he recounts the events of the past year. Sadness, pride, hope—the memories repeatedly bring tears to his eyes.

But of all the emotions, one reigns supreme. “I’ve never been prouder of the grit that this city has,” Salas said, adding that he was especially happy about city leadership’s handling of the pandemic. “When it came down to it, they kicked butt.”

Now, after months of restrictions on large-scale gatherings, the Sir Winston, popular with wedding parties and corporate clients, has finally begun to book up. And just in time for blue whale migration season, hundreds of guests are finally embarking on the company’s whale and harbor cruises again.

“There’s days we have to turn

(Please Continue to Page 18)



A woman takes a photo of a pod of dolphins from aboard a Harbor Breeze Cruises whale-watching boat. Photo by Alena Maschke.

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A crowd sits in the bleachers aboard Harbor Breeze Cruise's 3 p.m. whale watching cruise, Friday, June 4, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.



Captain Dan Salas, founder of Harbor Breeze Cruises, looks across Rainbow Harbor from the top deck of the company's five-deck Sir Winston yacht. Photo by Alena Maschke.

(Continued from Page 17)

people away," Salas said.

The tours currently still operate on limited capacity ahead of the state's full reopening, scheduled for June 15. Currently, each ship carries between 100 and 200 passengers, depending on the size of the boat, on up to eight departures per day.

Salas said other whale-watching cruise companies up and down the coast have seen similar increases in passengers eager to step aboard.

"People come to the ocean, they look out, they gaze at the ocean—

somehow, it does something to your mind," Salas said, adding that the fresh ocean breeze has helped him through some tough times, including the past year. "It changes your thinking."

For 24-year-old Leo Barajas, who boarded the company's Friday afternoon whale-watching departure with his girlfriend in celebration of her birthday, the cruise was a welcome change of scenery.

"With the whole COVID thing, we were just locked in," said Barajas, who lives in Montebello. "We're

from the city, so we just wanted to get out a little bit, do something different."

The crew is excited to be back too.

"I've always been out on the ocean," said Lon Taulbee, a 72-year-old retiree, who now spends his free time as a deckhand aboard Harbor Breeze Cruise's ships, spotting and photographing marine life.

Not being able to go out to sea during the month-long shutdown at the beginning of the pandemic was difficult, Taulbee said. "I get bored

real easy."

Now, he's happy to be back at sea. "To find [animals] and share what we find with everybody, there's nothing like it."

The pandemic has been a challenge, but Captain Dan—as Harbor Breeze founder Salas is fondly called—is optimistic about the future.

"We took a beating, but we're used to the ocean beating us up," he said. "We're gonna make it." ■

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With COVID guidelines clarified, convention bookings are ramping up

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Reporter

In early March it was still unclear when large indoor events like conventions would be allowed under California's tiered-approach to reopening its post-pandemic economy, and every day that passed meant the potential for cancellations, and the inability to book future events.

Convention centers in the state were losing business to states like Nevada, Texas and Florida, all which had announced guidelines for operating conventions long before California, and were aggressive in pursuing organizations with business booked in California.

Barb Newton, chief executive officer of the California Travel Association, an umbrella trade organization for the travel and tourism industry, said that the industry in the state likely lost about \$100 billion over the past 15 months, but a full assessment has yet to be completed.

"Business that was lost could take years to get back, if ever," Newton said, noting that oftentimes conventions enter into multi-year deals with facilities.

Newton was part of a coalition of



People walk by the Terrace Theater, Wednesday, June 9, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

industry groups that banded together in an effort to lobby for the state to issue guidance for what the post-pandemic convention world would look

like.

The year-long effort intensified in March when the group sent a letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom asking that rules finally be released.

"We raised our voices a little bit more when we saw the numbers receding," Newton said of the pressure the coalition put on state lawmakers once COVID-19 cases began to dramatically decline earlier this year.

The lobbying led to rules finally being released in April, something that Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Steve Goodling said allowed it to retain clients for next year, and ensure those that rebooked to have peace of mind that their events would happen.

"In our business, our clients need a minimum of four months, some longer, to know what they need to do with their conventions," Goodling said.

"Otherwise in our world it's a hollow announcement we can open. We're not like restaurants where you can open and within a week you can have clientele back in your business."

Long Beach did lose clients, but Goodling said they were able to retain about one-third of the events and rebook them for dates in 2024 and 2025. Since late April, the convention center has served as an intake center housing migrant children, which is expected to close on Aug. 2 to allow the center to begin hosting conventions.

But if rules would have been in place earlier, the Convention Center could have had events on the books before its initial booking of the Aug. 8 event for National Business Media. Booking requires a year or more advance notice, Goodling said.

Now the industry is in a ramp-up mode.

Charlie Beirne, general manager of the Long Beach Convention Center, said that he's trying to get back to his March 2020 staffing level of 155 full-time employees. He currently has 14 but is hoping to start the process of hiring back employees before the space begins hosting events later in the summer.

With the state expected to relax many COVID-19 guidelines on June 15, Beirne said the Terrace Theater is a hot commodity, pointing to four nights of comedian Bill Burr in October already nearing a sellout.

In September, the theater will host former President George W. Bush as part of a speaker series.

Beirne said that partnering with competitors to get to this point was not strange, noting that people in the industry are constantly talking and going to national meetings.

"We were all closed, we all gotta make money so we came together," Beirne said.

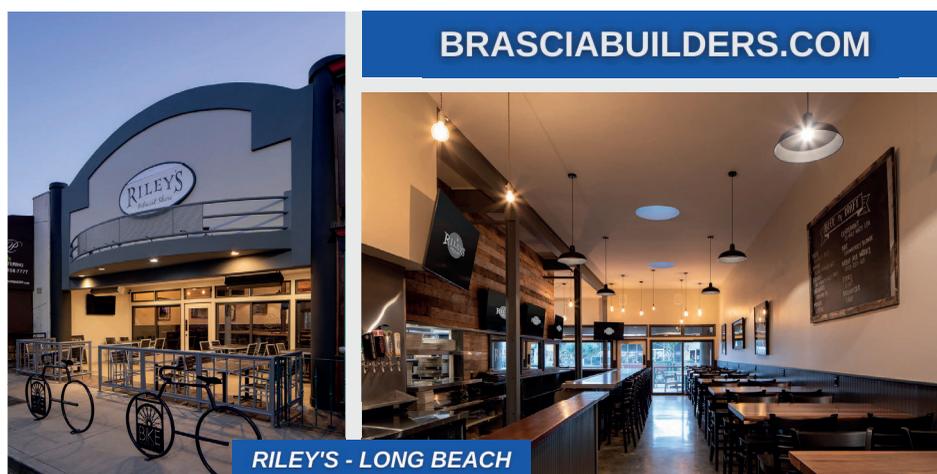
While it was uncommon for the entities to form a partnership, the 2020 effort could be the beginning of a lasting partnership. Goodling said that without this unified voice the industry could have been overlooked as a major industry in the state.

With hotel stays starting to be booked again and businesses transitioning back to in-person communications, Goodling said he's hopeful that it will translate to more business at the soon-to-be-opened Convention Center.

"Zoom is no longer sufficient to conduct business, not in a competitive environment," Goodling said. "They want to see that person and be and talk with that person in person." ■

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Airport passenger numbers are ticking up; Southwest seeks to bolster business travel

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Reporter

Passenger traffic through Long Beach Airport continues to make gains each month spurred by leisure travel. But as California and other states continue to loosen COVID-19 restrictions, Southwest Airlines has set its sights on bringing more business travel to the municipal airport.

During April, 160,969 passengers arrived at or departed from Long Beach, which is 45.8% less than in April 2019. While there is still a long way to go before reaching pre-pandemic numbers, the figure marks a staggering 2,455.5% increase in passenger traffic compared to April 2020 when 6,299 people passed through the facility.

“There is a demand out there, people are anxious and getting ready to travel again,” said Airport Director Cynthia Guidry. “Business travel is huge, it’s significant for us. Certainly it’s going to take a little bit longer than leisure travel but we’re optimistic.”

To that end, Southwest recently invited business representatives from across the region to tour Long Beach Airport from curb to gate. David Harvey, vice president of Southwest Business, was on hand to lead the tour along with Clifton Buford, Southwest’s Long Beach station manager.

Among the businesses represented on the tour were Kaiser Permanente, Snapchat, Northrop Grumman, Masimo, Western Dental, Amada America, Technologent, OSI Systems and Emser Tile. Sean Parham, Snapchat’s global travel manager, said the company’s em-



Southwest Business Vice President David Harvey addresses corporate travel managers just off the tarmac during a tour of Long Beach Airport, Thursday, May 20, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

ployees are more dispersed now than ever before thanks to work-from-home options brought on by the pandemic.

“We have people everywhere, so it’s not just about LAX for us anymore,” Parham said of the Santa Monica-based company. “We can have people fly pretty much from anywhere and with Southwest having so many flights now out of Long Beach, it has become a more viable option.”

June marks the five-year anniversary of Southwest coming to Long Beach.

The carrier began with just four flight slots at the noise-controlled airport but has increased its daily offerings to 34 direct flights to more than a dozen cities across the country.

Southwest flies out of LAX and Orange County’s John Wayne Airport, which are 20.9 and 21.4 miles away from Long Beach Airport, respectively. While those markets may seem close, Harvey noted that Southern California traffic makes the company’s Long Beach presence crucial.

During the tour, Guidry spoke to the group about the airport’s terminal improvement project, which includes new ticketing and checked baggage inspection buildings among other changes. Already underway but delayed due to the pandemic, the project is the second phase of a master plan that already has introduced updated concourses.

“It’s beautiful. It’s open—it reminds me of Honolulu International Airport,” said Amada Travel Manager Laurie Miyake. The machine manufacturing business is located in Buena Park and frequently flies to more than half a dozen destinations served by Southwest out of Long Beach, Miyake said.

Much of Amada’s staff lives in Orange County, making the trek to LAX for business travel uninviting, Miyake said. “Long Beach will be a big option for us,” she said. “We’re really excited.”

Since beginning service in the state nearly 40 years ago, Harvey said Southwest has expanded operations into 13 California cities, including the recent additions of Palm Springs, Fresno and Santa Barbara.

Even with the pandemic waning, uncertainty continues to cloud travel, particularly for businesses, Harvey said. As companies consider sending their road warriors back out into the world, Harvey said Southwest’s no-change-fee policy is ideal for ever-shifting itineraries and another incentive to make Long Beach the airport of choice.

“People want convenience,” Harvey said. “Flexibility has inherent value and they want to go to the airport that’s closer to their business or their home.” ■



Long Beach Airport Director Cynthia Guidry addresses corporate travel managers from numerous Southern California companies during an airport tour hosted by Southwest, Thursday, May 20, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Fireworks return to Long Beach Fourth of July weekend, with 'Big Bang on the Bay' and more

By **TESS KAZENOFF**
and **TIM GROBATY**

Fireworks are returning to Long Beach for the first time since 2019 for this year's Fourth of July celebration.

And Big Bang on the Bay—what's become a tradition in Long Beach on July 3—will also return after a hiatus due to the pandemic.

July 4 fireworks

The free 9 p.m. show will take place in Queensway Bay, with scenic viewing points throughout the area, such as Lions Lighthouse for Sight, Shoreline Village, Rainbow Harbor, Marina Green and the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center parking lot.

Harbor Breeze Cruises is sponsoring the event along with the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"We're celebrating our twentieth anniversary here in Long Beach, and after such a difficult year we wanted to give back and bring some joy to the city and the community that has supported us for so long," said Dan Salas, founder and CEO of Harbor Breeze Cruises, in a press release.

Parking will be available at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center and at public lots throughout the area, including Shoreline Village and adjacent to the Aquarium of the Pacific.

Spectators are encouraged to stop by waterfront restaurants and shops.

Harbor Breeze Cruises will also be offering ticketed cruises for viewing. For more information, call 562-983-6880.

Big Bang on the Bay

The patriotic pyrotechnic party will return on July 3, Independence Day Eve, lighting up the skies over the Peninsula and Naples, as well as the restaurants along the Alamitos Bay Marina.

After drawing huge crowds at bay-side restaurants and sparking private parties in some of the city's most expensive neighborhoods and yacht clubs since 2011, the event fizzled out last year thanks to COVID-19.

"This is going to be the first big event since COVID," said John Morris, general manager of Boathouse on the Bay and the Big Bang's founder and organizer.

Just how big the event will be still depends on the state of the pandemic locally. Morris says it's still unclear what restrictions will be in place at the beginning of July in terms of mandatory face-coverings, the number of people who will be allowed in, rules regarding the serving of food and other regulations that have still prevented many businesses, particularly restaurants and bars, from flinging open their doors back to the old normal.



Fireworks explode over Alamitos Bay. Photo courtesy of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The event is largely funded by residents of the Peninsula and Naples and yacht owners, who are hit up annually by Morris to help cover the expense of the fireworks and other entertainment that goes on throughout the late afternoon and evening, including aircraft flyovers, skydivers and music spun by DJ Ron.

Those who aren't invited to private parties can attend the party at the Boathouse, where a ticket gets you entrance to the restaurant's Block Party, a seat at a table just yards from the fireworks barge, and a barbecue dinner provided by Naples Rib Company.

Other restaurants in the area, including Malainey's, Ballast Point, San Pedro Fish Market and those at 2nd & PCH will also be offering seats with views of the fireworks show.

Proceeds from the Boathouse party go to local charities, with the main benefactor this year being Long Beach-based Children Today, whose mission is to foster stability and success in children and families who are facing homelessness or maltreatment or who are involved in the child welfare system. The event has raised close to a million dollars for local charities since its inception.

The Boathouse event will begin at 6 p.m.; fireworks start at 9 p.m. sharp.

Tickets to the Big Bang Block Party, at \$50, will be available at the Boathouse website or by calling 562-493-1100. ■



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amaraREPS LLC is a Hubspot Gold Partner and leading sales and marketing agency in Downtown Long Beach, CA. Their focus is on sustainable growth for companies that fall under STEAM and have sales organizations or teams that need marketing and sales, strategy, optimization, and alignment.



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Prior to the pandemic Tara was a production coordinator in the movie industry. With sanitation and disinfection top of mind for the past year, Tara pivoted her energy and resources to open Anti-Virus Sanitation, a fully licensed and bonded sanitation and disinfection company offering services throughout Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside counties.



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Having learned from respected culinarians, Nickey is passionate about making everything from scratch and sourcing the finest possible ingredients. A keen appreciation for food history plays a large role in the style and flavors that she displays at The Boujje Crab. While in the kitchen, Nickey stresses teamwork to elevate the performance of the entire staff. Expanding beyond Long Beach, she will be opening a new location near LAX in Fall 2021.



Greg Johnson
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Greg J is a well known media marketing executive, event producer, radio broadcaster and global thinker. A veteran of the United States Marines Corps, his professional broadcast career includes sales and marketing management positions at national networks and local radio stations including Stevie Wonder owned KJLH. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Arts Council for Long Beach.



Takisha Clark
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Takisha Clark grew up in Compton, CA determined to rise above challenges and find success, culminating with the opening of her Capital Postal & Mailbox Service store. Named a top 10 entrepreneur alongside Elon Musk as the first Black woman to own a shipping franchise, there's no stopping this success story.

New delivery service aims to bring more diversity to Long Beach cannabis industry



Owner Carlos Zepeda, 35, and Delivery Manager Jazmere Johnston, 31, operate Pusherman Delivery, a Long Beach cannabis business. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

For a few days after its soft launch in May, the phones at Pusherman's offices on 10th Street near Cherry Avenue were silent. There were no incoming orders, and no chatter on the walkie-talkie of delivery drivers picking up vapes, THC gummies or cannabis flower buds.

"The first couple of days, we got our ass kicked to be honest: zero deliveries," said Carlos Zepeda, the cannabis delivery service's founder.

Still, Zepeda pushed forward, as he has for the past three years. For the son of Honduran immigrants, the newly launched delivery service is the culmination of years of work to start his own licensed cannabis business.

"It means the world to me," Zepeda said. But his path to business ownership was anything but easy.

After a failed attempt at starting a similar business in California City—Zepeda's company ended up suing the city, alleging corruption and unfair licensing practices, but the case was later dismissed—he came back to his hometown of Long Beach in search of new opportunities.

"I licked my wounds and looked at what was going on with the social equity program out here," Zepeda said.

Not much, it turned out.

The program, which was launched in 2018 to help those most affected by the former criminalization of cannabis, has so far failed to produce tangible results, especially when it comes to increasing racial diversity among business owners in the local cannabis industry.

Zepeda identifies as Afro-Lati-

no—which places him in two demographics that were heavily affected by the war on drugs and the criminalization of cannabis preceding California's gradual move toward legalization. While he made it to the date of eventual legalization unscathed, he said some of his family members have spent time behind bars for cannabis-related offenses.

"My personal experience is miniscule compared to what other people have been through," Zepeda said. Still, he believes that someone from his background owning a cannabis business can help others gain access, build generational wealth and support a movement for more equity within the industry.

"For me it's more about principle. It's about women, Black, Brown and indigenous empowerment," he said. "If we have wealth, we can amplify our voices, and hopefully pass and implement policies that will benefit us."

To launch his business, Zepeda had to find a unique workaround to the city's restrictions on a type of business that many low-income entrepreneurs say would help boost diversity: non-storefront delivery.

Currently, the city only allows deliveries from one of its 16 licensed dispensaries, all of which are spoken for already—and none of which are held by Black or Latino entrepreneurs, according to the Long Beach Collective Association. Demographic data collected by the city's Office of Cannabis Oversight is self-reported and non-comprehensive, according to the program manager, who declined to share that data with the Long Beach Business Journal.

Applicants to the city's social eq-

uity program have long asked the City Council to reconsider its policy on non-storefront delivery services. Its low startup costs, they argue, make delivery-only retail the most attainable business type for entrepreneurs with limited financial resources.

The cost associated with starting any of the types of cannabis businesses currently allowed in the city, from navigating the licensing process to procuring real estate in an area zoned for cannabis, is what kept Zepeda from moving forward after he first joined the city's cohort of social equity applicants in 2019.

"If you have capital, you have money, you can easily cut through the red tape," he said, adding that many wealthier investors simply hire consultants to help them navigate the process. For him, however, starting his own business "just wasn't attainable."

The City Council has been discussing an amendment to the cannabis ordinance, adding licensing provisions for delivery-only businesses and shared manufacturing facilities, since last year. Adding these license types, advocates hope, will ease entry to the industry for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. The change is expected to go to council for an initial vote in early July, according to industry insiders.

To work around the barriers posed by the delivery-only ban at the moment, Zepeda partnered with Catalyst Cannabis Company, which holds several dispensary licenses in the city.

Catalyst CEO Elliot Lewis provided the funds to start the business, which he estimates to be around \$200,000, to support underrepresent-

The List of the June 29 edition of the Long Beach Business Journal will highlight West Long Beach business owners. To be included, please email ads@lbpost.com

ed entrepreneurs like Zepeda and others in the equity program. When Zepeda approached him, he said he was ready to make a move as soon as possible.

“To be totally honest, I didn’t put that much thought into it,” Lewis said about his decision to front the start-up costs. “I said: let’s figure out how to do it.” His company, he noted, has placed an increased focus on social and racial equity in the local cannabis industry. “We want to be on the right side of the issue.”

Jazmere Johnston, one of Pusherman’s co-founders, said that for her, the opportunity to help build a business from the ground up will be advantageous no matter where her career path takes her. Johnston is currently in the process of applying for a manufacturing license, which she wants to use to make edible cannabis products.

“I think it’s a great opportunity to learn,” Johnston said. “To put good back in our community.”

Despite the lower barrier to entry, delivery businesses aren’t without their challenges either. Only a handful of Long Beach dispensaries are currently using their license to deliver, largely because of the additional cost associated with delivery services and the high level of compe-

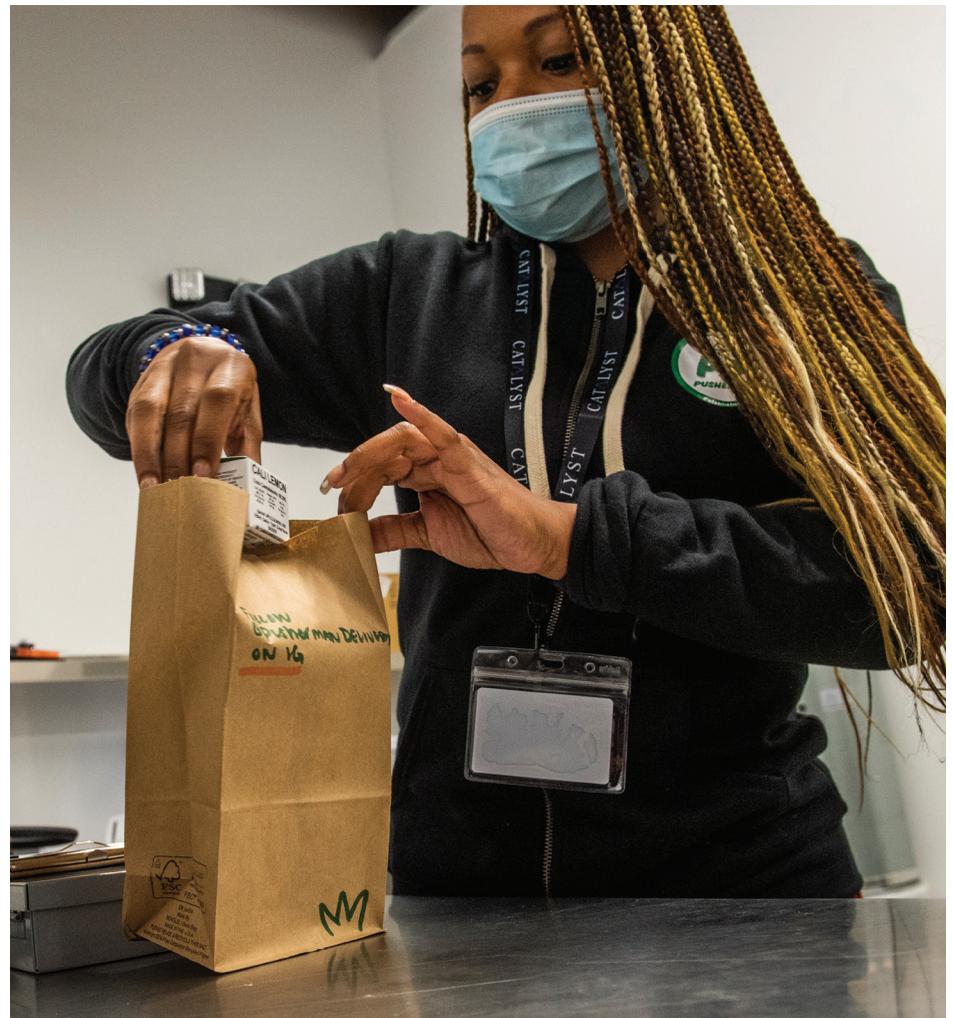
tion from licensed and unlicensed companies delivering into Long Beach from neighboring cities, said Long Beach Collective Association President Adam Hijazi.

Between labor costs, insurance premiums, cars and marketing expenses, “to actually run a full-on delivery, it can be very expensive,” Hijazi said. Still, he said, he supports the city’s plans to offer delivery-only licenses to lower-income applicants and those with previous cannabis-related convictions, the target demographic of the social equity program.

“For the city to be able to provide these opportunities for equity applicants is a great first step,” he said. Having more Long Beach-based delivery services is also likely to benefit licensed cannabis businesses as a whole, he noted. “The more licensed delivery you have, the more people can participate in the legal market.”

Zepeda acknowledged that building a client base large enough to make his business profitable will be a challenge, but it’s one he’s willing to take on. “This is my only avenue now, so I’m going to take what I can, make it happen,” he said.

One day, Zepeda hopes to own and operate his own brick-and-mortar dispensary. “Hopefully, this is just the beginning,” he said. ■



Delivery Manager Jazmere Johnston bags an order at Pusherman Delivery, Thursday, May 27, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

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Return to the sweet life: Bundts on Melrose owner Jeff Beasley steps back into the kitchen

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Getting a hold of Bundts on Melrose owner Jeff Beasley these days is challenging. “I’ve been putting out a few fires,” he said after apologizing for the delay in responding to calls and emails.

Short on workers who didn’t return after the pandemic—a problem many business owners are facing—he is also in the midst of a surge in orders for his palm-sized baked goods as the economy begins to reopen.

Beasley said he lost several large accounts due to pandemic-related business closures, but now orders have picked up so quickly that he’s had to step back into the kitchen himself, whipping up batter and piping cream cheese frosting onto his creations.

Beasley doesn’t mind being back in between the mixing bowls; he’s spent nearly five decades in the cake business.

“I don’t think I would change it for anything,” Beasley said.

His career started as a baker for Ralphs supermarkets in the late 1970s, but his passion for baking goes back even farther, to a time when he was a little boy following his grandmother around the kitchen.

“That’s where I found the fascination of watching the ingredients come together,” Beasley remembers. “It’s one of those things you can’t explain, I was just totally captivated by it.”

Soon enough, his aunt asked him to bake a cake for her social club and offered to pay him, too. But it wasn’t cash that drew the young baker in. “It was the look and the expression on anyone’s face who tasted my cake, that gave me a feeling that I still get to this day,” he said.

After working at the Ralphs central baking facility in Glendale for 14 years before operations were outsourced, and another 17 years at an upscale bakery in LA, Beasley found himself unemployed for the first time ever when that business was sold in 2011.

It was during a job interview that he realized it was time to start his own business.

“A light that was flickering in the back



Jeff Beasley stands at the counter of his Bixby Knolls bakery, Bundts on Melrose, June 9, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.

of my head started flashing,” he said. So he went home and began experimenting.

“I went out into the garage, pulled out the mixer and I started working on the recipes that were in my head already,” Beasley remembers.

His wife was supportive of his plans from the start, Beasley said, even if the endeavor seemed daunting at first.

“Honestly, it was very scary,” Amanda Beasley remembers. But, “I trusted that he could do it. I never doubted that he would be successful.”

Years later, she said her instincts were right. “I know that he will put his all into what he’s doing,” she said. “I’ve seen him do nothing but prosper.”

From selecting the name—Beasley said it just had an undeniably upscale ring to it—to running the business, Bundts on Melrose

has always been a family affair. When he suffered two subsequent strokes in 2018, his youngest daughter took over operations for a while.

“I would have lost it if she had not stepped in,” he said. “She put her life on hold.”

Then, when the pandemic hit, the two ran the business together, with the elder Beasley baking the cakes and his daughter manning the counter.

Throughout the tribulations of the pandemic, his family and the community have helped Bundts on Melrose survive, said Beasley.

“The journey, the support that I’ve had from the community—I couldn’t even put that into words,” he said.

One customer, who preferred to remain anonymous, ordered a Bundt cake for every worker at MemorialCare Long Beach Med-

ical Center. When he delivered the order, Beasley received a standing ovation from everyone, including the hospital’s CEO. He remembers breaking into tears.

“I was so touched,” he said.

Despite a difficult year and his previous health issues, the 61-year-old is nowhere near ready to retire.

“My wife says I’m a control freak,” Beasley said.

Passing the baton won’t be easy, he said: “There’s a lot of blood, a lot of sweat and a lot of tears.”

But once the time comes for him to retire, he’s hoping his grandchildren will take over.

“During the summertime, when they’re here, they’ll come and work the counter,” he said. “They actually learned the [point of sale system] faster than I did.” ■



Jeff Beasley, owner of Bundts on Melrose, tops mini bundt cakes with cream cheese frosting. Photo by Alena Maschke.



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Celebration to mark Juneteenth with performances, vendors and other festivities

■ By **TESS KAZENOFF**
Reporter

Long Beach will mark Juneteenth with performances, vendors and more at one of the city's first large, in-person events following the coronavirus pandemic.

The event on Saturday, June 19, will include outdoor performances and activities ranging from traditional African drumming, poetry, modern dance, vendors, emceed by Aundrae Russell of KJLH Radio, and more, will be located on Pine Avenue between Fourth and Fifth streets from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m.

The headliner has yet to be announced.

"Our goal is to give (attendees) something that makes them walk away feeling good about Juneteenth and excited to come back and celebrate Juneteenth with us next year," said organizer Carl Kemp.

For Kemp, the idea to create an innovative Juneteenth celebration was two years in the making, ultimately putting the plan into action following the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

"I think it's always been important to celebrate Juneteenth. In this coun-

try, oftentimes, the things that force us to look at some of our ugly past are buried," he said.

Juneteenth is a celebration of freedom, commemorating June 19, 1865, the day that Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, announcing that the Civil War had ended and those who were enslaved were now free, two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

"I think it is an opportunity for America, and all Americans to pause, acknowledge what makes America great and made America great, was 400 years of free labor and unimaginable terror inflicted upon Black people, and still from that experience was extracted a level of joy, culture, innovation that defines America to this day, whether it be through rock 'n' roll, or jazz, or peanut butter, or any number of other huge contributions that Black people have made to this country despite always being treated in some unfortunate ways," said Kemp.

Kemp hopes that this year's Juneteenth will be a model for other cities and future Long Beach celebrations to follow, and he emphasized the event will be coronavirus-safe.

Some of the event's supporters include the Downtown Long Beach Alliance, Antioch Church, the Long Beach Post, the Port of Long Beach, Boeing, the YMCA—which will provide kid-friendly activities—and its newest sponsor, Amazon.

"Oftentimes Black History Month is a more pensive sort of thoughtful opportunity to look at our history, and in ways that alternatively Juneteenth offers that opportunity, but I think really should be embraced as a time to celebrate Black culture. We have an opportunity to make this holiday on par with Cinco de Mayo or St. Patrick's Day ... where we celebrate the culture of a fundamental American population," said Kemp.

The Long Beach City Council recently recognized Juneteenth as an official "day of celebration," and the city agreed to advocate that it become a state and federal holiday.

For those unable to attend in-person, the celebration will also be livestreamed across various social media platforms. Tickets are free, and registration in advance is encouraged by visiting www.lbjuneteenth.com/.

Other Juneteenth celebrations around Southern California are also planned:

- Presented by Black Arts Los Angeles, a Juneteenth Virtual Heritage Festival on June 19 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event includes panel discussions, music and food demonstrations.
- Enjoy a day of tributes, education, and entertainment, culminating with fireworks over the water at the Port of Los Angeles on June 19, from 1 to 8 p.m. The port is located at 425 S. Palos Verdes St., San Pedro.
- Attend a two-day Leimert Park Rising event at Leimert Park Village in Los Angeles. On June 19 and 20, from noon to 7 p.m. enjoy live music, art, storytelling and idea-sharing in honor of Juneteenth. Leimert Park is located at 4343 Leimert Blvd., Los Angeles.
- Celebrate Juneteenth with Afro GoGo, the African Fiesta at Catch One. Enjoy Afrobeats and more with music by Blaq Pages, Juan G and Vonnie Mack, and live performances by Soko7, Kobi Jonz, among others yet to be announced. Doors open at 9 p.m. and the event is 21+ only. For additional information, email Afrikalivepresents@gmail.com. Catch One is located at 4067 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles. ■



The flavored syrup is poured to make New Orleans sno-balls. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Fluffy's Sno-Balls

(Continued from Page 1)
be an entrepreneur.

"Growing up in New Orleans is a very interesting experience, especially for a young Black boy living in poverty," he said. "You wish, you dream and you strive to work hard."

After his family was displaced in Hurricane Katrina, he moved to Los Angeles with help from the Red Cross. He used his first check from the Red Cross to buy a suit so he could go on job interviews.

Lee started working for the Boy Scouts of America and then as a vice president for US Foods in Utah and for a cannabis company in Los Angeles. He wrote a book called, "The Young Black Man's Definitive Guide to Getting the Job," building on his success in the corporate world.

It was last year during the pandemic lockdown that he decided it was time to start his own business. Lee said he knew opening a business on the tail end of a pandemic would be tough, but he's hopeful customers will come flocking when the weather warms up and more people venture out.

Lee said he's invested most of his life's savings in the business.

"It took a lot of courage not knowing what the state of the world was going to be, but I had to have faith in myself," he said.

Lee plans to eventually hire kids from the neighborhood to help in the shop, but for now, his fiancé Darren Castillo helps out on weekends. Castillo, a native of Belize, is working on his doctorate in epidemiology with the goal of eventually helping to improve the healthcare system in his home country.

Lee dubbed the shop "Fluffy's" after the



Kevyn Lee, owner, right, stands with his fiancé Darren Castillo inside Fluffy's Sno-Balls. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

couple's two, fluffy standard poodles, named Lord Kensington and Duke Herrington.

Lee said business has so far been good, with customers ranging from those who have never tried a sno-ball to die-hard Louisiana natives with high expectations. Lee said a family who owns one of the oldest

sno-ball shops in New Orleans even came for a taste test.

"They gave me the seal of approval," he said.

Fluffy's Sno-Balls is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week at 1208 Long Beach Blvd. ■

A place of peace, but not quiet: After over a decade in business and a global pandemic, Shades of Afrika is as lively as ever

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Reporter

Leaning against the back door of her store, cigarette in hand and gazing at her beloved Golden Chain trees, Shades of Afrika owner Renee Quarles finds a rare moment of rest. Since opening her store in 2007, it's hard to imagine that Quarles has stood still once.

From poetry readings to yoga classes, the multi-room store on Fourth Street and Alamitos Avenue offers much more than body oils, books and incense—although there's plenty of those. Quarles, a former foster child who was homeless at 15, has clawed her way to business ownership and is now ready to share her wisdom to anyone who will listen.

"She's a powerful person, very intelligent," said Mansa Musa, who has been coming to the store for five years, while getting his hair twisted into locs at Natural Kinx and Waves, the hair salon Quarles opened next door. The atmosphere is what keeps him coming back, said Musa. "It's just a positive vibe, mentally and physically."

Next door, Quarles is busy deliberating on the health benefits of sea moss gel or the aphrodisiac effects of Oud wood body oil, all while fielding a seemingly never-ending



Customer Juliette Ortiz talks to Shades of Afrika owner Renee Quarles, June 8, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.

stream of phone calls. "Well honey, I don't know what that is. Why don't you send me an email?" she tells one caller before hanging up the phone and turning her attention back to her customers.

She keeps busy, but as for everyone else, it's been a rough year. "I now think about dying, and that's not something I'd ever think

about," she said. Not being able to hold community events has been especially difficult. "It's my heartbeat," she added.

But there are plenty of positives that came out of the past year as well.

After 14 years in the building, Quarles expects to pay off her mortgage in the next three months. Having been displaced by rising rents and new development in the past, she said the importance of ownership has been one of the biggest lessons she's learned as a business owner, especially during the pandemic.

"To weather the storm of any economic crisis such as this—this is not just a pandemic, it's an economic crisis because of the start and stop of the businesses—it needs ownership," she said. It's a lesson she'd like to pass on to her customers, especially those interested in starting their own business: do the math and own as soon as you can. "I want everyone to learn to do their numbers."

Bouncing around between foster care, living with her mother who struggled with alcohol and drug addiction, and staying in motels as a young girl, Quarles had to learn much of what she knows about life and business ownership on her own.

"It's hard out there, especially for kids who come from foster homes," she said. But her own biography has also inspired her to provide a space for people to come together, learn and grow, "Every one of us has it in us."

Among her customers, Quarles said the protests over racial equity and police brutality last summer brought about a desire to learn more about the plight of Black Americans and the history of racism in the U.S.

"Everybody is joining reading groups and reading circles to really study the issue of racism," Quarles said. And while other Black-owned bookstores around the country have reported a spike in sales during the summer and a sharp drop after protests died down, Quarles said she's confident that Shades of Afrika will be able to keep the momentum going.

"I don't think I'm going to lose their attention," she said. "They're going to keep coming."

But keeping the store stocked during the pandemic has been a challenge. As global supply chains became less reliable—currently, she is struggling with a shortage of bonnets—Quarles leaned into the local market.

"That's what made me invest more in creative minds here, locally," she said. "To get more products, I opened my doors to everybody making something."

Seeing some of their favorite stores and restaurants close during the pandemic, customers have also found a new appreciation for local small businesses, Quarles said. "COVID actually had some real benefits to us seeing things differently," she said. "Locally, we're going to stand strong."

With the pandemic seemingly fading out of view, the tireless entrepreneur is already dreaming up a new business idea: a restaurant serving food from the African continent and the diaspora called Wakanda Station.

Determined to own her next property as well, Quarles said she's keeping an eye on real estate prices, hoping they will cool down after months of record highs. "I'm waiting, patiently waiting," she said. ■



Hair stylist Tina "Mz. Tina" Manning of Natural Kinx and Waves hair salon twists client Mansa Musa's hair into locs. Photo by Alena Maschke.

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