

Long Beach Business Journal

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Charles Beirne, general manager of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, stands on the main front floor of the facility as his team prepares to reopen. Tuesday, August 3, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

‘WE’RE READY’: CONVENTION CENTER PREPS FOR RETURN TO LARGE EVENTS

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

When Eric Johnson opened his Downtown Long Beach pub in 2004, its location across the street from the Long Beach Convention Center was a main selling point.

Convention attendees make up roughly half of the Auld Dubliner’s business, Johnson said. He receives regular emails about events coming to the center and plans his inventory purchases around them.

After a tough year in which Johnson estimates he lost \$1.5 million in business, he’s ecstatic for the return of large events.

“If I could do a cartwheel, I’d do it down the halls,” he said.

Restaurateurs like Johnson, along with the owners of hotels, retail stores, and attractions are elated now that the convention center is reopening and its patrons are returning to Long Beach. The first convention—after 15 months—is set for Aug. 12.

The Convention Center brings over \$1 billion to the local economy, drawing in hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city each year who eat, sleep and shop at local establishments.

The Convention Center was shuttered on March 12, 2020 to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. It has since served as a mass vaccination site, and more recently as an emergency shelter for more than 1,000 migrant children as they waited to be reunited with family or

sponsors in the United States.

In the absence of events, the center saw its core staff drop from 125 to 15 during the height of the pandemic, leaving the remaining workers to pick up new skills to fill in the gaps. At one point, everyone—including General Manager Charlie Beirne—learned how to drive a forklift.

As the event calendar begins to fill up again, Beirne said the center has been hiring back staff, with 47 employees on the job so far.

At the facility, furniture has been wheeled in from storage, walls have been repainted and new exit signs have been installed.

“Everything’s been cleaned,

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Bixby Knolls business association at a ‘crossroads’ as major revenue source dries up

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

Sporting his usual black hat emblazoned with the words “Long Beach,” Blair Cohn walks the streets of Bixby Knolls on a Wednesday morning touching base with small business owners. He is updating them on plans for an upcoming First Fridays event, the first since the pandemic began.

Cohn, the executive director of the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association, winces as he briskly walks across the street, having recently had surgery on his neck. He is dressed in all black, despite the late morning heat, already reaching the high 70s. But connecting with the community is more important to him than his own comfort.

The association pays for a slew of services and events that benefit the neighborhood’s businesses as well as residents. From security to street cleanups and landscaping to events such as First Fridays, the association brings the community together and props up the neighborhood’s businesses. These services, crucial for the survival of the locally owned shops and restaurants, are in jeopardy because the association’s primary funding source is set to dry up this year.

“We have done so much with the funding. What now?” Cohn said. “This is the answer we are working on as the sands of the hourglass continue to empty quickly. We’re at a crossroads.”

When the Long Beach’s Redevelopment Agency was dissolved in 2012, the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association had a 10-year contract to receive funding. The association has billed the city for the remaining funds owed for 2021. Once it is paid the roughly \$70,000, that will be it, according Cohn.

The annual funding has been used to pay for banners, signage, landscaping, power washing sidewalks, private security, public art, facade

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GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Candice Wong

PUBLISHER EMERITUS
George Economides

The Long Beach Business Journal is a publication of Pacific Community Media. The journal premiered in 1987 as the Long Beach Airport Business Journal. The Business Journal is published every other Tuesday, except between Dec. 25 and mid-January. Distribution is approximately 22,000. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Opinions expressed by perspective writers and guest columnists are not necessarily the views of the Long Beach Business Journal.

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Ads: Tuesday prior to publication.
Press releases: two weeks prior to publication.
Email press releases to editor@lbbj.com.
The editorial calendar is available at lbbusinessjournal.com.

LONG BEACH BUSINESS JOURNAL
211 E. Ocean Blvd., Ste. 400
Long Beach, CA 90802
News tips: (562) 655-7678
Advertising: (562) 912-0161
Editorial: editor@lbbj.com
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Blair Cohn walks by The Bixby Allery, a communal dining space shared by numerous restaurants that was erected amid the pandemic to increase outdoor dining. Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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improvements and numerous events to promote and support businesses, all with a staff of two or three people.

Many people donated to the association throughout the pandemic, Cohn said, including one anonymous donor who gave \$50,000 to “pay it forward.” Cohn and his team took that money, bought large quantities of food from the area’s various restaurants, including MeeMa’s breakfast restaurants, then donated it to health workers, police, COVID-19 testers, vaccine administrators and others.

The association also received \$114,000 in CARES Act funding in November and expects additional American Rescue Plan funding from the city next month.

But these are one-time funding sources for extreme circumstances and will not sustain the organization for any length of time.

“We’ve been very creative with what funds are available to us anyway—a lot of smart spending,” interim association board President Norm Cauntay, a certified financial planner with Edward Jones, said. “We’re going to have to get a little bit more creative in how we raise

funds. I’m cautiously optimistic.”

After striking out with city officials to identify other revenue sources, Blair and the association board are brainstorming ways to increase funding. One option is to expand the association’s boundaries to include more businesses, particularly those along Orange Avenue. This would bring in more revenue through the annual fees businesses pay, which is currently about \$280, or 76 cents per day, Cohn said.

Another thought is the association could increase its annual business fee, which—other than minimal cost of living increases—has increased once in the last 27 years, Cohn said. Other ideas include an annual fundraiser and creating a Bixby Knolls Parking Improvement Area, which would mean additional annual fees for business owners.

Without identifying new funding sources, Cohn said some difficult decisions would have to be made, including whether he could continue as executive director. The association includes Cohn, one full-time staffer and one part-timer but if it reverted to its previous state, that would be a part-time executive director and an answering machine, Cohn said.

“It’d be very bare bones. All this momentum would come to a screeching halt,” Cohn said. “Just give it three weeks



Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association Executive Director Blair Cohn looks for a new hat at Long Beach Clothing Co., Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

and you’d see a physical difference on the street. We’d have a disconnect again ... and you might find me at Millikan High School sweeping floors.”

The association’s importance to businesses and the community at large cannot be understated, Miguel Perez,

owner of MeeMa’s said. Perez opened his breakfast restaurant in Bixby Knolls during the summer coronavirus surge in July 2020. Operating a new restaurant is always a challenge but the added stress of a global pandemic was almost impossible

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Demolition of a wall has begun outside Georgie's Place, a Bixby Knolls staple that recently closed permanently, another victim of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thursday, Aug. 5, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

‘A double whammy’: 2 popular restaurants close in Bixby Knolls

By **CHEANTAY JENSEN** / Reporter

When June 15 arrived in Long Beach, it seemed as if the whole city could collectively breathe a sigh of relief.

The city had lifted most restrictions limiting indoor and outdoor gatherings and capacity, which meant restaurants and other businesses hampered by those limitations could finally resume at full force. It seemed all would be OK.

But not two weeks later, two popular and locally cherished Bixby Knolls restaurants announced they would close for good. The first, on June 28, was Bixby's Brooklyn Deli, a classic Jewish deli next to the outdoor dining space, The Allery.

Two days later, George's Place, a near 20-year-old Greek and American diner—a local institution—also bid farewell.

“It was a double whammy,” said Blair Cohn, president of the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association.

The loss of both restaurants served as painful symbols of the toll the COVID-19 pandemic wrought on business and a sharp reminder that the city is still far from returning to pre-pandemic bliss.

“A lot of us thought that as soon as the restrictions were lifted that things would go back to normal. But it wasn't so,” said Miguel Perez, owner of MeeMa's which is next door to what was Brooklyn Deli. “It's been one thing after another.”

At the outset of the pandemic, Cohn said he and his team at the BKBIA knew there were going to be casualties. There

were a handful of businesses, he said, that almost immediately decided to call it quits. Others, he said, tried to tread water but caved shortly after.

Now, Cohn said, Bixby Knolls is still seeing the fallout from myriad pandemic-related consequences. The chief struggle now, he says, is hiring.

Long Beach employment agencies point to continued fear of the COVID-19 virus, childcare limitations and workers finding more stable jobs outside of the restaurant industry as reasons for the hiring stalls.

But what Cohn is hearing from most businesses as the root cause is the added federal unemployment benefits. Most are making more money staying unemployed than if they returned to work, he said.

“We've heard all kinds of things from folks who would go work for one shift at a restaurant, then quit and file for unemployment,” Cohn said.

In the last three months Perez, owner of MeeMa's, said he's had three people do this. In his 25 years working in the restaurant industry, Perez said he'd only seen that happen twice before.

It's been tough to find front of house staff, Perez said, and especially challenging to hire line cooks. Without cooks he said he has to limit his service capacity, so he doesn't overwhelm his kitchen. That, combined with inflating food costs, has severely hurt his bottom line.

“You need certain revenue on one end, so you can afford to pay the staff,

you don't have the staff, you can't operate as much to make the revenue,” Cohn said of the business cycle. “So there's a Catch-22 there.”

Perez said he and other businesses have increased wages to try and attract new staff, but that hasn't been met with much success.

“We have no choice,” he said. “That's also something we weren't ready for.”

Both Cohn and Perez predict the job market may improve once federal unemployment benefits expire in September.

“The issue is surviving until then,” Cohn said.

It's not, however, all doom and gloom, Cohn notes. Despite the dozen closures in the last 15 months a number of new businesses, including MeeMa's, opened during the pandemic. Some of these include Wood & Salt Tavern, SomiSomi, Sala Coffee & Wine, plant shop Rooted LB and three tattoo shops. Sal's Gumbo shack is scheduled to open in the next few months.

And Georgie's Place is slated to become LA Crab, what will be the Irvine-based seafood restaurant's second location.

“They are stripping the place. Construction is underway,” Cohn said. ■



Despite a prominent “open” sign, Bixby's Brooklyn Deli recently announced its permanent closure. Thursday, Aug. 5, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Bixby Knolls Business

Continued from page 3

to overcome. That is, without the assistance of the association, Perez said.

“I don't think we would have lasted without Blair and the association,” Perez said. “They were crucial in getting the word out about us. Every two weeks, I got a call from him asking what they could do, how they could assist me.”

The association's events and the food donation efforts were helpful in allowing the community to get a taste of what MeeMa's had to offer, Perez said, and getting the community talking about the restaurant. If he were to open a second eatery in the neighborhood, Perez said he would need the association to operate exactly as it does now.

“Blair really cares about our existence and that is huge,” he said. “Losing the association would be robbing the community.”

During the pandemic

In the best of times, the association works to support and promote businesses, keep the major corridors clean and graffiti free and bring the community together. When the pandemic set in, Cohn and his small team kicked it into overdrive.

“We spent an entire year in triage mode. The phones would start ringing at

7 in the morning and stop at 11 at night: ‘What do I do? How do I operate? Am I essential?’” Cohn said. “That's a tough question to answer. You're talking about someone's business, them as a person.”

Under normal circumstances, the association hosts in-person events, driving customers to businesses and creating a sense of community. However, the pandemic forced the team to emphasize its presence online. From March 2020 to May of this year, the association sent its membership 400 emails related to resources and guidance updates, shared 562 social media posts and even sent multiple physical letters to every member.

The association hosts numerous recurring social gatherings, such as a walking club, book club and a music club. Cohn was adamant about keeping engagement up for this programming throughout the pandemic no matter what.

For those who were comfortable, the walking club continued to meet every Saturday, masked up with staggered departures for a predetermined route. The music group Knights of the Turntable began receiving weekly curated playlists rather than gathering around and listening to a record. The book club met via Zoom.

In addition to virtual programming, services continued throughout the pandemic, including trash pickups, landscaping and security, all paid for



A woman walks her dog along the Atlantic corridor in Bixby Knolls, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

through the association.

“We didn't want it to look abandoned,” Cohn said. “We didn't want anything to be overgrown so when people came back ... it was in horrible shape.”

Of course, the association could not entirely turn its back on in-person community engagement. Partnering with businesses, the association hosted 11 parades where participants drove through streets, cars decorated, so the residents could watch from their windows, porches and lawns, and stay connected with business owners and each other.

The Halloween parade was six hours long and consisted of a 30-mile route that covered every street in the neighborhood, Cohn said.

“We had to keep everybody engaged with us. If we gave them time to change their patterns enough, it would be hard to get them back,” Cohn said. “So we did as much as we could to beat the drum.”

When allowed per state, county and local health guidelines, the association hosted 53 flash events, often including giveaways, at various businesses to bring in customers. The events were a rousing success, Cohn said, noting that 80% of people would show up for a free item such as a burger but spend money on other items, bringing much-needed sales and brand awareness to suffering businesses.

“But we were not fooled to think that there wouldn't be casualties,” Cohn said. Some businesses had issues before the pandemic set in, which became insurmountable in the face of shutdowns. Others took the opportunity to retire. “And some just couldn't make it,” he added.

Businesses that closed as a result of the pandemic include Elise's Tea Room, FreeSpirit Yoga, Jumper's Jungle, Averyboo Arts, Recreation Fitness, Payday Advance, Mixx Kitchen, Bixby's Brooklyn Deli and Georgie's Place. But it has not all been “doom and gloom,” Cohn said. Bixby Knolls also is preparing to welcome several other businesses soon, including Juice Lab, Sweetgrass, LA Crab, Sal's Gumbo Shack #2, Blue Burro and Romeo Chocolates.

Like business owners across the

country, Bixby Knolls entrepreneurs are getting nervous watching COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations increase, Cauntay said. Many restaurants are watching the news and wondering if new guidelines could move business back to outdoors only.

“I've told them they should probably prepare,” Cohn said. “But we can't go backward completely. We can't shut down again. It'll be disastrous. It'd be horrific.”

To offset the negative impacts of the pandemic when only outdoor dining was allowed, the city shutdown one northbound and one southbound lane along Atlantic Avenue and added diagonal parking, which allowed for small parklets and put a buffer between outdoor diners and passing vehicles. For years, Cohn has argued that traffic needed to be slowed along the corridor—be it more traffic lights, a reduced speed limit or lane reduction—so passersby would have time to notice the businesses.

The pandemic caused the opposite. With pedestrians off the street, vehicle speeds through Bixby Knolls increased drastically, and even included dangerous street racing, Cohn said. The lane closures helped curtail that, he said. However, the trial closure was not maintained well due to Public Works being pulled in so many directions, he added.

As it stands, the northbound lane has been reopened and diagonal parking remains on the southbound, which is the opposite of what it should be, as far as Cohn is concerned. He explained that the northbound side has often had a parking shortage, while the southbound side often has spaces available. The future of Atlantic Avenue is just as uncertain as that of the association, Cohn said, adding that Public Works is still considering its options.

Regardless of what happens with the Atlantic corridor or the future of the association, Cohn said he feels he has upheld his commitment to the community.

“People say, ‘Leave it better than when you found it,’ and I think we've done that,” Cohn said. “But what happens next? I don't know.” ■



Liberation Brewing Co. co-owner Eric McLaughlin puts labels on the brewery's newest beer, a Belgian-style Saison dubbed "The Path of Least Resistance," Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



Dutch's Brewhouse owner Jason Van Fleet pours a beer, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



With the brewery closed to customers on Wednesdays, the owners of Ambitious Ales can their beer, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson

Bixby's beer scene bounces back from pandemic pains

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

People missed their local watering holes throughout the pandemic. The businesses built around mind-altering libations and bringing people together to commune were shut down for months. But the beer scene in Bixby Knolls has persevered through the worst of the pandemic.

From to-go booze to partnering with nearby restaurants to becoming mini-marts and Christmas tree lots, the beer-centric establishments found creative ways to sustain themselves while their original business models were not available to them. But now that they are back, they are back strong, according to Ambitious Ales co-founder Garrett Carroll.

"There is a lot of loyalty to the small businesses community in Bixby Knolls," he said. "A lot of the businesses live and [die] by the neighborhood. There's a strong sense of community and that's one of the big reasons we've been thankful to be in the area."

Bixby Knolls has two full-fledged breweries—Ambitious and Liberation Brewing Co.—and several other establishments that emphasize the hoppy beverage, including Dutch's Brewhouse, Rasselbock Kitchen & Beer Garden and Smog City Brewing Co. While the others had some respite thanks to their business models including food, the

breweries were shuttered for more than half of 2020.

It wasn't until October that breweries were allowed to reopen their doors with one catch—they had to serve food. Both breweries successfully partnered with food vendors and commenced in-person sales after offering only to-go brews. Of course, the pandemic worsened during the winter but the new year brought revised guidelines and a full reopening in June after vaccinations were more widespread.

Once the reopening started, Carroll said the beer scene's regulars were the first to come back. But shortly thereafter, new faces began coming in, some from as far as Culver City—a sign that many were missing the craft beer scene.

"It's definitely bounced back big time. It's clear lots of people were ready to get out," Carroll said. "Especially when vaccines were more readily available, we got people saying, 'This is the first place I came after getting my vaccination.' I can't believe how many times I've heard that."

The area's business district, led by Executive Director Blair Cohn, pushed the community to support the breweries and restaurants by ordering food and drinks to go and to patronize when allowed. One of the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association's most prominent beer-focused offerings is coming back after a year and a half.

the Big Red Bus Trolley, which carts passengers around to enjoy all of Brewery Knolls' offerings over four hours.

It returned Aug. 14, Cohn said. "It's fantastic having a beer culture here," Cohn said. "We had fished around for our 'thing' for years—at first we thought it could be 'Little Italy' because there's a lot of Italian and pizza places. But when the beer started coming, it was perfect."

Here is a rundown of Bixby beer businesses:

Ambitious Ales

This microbrewery was founded by five friends and celebrated its grand opening in February 2019, so the small team had only a year to establish themselves within the tight-knit community. But being strictly a taproom with no food offerings at the onset of the pandemic, Ambitious had an uphill battle.

The team was able to turn to canning some of its beers for sale in four packs or singles for customers to mix and match. Customers are able to order online for quick and easy pickup requiring minimal contact. When breweries were allowed to reopen in October, the Ambitious team had to figure out how to bring in the required food element. Fortunately, Thunderbolt Pizza opened next door later that month, and teamed

up with the brewery to offer food in a new beer garden behind the brewery.

Head brewer Garrett Carroll has 14 beers on tap as of the end of July. From the blonde coffee-infused Central Perk to the 12% Korben, the brewery's two-year anniversary imperial stout that was aged in bourbon barrels for 16 months, the team lives up to its mission to push the boundaries of craft beer by reinventing classics with their own twist. Other offerings include pale ales, IPAs, gose, pilsners and lagers.

Ambitious is located at 4019 Atlantic Ave., Long Beach, CA 90807

Dutch's Brewhouse

At any given time, Dutch's has four to six micro batches brewing for sale on site. The microbrewery opened in 2015 and also carries other brands, including owner Jason "Dutch" Van Fleet's new brewery Syncopated, which is located in Lakewood, Modern Times Beer, Oskar Blues Brewery, Radiant Beer Co. and Texas-based Shiner Bock from the Spoetzl Brewery.

Also a popular eatery known for its pizza, it was not a tall order for Dutch's to fall back on takeout business, especially once they purchased a canning machine. When beers arrived in kegs, staff would get to work canning them for retail sale to go. To further drive its takeout businesses, Dutch's implemented free delivery for orders

within two miles of the storefront. While the free deliveries continue, the staff no longer cans beer.

One of Dutch's unique features is its onsite brewing class. Prior to the pandemic, small groups could sign up to have staff walk them through the beer-making process. Once the beer ferments, the customer returns for a small batch that's bottled and ready to drink. However, due to the close proximity necessary for the class, there are no plans to bring back brewing sessions anytime soon, one employee said.

Dutch's is located at 4244 Atlantic Ave., Long Beach, CA 90807

Liberation Brewing Co.

The first full-fledged brewery in Bixby Knolls, co-founders Dan Regan (former Reel Big Fish trombonist), Eric McLaughlin and Mike Clements opened

the doors to Liberation in 2018. "Equal parts Mos Eisley cantina [a "Star Wars" reference] and Tom Waits fever dream," according to its website, Liberation includes a five-barrel production facility and a tasting room, which—outside of pandemic circumstances—has been used for community events.

The brewery offers numerous lagers, ales, IPAs and more, some with Long Beach-inspired names such as the Jackrabbit and the Cyclone Racer. Throughout the pandemic, Liberation continued the sale of its beers in growlers and Crawlies—large containers, such as jugs or cans, that hold 32-64 ounces of beer—as well as cans and bottles.

Even before the pandemic, Liberation teamed up with food vendors for events and pop-ups on site. The brewery began serving Fire Bird's Nashville hot

chicken months before the pandemic forced the facility to close. But as soon as the city gave approval, Liberation and Fire Bird were back in the game, offering ice-cold beer and smokin' hot chicken outdoors.

Liberation is located at 3630 Atlantic Ave., Long Beach, CA 90807

Rasselbock Kitchen & Beer Garden

While not a brewery, Rasselbock is absolutely a staple in Bixby's beer scene. As it says on the restaurant's website, "Germans take our beer seriously and it plays a major role in our culture." Owned by German-born Bjoern Risse and Bülent Yildirim, the restaurant carries 35 German and Belgian beers, served in German-style pint glasses, mugs and even boots.

Rasselbock thrives on its biergarten atmosphere: people coming together

to enjoy hearty food and heartier beer. Forced to forego that atmosphere, the team made some of the most creative moves of the past year. Most notably, in late November and early December, the restaurant turned itself into a Christmas tree lot, selling hundreds of trees to the community. Rasselbock also transformed into a mini-market, selling beer, imported chocolates and other items.

Undeterred by the challenges of the pandemic, Bjoern opened a second Bixby Knolls restaurant. Wood & Salt Tavern opened in September during a brief lull in the pandemic, a couple months before the worst surge of the pandemic began.

Rasselbock is located at 4020 Atlantic Ave., Long Beach, CA 90807

Smog City Brewing Co. @ SteelCraft

Though not based in Long Beach, Smog City Brewing Co. certainly has established itself as a Bixby Knolls beer scene contributor. The Torrance-based brewery is one of the original tenants of the original SteelCraft food hall, which opened in Bixby Knolls in early 2017. The Long Beach location offers 25 beers, including pilsners, IPAs, various ales, lagers, saisons, stouts, sours and cider.

In January 2017, the Long Beach Planning Commission approved Smog City for the sale of beer for off-site consumption, which was a plus when on-site dining came to an end during the pandemic. Similarly, being located within a food hall and surrounded by various eateries with shared outdoor seating, Smog City was uniquely positioned when state orders allowed for breweries to open outdoors if they sold food.

Founded in 2011, the Torrance brewery celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The company has expanded to four locations, including the original brewery and taphouse, Long Beach, a second Torrance location and a space in the Glendora Public Market.

SteelCraft is located at 3768 Long Beach Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90807 ■



A server walks a flight of beers out to customers at Rasselbock Kitchen & Beer Garden, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



A customer drinks a Smog City beer at the SteelCraft food hall, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



Poking out a takeout window, Joty Kaur holds a plate of “Good Vibes Tostadas” at Break Time! in West Long Beach, Tuesday, Aug. 2, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

Two women challenge stereotypes with ‘remixed’ Mexican food

By **CRYSTAL NIEBLA** / Reporter

Best friends Joty Kaur, 28, and Lucy Singleton, 30, are always catching people by surprise.

Every day, they say, men at their Mexican takeout spot Break Time! in West Long Beach often comment on their young age and looks.

“When people see us in here, they think that we need to be saved or something,” Kaur said, sitting inside their pink-painted eatery. Men used to say similar things to her mother, she recalled.

In April, Kaur and Singleton officially debuted their takeout business, operating out of a unit they share with a flan factory. Kaur’s mother, 60-year-old Lina Kaur, bought the space five years ago, where she only sold doughnuts and later lottery tickets.

Lina, who’s Indian, wanted to cook and sell Indian food from the space, but there was no demand for it, according to Lina. Years later, Singleton, who’s of Mexican descent, entered the equation.

And she’s a great cook—so much so that

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From left to right, Mexican Squirt, pineapple and strawberry flavored iced sodas sweat on a hot summer day at Break Time!, a Mexican takeout business in West Long Beach. Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.



Ylenia Mino, owner of Paint for Purpose, at Hellada Gallery at 117 Linden Ave. Photo by Alena Maschke.

How Ylenia Mino painted her way through the pandemic

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

When the pandemic restrictions shut down her business, Ylenia Mino had to shift focus. Her company, Paint for a Purpose, offers painting classes for corporate and private clients—hosting as many as 200 people per event—that range from team building exercises to birthday parties.

With in-person events prohibited, Mino quickly moved her business online, offering virtual classes and delivering painting kits to her students’ homes. In a time of turmoil, like the coronavirus pandemic, she figured, people needed her classes more than ever.

“I want to bring that joy, encouragement and empower people,” Mino said of her businesses’ namesake purpose.

Learning how to paint and improving their skills can help students overcome challenges in other areas of their lives, Mino said. “If they’re frustrated, they don’t know how to do something—they can overcome that.”

After taking art classes from age 7 through her teen years, Mino moved on to study psychology at the University of Turin. Understanding the human mind has informed both her art and her educational approach, she said.

“If you have a vision, if you have a story—if you understand the mind, the heart—and you put it together with art, it’s really a powerful tool.”

For her students, the classes also offer an opportunity to escape the stress of everyday life.

“It just gives you that ability to let your creativity express itself in the most organic way possible,” said Sean Seal, a hearing aid specialist from Long Beach who has attended several of Mino’s classes and even celebrated his 30th

birthday with a paint-and-sip party.

Her warm approach and openness are what stood out most to him, Seal said, “allowing you to be creative in a nice, positive environment.”

Mino aims to lead by example when it comes to overcoming challenges and taking matters into her own hands.

“She sets up chairs, tables, easels, all on her own,” said Marek Dzida, director of Hellada Gallery, where Mino has recently resumed in person classes. “She’s a one-woman show.”

The pandemic has put that resilience to the test once more. “It makes you or it breaks you,” Mino said of a challenging time like the current. “You can bend as long as you don’t break.”

Her experience as an immigrant—Mino moved to the U.S. from a small town in Northern Italy nine years ago—has taught her to bend, readjust and fight for every opportunity, she said.

“You don’t have a safety net—family, friends—everything is new,” Mino said. “You have to become like a tiger.”

Since the state moved to allow in-person gatherings to resume, Mino has observed a change in her students. “People are more grateful,” she said, adding that they seemed more appreciative of the sense of community the classes offer.

Her business, she noted, was able to survive with the help of a \$5,000 grant from TMC Community Capital, as well as a lot of her own sweat and—at times—tears. It also offered her to fulfill a longtime dream of hers to travel to Hawaii. Soon, she’s hoping to offer classes there as well.

Paint for a Purpose is located at 3780 Kilroy Airport Way, suite 200. They can be reached at 562-666-2517. Visit www.paintforapurpose.com. ■

Female-founded startups receive less funding despite higher returns

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

When Nassim Abdi began shopping around the concept for her company to investors, she was optimistic. With companies like Amazon and Google as paying clients—her company, Storybolt, offers equity and diversity training—she was confident they would bite. When many didn’t, she was confused.

“Is it that I’m lacking something?” Abdi remembers asking herself. “I started really doubting myself.”

Companies founded by women produce higher returns on investment and cumulative revenues than those led by men—still they receive only a fraction of overall funding from investors. The pandemic has worsened this funding gap: already miniscule, the percentage of venture capital investment flowing to female founders dropped dramatically last year.

According to Crunchbase, a company that collects data on private and public companies, only \$2.3% of venture capital investment went to female founders in 2020. The total amount of funding invested in female-founded companies also decreased by 27% compared to the previous year.

“Abysmal,” said Andrea White-Kjoss, managing director of the Long Beach Accelerator, of these numbers. “They’re absolutely terrible, no matter what metric you apply.”

So why are female-founded companies having such a hard time attracting investors?

Abdi said she noticed that potential investors often asked her about the potential risks the company might face, rather than inquire about her vision for the future. She soon began to suspect that her being a woman and an

immigrant who speaks with an accent—she immigrated to the U.S. from Iran in 2003—had something to do with that.

“They don’t trust you because you’re not like them,” she said.

And there’s research to back up Abdi’s intuition. After having similar experiences as the co-founder of a venture-funded startup, former investment banker and strategic consultant Dana Kanze set out to test her hypothesis that women founders weren’t given the same shot at funding as their male counterparts.

To do so, Kanze transcribed and analyzed years pitch presentations from TechCrunch’s Disrupt Startup Battlefield, an event that has helped launch companies that have since become household names, such as Dropbox, Fitbit and Mint, by placing them in front of top venture capital firms.

Using a linguistic analysis software as well as manual coding in a research lab, Kanze determined the frequency with which female founders were asked questions aimed at prevention rather than promotion. For example, a prevention approach would be to ask a founder how they planned to retain customers, rather than asking them how many they expected to add in the future.

Kanze’s research, the results of which she presented in a 2017 TED Talk, showed a startling imbalance. Of the questions posed to male founders by investors, 67% were “promotion-coded,” meaning that they focused on a founder’s vision for growing the company. Meanwhile, the numbers were reversed for female founders—66% of questions directed at them were focused on prevention.

“When it comes to venture funding,

Continued on page 10



Closed Loop Plastics founders Sharon To, Aldrin Lupisan and Will Amos at the Bay Area Maker Faire in San Mateo in 2019. Photo courtesy of Closed Loop Plastic.

Startups

Continued from page 9

entrepreneurs need to convince investors of their start-up’s home run potential,” Kanze said in her TED Talk. “It’s not enough to merely demonstrate you’re not going to lose your investors’ money.”

Being asked limiting questions, she concluded, meant that women had less of a chance to shine in front of investors—resulting in less enthusiasm to fund their business ventures.

While Kanze’s research found that female venture capitalists were displaying the same bias against female founders as male venture capitalists, a phenomenon called “similarity bias” likely also works against women founders, said White-Kjoss, of the Long Beach Accelerator.

“There’s this tendency to talk to people who look like you,” she said.

This makes things difficult for anyone who’s not a white man, demographic data of the venture capital landscape shows. According to the National Venture Capital Association, 80% of investment partners at venture capital firms were White and only 14% were women.

“If all of the people making decisions are White men, they are likely to gravitate and talk to White men,” White-Kjoss said.

That experience is one Sharon To, a 24-year-old cofounder of Long Beach-based Closed Loop Plastics, can confirm. As a Chinese American woman who co-founded the plastics recycling company together with two male co-founders, To said she often found investors deferring to them during pitch meetings.

“As the computer engineer, I do work on the algorithm and the control systems that we use in our process, so I am the expert on that,” To said. Still, she said, investors often directed their technological questions toward her male co-founders.

In the short-term, some women founders like To have taken it upon themselves to make up for the lack of trust they sense among their audience of investors. “This is the type of room that I will be walking into,” she said. “I do try to emit more confidence than I normally have.”

Kanze’s research showed that this approach can make an impact. In her analysis, she found that by responding to limiting questions with promotion-

driven answers, founders were able to raise 14 times more funding than those who went along with the prevention-focused approach.

In the long-term, investors have to change the way they approach female founders, from the questions they ask to the outreach they do, said White-Kjoss. “It has to be really committed to correcting these outcomes.”

There are multiple ways to achieve this, she added, from equity and diversity training to setting a minimum percentage of women-founded companies a firm funds and reaching out to local, national, global organizations for female founders.

“It’s really important when you cast your net that you’re fishing in the right waters,” White-Kjoss said.

Unwilling to wait for traditional venture capital firms to change, a growing number of social equity-driven investment funds are hoping to impact the demographics of the investment landscape and company boardrooms.

“Women really need to step up as investors,” said Julie Castro Abrams, co-founder of How Women Invest, an investment fund that exclusively invests in women-founded companies. “That’s probably one of the biggest things that

could change the game.”

How Women Invest currently boasts a network of 211 investors, 90% of whom are women. In its first year, the venture capital firm drummed up \$10 million in funding for women-founded companies, two of which have been selected so far.

If women continue to avoid the male-dominated venture capital world, “we’re missing out on the power, wealth and influence that we could have investing in venture,” Castro Abrams said. Meanwhile, as other investors shy away from women-founded companies with high revenue potential, “those of us who are investing in women-founded companies can make a lot of money,” she added.

Whether it’s to create change within existing venture capital firms or forming new ones to invest in founders who have long been overlooked, like women and founders of color, awareness of the bias they face is key, said Storybolt-founder Abdi.

“We need to be more vocal about it as female founders that this bias exists,” she said. This, Abdi hopes, will help spur more diversity and equity programs in venture capital. “Silicon Valley could benefit from that,” she said. ■



Lina Kaur, center, stands alongside Lucy Singleton, left, and Joty Kaur outside their business, Break Time!, in West Long Beach, Thursday, July 15, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

Mexican Food

Continued from page 8

people can’t believe it, according to the three women.

Even Singleton’s own family questioned her cooking abilities. “Now, it’s more like my hidden card. Like, ha!” she exclaimed.

While Singleton’s in charge of the recipes, Kaur handles the marketing. The two make a good team, they said.

Singleton’s food is influenced by Durango, Mexico, where her mother is from, and “remixed” by soul food from the South, where her boyfriend’s from. And you can taste it in the hints of the barbecue flavor of her meats she uses in her taquitos. With the two nationalities fused together, their food—like their vegetarian potato tacos—is full of spice, and not necessarily the hot kind.

“People say, ‘You don’t even need sauce in it,’” Singleton said. “It’s a new Mexican flavor.”

She and Kaur also experiment with items, such as drizzling a small bag of Hot Cheeto over taquitos, tajin-rimming and dropping chopped fruits in their iced Jarrito drinks, and putting an entire cheese-oozing chile relleno in a burrito.

“To make every bite a party,” is all Singleton wants, she said.

Like many great cooks, Singleton said that she has to do it with love in order for it to taste perfect. While she said it might be a superstition, she took that expression very seriously.

Singleton said she’ll never forget a time her mother asked, “‘Were you mad when you made this?’” after tasting a dish. Singleton said that if her mood isn’t positive when she cooks, “it just throws your palette off.” A dish too salty, too bitter or too spicy might be the consequence, she said.

Since launching the takeout business, Singleton changed her lifestyle. “Good vibes only,” an expression literally glowing in pink, neon lights inside the business, also became Singleton’s priority. Avoiding any stress from rushing to work, she gets up early, 6:30 a.m. to be exact. For a clear mind, she then meditates. When she finally hits the road to Long Beach in her cinnamon-colored Dodge Charger from her Canyon Country home, she drives slowly.

“I like to take my time with things,” she said.

When she finally gets to work around 9 a.m., when they start serving food, Kaur said Singleton is always in such a happy mood.

“‘Why don’t you come in like Lucy? Lucy’s always in a great mood,’” Kaur said, giggling as she recalled her mother’s words.

Before launching the takeout business, Kaur’s father died in March from ailments related to alcoholism, which had set her back, she said. Now, she can speak more freely about it without tearing.

“It just gave me and Lucy some strength,” Kaur said. “Now, we have to make this work.”

Break Time! is located at 3636 Santa Fe Ave. ■

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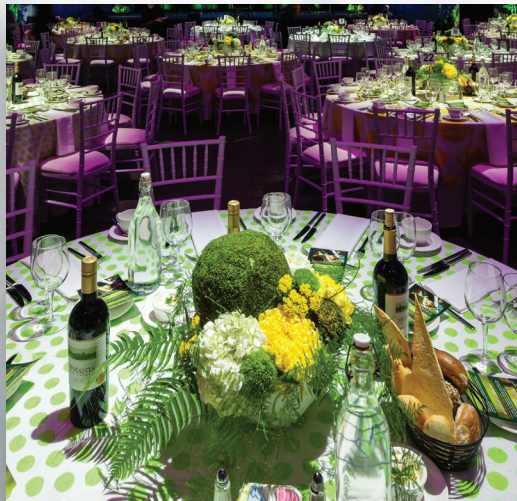
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A K-rail is moved into place on the first day of track building for the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach, Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Crews begin work on the Acura Grand Prix track for the first time in more than two years

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

It’s been nearly two and a half years since the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach has sent cars and trucks zooming through its Downtown race track, but if all goes to plan race organizers hope that drivers will start their engines as planned for the Sept. 24 race weekend.

Crews began work Monday, Aug. 2, setting up the more than 2,400 K-rails that will line the racecourse on Shoreline Drive with a two-man tractor team meticulously placing the concrete barriers that weigh several thousand pounds each south of the Long Beach Convention Center.

Setting the track up will take about 53 days, according to race organizers, and a total of about two and half weeks to tear down.

The track was about 70% set up in March 2020 when race organizers were told that it would be canceled due to the pandemic.

Track construction now begins as COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations continue to climb, with health officials in Los Angeles County recently reporting

over 3,000 cases per day.

Grand Prix Chief Executive Officer Jim Michaelian said it’s hard to tell what effect the delta variant, the dominant strain that has been attributed to rising case levels in the county, will have on the event but he’s hopeful that this year’s race will go on as planned.

“We’ll abide by whatever the Long Beach Health Department and other health officials have stipulated for the race and we’ll be in contact with them as time goes along to see how those trends are moving along,” Michaelian said. “But we’re hopeful to be able to conduct this event with full fan participation.”

The race has traditionally drawn about 185,000 spectators over the three-day weekend and race organizers believe they’ll see a good turnout this year, citing a pent-up demand for live sporting events and the race’s two-year absence. Tickets went on sale to the public in June.

Under current health orders, the race would not require masking for the outdoor race portions of the three-day event, but would require masking for the indoor components like the lifestyle

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A K-rail is moved as seen from beneath the grandstand on the first day of track building for the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach, Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



A man rides by the old Gerald Desmond Bridge at the Port of Long Beach, Wednesday, July 29, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Old Gerald Desmond Bridge to be fully demolished by October 2023

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

The Gerald Desmond Bridge, which has connected Downtown Long Beach to Terminal Island for more than five decades, is slated to be fully demolished by October 2023, with the main span completely removed months earlier in April 2023, according to Port of Long Beach officials.

The Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners earlier this month in July approved a \$27.5 million contract with Vancouver Washington-based construction company Kiewit Infrastructure West Co. to demolish the bridge. The company is expected to submit its demolition plans, including methodology, by early 2022 with demolition to begin in May 2022, according to port Port of Long Beach Capital Programs Executive Duane Kenagy.

Part of the reason for the new bridge was to allow larger ships to pass through the harbor, as the old bridge has a lower clearance.

“Our tenants in the inner harbor area would like to begin scheduling larger vessels as soon as possible,” Kenagy said. “So we’re going to do everything we can to get this thing removed safely and as fast as reasonably possible.”

Methods to demolish the bridge include lowering large sections onto a barge to be disassembled at another location or reverse-engineering the

bridge in place. Kenagy said the demolition will likely be a hybrid of the two methods.

The total budget for the project is \$59.9 million, which includes the Kiewit contract, a \$7.2 million contract with WSP USA for construction management, \$6 million for contract support, an \$8.6 million contingency fund, \$10 million in design costs that has already been spent and \$600,000 in bid and award costs.

Kiewit submitted the lowest of five bids received by the port. The company underbid the next lowest firm, American Bridge Company, by nearly \$5 million. The high bid of nearly \$75 million came from Long Beach-based Taylor-Walsh Joint Venture.

“There are a number of factors that go into demolition that are unique in construction,” Kenagy said. “First of all, it’s not a situation where you go and buy [materials] in a competitive market, it’s all down to methodology. Also, there’s quite a bit of value in the salvaged materials.”

Demolition companies often have disposal agreements in place for materials such as steel, Kenagy explained. The more favorable the agreement, the more money the demolition company will make on salvaged materials, which can translate to lower bids for the work being done.

The vast majority of the old bridge will be recycled in some manner,

Kenagy said, but the port is retaining small bits of steel and a certain number of bolts to be given out as commemorative gifts, he said.

The demolition requires extra care due to the close proximity of the Gerald Desmond’s close proximity to the newly opened bike path on the south side of the Long Beach International Gateway Bridge. Another challenge is to ensure



Construction of the Gerald Desmond Bridge nears completion in 1967. Photo courtesy of the Port of Long Beach.

the old bridge does not collapse during the demolition, Kenagy said, adding that the pavement will likely be removed first to lessen the load on the steel structure.

“The old bridge was designed to be locked together, so when you start tearing it apart, you need to make sure it remains stable,” Kenagy said. “In fact, as part of the demolition, one of the first things they’ll have to do is actually build some extra reinforcement.”

Once the Gerald Desmond is no more, the new bridge, which opened in October, will allow larger ships to pass through to Long Beach’s inner harbor. Over the last 20 years, container ships have continued to grow. Two decades ago, when initial planning began for the International Gateway Bridge began, “mega ships” were not nearly as large as they are today, port spokesman Lee Peterson noted.

In the year 2000, the largest container ship was capable of carrying 8,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (the standard measure of a shipping container), according to porteconomicsmanagement.org. By 2010, when port officials submitted the environmental impact report for the proposed bridge replacement project, the largest vessel could carry up to 14,000 TEUs. Today, ships are fast approaching a 25,000 TEU capacity.

“The biggest ships in the world are not going to go back there,” Peterson said.

However, only two of the port’s six container terminals are in the inner harbor, Kenagy pointed out. While ships carrying upward of about 9,000 TEUs would have to squeeze beneath the old bridge, the International Gateway will allow vessels carrying upward of around 15,000 TEUs depending on the configuration of the cargo, Kenagy said.

“There’s a lot of industry thought that the workhorse of the Pacific trade lanes in the future are probably going to be in the 13,000-14,000 TEU vessel size,” Kenagy said. “We believe virtually all of the vessels that would want to go into the inner harbor area will be able to.” ■



Laughs in space: Rocket Lab has a blast naming its missions

By **TIM GROBATY** / Columnist

NASA will brook no monkey business when it comes to giving names to its missions. The rules are laid out in a policy directive (and does anything sap comedic horseplay more thoroughly than a policy directive?) titled “Official names for Major NASA Projects.”

“Project names will be simple and easy to pronounce,” drones the steely-eyed, buttoned-down directive. “Names will not be duplicate or be so similar to other names that they create confusion; project names will be serialized (when appropriate), including Arabic numbers; acronyms are to be avoided in selecting names except where the acronym is descriptive and easily pronounced; names will be printed with only the initial letter capitalized.” So that explains why NASA’s mission to Mars wasn’t called “Better Red Than Dead” or “Ziggy Stardust.”

If you want to get cute with naming missions, perhaps you’d be more comfortable working elsewhere.

Like Long Beach-based Rocket

Lab, a private American aerospace manufacturer and small satellite launch service that, unlike your stodgy NASA employees or overly nerdy Elon Musk of Space X who favors names taken from sci-fi novels, has a bit of rocket-science fun in coming up with names of its missions to deliver satellites into orbit.

When the company launched a Canon Electronics satellite to demonstrate Canon’s earth-imaging technology, Rocket Lab dubbed the mission, “Pics Or It Didn’t Happen,” a social-media demand in response to a fantastical but visually undocumented posting.

Elvis Presley’s hit “Return to Sender” was the obvious choice of the name of the company’s first attempt to bring its Electron rocket’s first stage back to earth under a parachute system for a controlled water landing.

“We were going to reveal ‘Return To Sender’ in a teaser video with Elvis Presley’s classic song of the same name until we were told the licensing costs to use the song in the video clip,” said a

Rocket Lab spokesperson.

Rocket Lab’s mission names are a collective effort. If it’s a dedicated mission, then the customer gets to select the name, though they also workshop titles with the Rocket Lab team. For Rocket Lab’s 14th mission, Capella Space suggested “I Can’t Believe It’s Not Optical” as a nod to its unique (non-optical) imaging satellite. While “As The Crow Flies,” was a reference to a customer’s platform named Corvus, which is also the genus of birds that includes crows. “With ‘As The Crow Flies’ being an idiom for the most direct path between two points, the name seemed perfect for that dedicated mission,” according to a Rocket Lab email.

For rideshare missions, with multiple companies’ payloads being launched in a mission, the name is up to Rocket Lab’s team. Ahead of the launch the details about the mission and payload are shared with the team, as well as the customers behind it, and any other milestones or interesting facts. They then suggest a name that ties those elements together

and a shortlist is handed over to Rocket Lab’s CEO and founder Peter Beck.

Is there any money to be made in naming Rocket Lab missions? No, not hard, cold cash, but the successful namers do get bragging rights—an incalculable value—plus a swag bag full of mission memorabilia, including patches bearing the name of the launch.

Some other notable mission names from Rocket Lab include “Running Out of Fingers” for its 10th launch and “Running Out of Toes” for its 20th; and “It’s Business Time,” a Flight of the Conchords’ song that was brain-worming the team when working on the launch of its first commercial mission.

Perhaps the best indication that the madcap team at Rocket Lab doesn’t have the right stuff for NASA’s no-nonsense work environment is the fact that at virtually every naming workshop, the team’s No. 1 suggestion is invariably Rocket McRocketface. ■

New city program to help businesses take down boarding from windows, storefronts

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

The city of Long Beach announced a new program designed to help businesses take down and haul away materials used to board up storefronts and windows “in response to either

the COVID-19 pandemic, state and local health orders or civil unrest that occurred in the city last year.”

Business and property owners can qualify for grants ranging from \$100 to \$600 for the removal and haul-away costs for up to 30 pieces of plywood per location. The program is funded as part of the Long Beach Recovery plan, which was approved by the City Council in March.

Applications for the program can be submitted through the program website through Aug. 31 and will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

The grant amount available per eligible applicant varies based on the

property size, according to a city press release. Grants cannot be used for other work or repairs.

Businesses and properties qualify as long as they fulfill the following criteria:

Businesses

- Business owners must have experienced financial hardship resulting from either the COVID-19 pandemic, state and local health orders or civil unrest
- Must be a nonprofit or for-profit business
- Must have an active Long Beach business license
- Must have 50 or fewer full-time employees within Long Beach

- Must be located in Long Beach
- Must be in compliance with local health order
- Must not be permanently closed

Properties

- Property owners must have experienced financial hardship resulting from either the COVID-19 pandemic, state and local health orders or civil unrest
- Must have a current vacancy
- Must be actively marketing the property for lease or sale
- Must be located in the city of Long Beach
- Must not have any code enforcement violations that are active or pending ■

Convention Center

Continued from cover

shampooed, dusted,” said Beirne, fresh off the first in-person site visit with potential clients since the start of the pandemic. “We’re ready.”

After more than a year of restrictions on gatherings large and small, people are eager to meet in person again, said Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Across the board, what I’m hearing from people is that they’re just excited to be out again.”

Most recurring events, like Complex Con, a two-day event centered around music, culture and food, and regular gatherings of Jehovah’s Witnesses will be returning next year, promising tens of millions in associated spending.

Smaller events with less lead time are returning as early as this month. The first event, the Graphics Pro Expo, takes place on Aug. 12. Another 13 conventions are on the books so far for this year.

In August alone, conventions will bring an estimated \$6.9 million and 10,600 visitors into town, according to the convention and visitors bureau.

One of the events returning to the convention center this month is the Long Beach Home and Backyard show on

Aug. 20.

With large, in-person gatherings on hold during the pandemic, the company behind the show, Jurupa Valley-based Home Show Consultants, had to lay off its entire 12-person staff last year. Now, their office is bustling again, with planners booking shows across Southern California.

“We got them all back, every one of them,” said Jim Williams, general manager of Home Show Consultants.

Coming back to in-person events was key for the company.

“If you’re engaging someone to do the tiles in your house, you want to meet them,” he said. “You want to touch and feel the products.”

Some challenges remain

As hotels and restaurants ready themselves for conventions to return, they’re running up against a national labor shortage in the hospitality industry, making it a difficult to staff up in time for conventions to return.

“It’s not a light switch,” said Peter Hillan, spokesperson for the Long Beach Hospitality Alliance, an advocacy group representing several Downtown hotels.

According to an Oxford Economics study, hotels cut nearly a third of their staff during the pandemic—90,977 jobs lost—and many of those workers haven’t answered the call to return to duty.

Some may have moved out of state or changed professions, said Hillan. “We’re pretty confident that we lost the bulk of those employees.”

Still, he said, hotels are doing everything in their power to raise staffing levels before conventions return in full force, offering more scheduling flexibility and paid time off to attract workers and cross-training those already on staff.

“Hotels are going to be as ready as we possibly can,” said Hillan.

The emergence of new coronavirus variants is another cause for concern among business owners.

“I think there’s heightened uncertainty right now about our ability to contain the virus,” said local economist Robert Kleinhenz. “We’re by no means out of the woods.”

Still, Kleinhenz and others remain cautiously optimistic about the future of conventions—and the local economy as a whole. “There’s no doubt there’s a comeback,” he said. But, “it’s going to be a deliberate recovery.”

Even smaller groups of convention guests returning represent a silver lining for local business owners.

“That little sense of normalcy of some people being here, some conventions being here keeps everyone upbeat,” said David Maskello, general manager of Parkers’ Lighthouse, which relies on convention

traffic to fill in during the winter months, when tourism slows down.

“We generate a lot of business from the conventions so we look forward to them coming back,” Maskello said. “We’re absolutely excited.”

At the Convention and Visitors Bureau, new leads for business have tripled every month since January, with a major convention booked every two weeks according to Goodling.

While keeping an eye on the emerging coronavirus variant, the bureau president isn’t worried about another shutdown. “I don’t think anybody wants to revert back to where we were,” he said.

Meanwhile, over at the convention center, the smell of food wafts through the soon-to-be-filled ballroom—the reopening also marks the hiring of a new culinary director, a position recently created at convention centers managed by ASM Global nationwide.

On the bottom level, the polished floors of the 224,000 square feet exhibition halls gleam under neon lights. Heavy leather couches and wooden tables have returned to their place in the lobby facing the Hyatt hotel. Custom-built hand sanitizer stands were set to arrive the next day.

“I think we’re in great shape,” Beirne said. ■



Los Cerritos Neighborhood Association President Bob Gill straddles the district boundary between Long Beach’s 7th, left, and 8th Districts, Tuesday, July 27. The boundary runs right through the Los Cerritos neighborhood, splitting it in two. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

With neighborhoods split in past redistricting, some want new commission to fix old mistakes

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

When Long Beach last drew its City Council district lines in 2011, the border between the city’s 7th and 8th districts was arguably the most contentious battle with council incumbents fighting for the rights to the Bixby Knolls and Los Cerritos neighborhoods, the latter of which was split in a divisive vote.

A proposal in 2011 by former Councilman James Johnson sought to split the Atlantic Avenue business corridor in two to unite the part of Bixby Knolls east of Atlantic with smaller communities like Bixby Terrace, Bixby Highlands with areas that Johnson already represented south of Bixby Road including California Heights.

Former Councilwoman Rae Gabelich represented the city’s 8th District in 2011, an area that currently includes parts of Bixby Knolls, Virginia Country Club and reaches as far north as South Street, and called the proposal “offensive.”

Gabelich was nearing the end of her final term as councilwoman and found herself pitched in a fierce public battle to try to retain the shape of the district that

she had helped to revitalize.

“It was hell,” Gabelich said, recounting the redistricting process from 2011. “It was absolute hell.”

A compromise map was ultimately approved with the 8th district holding onto the Bixby Knolls neighborhoods west of Orange Avenue, however, the plan sent the southern half of the Los Cerritos neighborhood into the 7th District. An attempt to recall Johnson later that year ultimately failed after a signature-gathering effort was suspended.

The lines created a group of residents, some of whom jokingly self-identify as “SOB’s” (South of Bixby) who are now hoping the city’s newly created Independent Redistricting Commission can help fix the wrongs they feel were created by politicians 10 years ago.

Johnson could not be reached for comment.

Bob Gill is the president of the Los Cerritos Neighborhood Association which includes NOBs (North of Bixby) and the SOBs to the south.

The association has been around for about 80 years and Gill said it’s very active with many well-attended events including community concerts and parades that regularly draw about

1,000 people. Some of the events are in the 7th District and others are in the 8th, but they’re all in the Los Cerritos neighborhood.

“The plus has been we have two City Council offices to discuss things with,” Gill said. “The minus has been that our influence based on size has been reduced.”

Gill believes the current lines went against the rules established by the City Council in 2011 that prohibited the splitting of parks. The current southern border of the 8th District cuts through Los Cerritos Park.

Gill said he’s hopeful that the neighborhood can be made whole again but is concerned about the window of time in which the public will be allowed to give input.

The commission’s process is being delayed by the release of Census data, which is not expected until the end of September. The commission then needs to host public meetings, draw new lines based on new population data and approve new maps by December, the current cut-off date for the maps to be used in the June 2022 elections.

But when it does begin, the line-drawing process the 7th and 8th will

likely be intertwined again.

The 7th District has historically been one of the most in-flux districts. At one point in the 1990s, Cambodia Town, which sits squarely in Central Long Beach, was part of the 7th, which has typically included parts of West Long Beach.

The 7th, 8th and 9th districts all have projected population growth, according to American Community Survey data, with the three districts expected to add about 3,000 residents when the Census data is released in September.

Combined with a projected loss of nearly 1,200 residents in the 6th District that is located immediately south of all three, there could be substantial changes when a final map is presented in December.

While the fluctuations in the 7th District’s border in 2011 were mild when compared to the 1991 map, they didn’t come without controversy that still has some residents roiled over how their neighborhoods were split.

Harold Dela Cruz, an organizer in West Long Beach who recently filed an intention to run for City Council in 2022, said that the current district lines

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North Long Beach Councilman Rex Richardson pulls in record \$168K in campaign contributions

By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY** and **ANTHONY PIGNATARO** / Reporters

With over a year to go before the 2022 election race begins in Long Beach, Councilman Rex Richardson has raised close to \$170,000—a considerable amount of money for a race in which he is currently running unopposed—according to public campaign-finance reports.

Richardson’s campaign called the haul “the highest amount raised within the first six months of any city campaign in Long Beach history” in a July 30 news release. In that same news release, Richardson, who represents District 9 in North Long Beach, called the fundraising total “a testament to all the work we’ve done together as a community.”

In the first six months of 2021, Richardson’s campaign took in \$167,972.43 from 624 donors, representing a wide variety of interests and occupations. Donors include small business owners, real estate

developers, labor unions, community organizers, attorneys, lobbyists, firefighter political action committees and political consultants.

One notable contribution of \$400—the maximum amount allowed—came from Tom Carpenter, vice president of Acquisitions and Leasing at Frontier Real Estate Investments, who was responsible for the development of The Uptown Commons retail center in Richardson’s district. Mayor Robert Garcia’s campaign also donated \$400, as did former Mayor Bob Foster.

Campaign records show Richardson’s campaign spent \$51,911.25 in the first six months of the year, bringing his cash-on-hand balance to \$126,192.18.

By contrast, four years ago at this time, Richardson’s campaign brought in slightly more than \$70,000 in contributions, spent nearly \$26,000 and had a cash balance of about \$58,000.

Richardson has worked to raise his political profile in the last few years. He is a past president of the Southern California Association of Governments



Long Beach Councilman Rex Richardson. Photo by Thomas Cordova.

and a current governing board member of the South Coast Air Quality Management District. He’s also the city’s current vice mayor, a position elected by his colleagues on the council.

When asked if his large fundraising was a prelude to a run at the mayor’s office, Richardson said no, though he said he might reevaluate if Garcia decides not to run again.

“I’m old school, man, I think it’s

bad form to angle for the mayor’s seat when he’s currently in the position and doing a great job in my opinion,” Richardson said. “I fully support our mayor, Garcia. If he leaves I’m going to have to make serious consideration of what my decision will be, but my plan as it is today, has been the same—I’m running for a third term on the Long Beach City Council.” ■

Ambitious reconstruction of Artesia Boulevard to break ground winter 2021

By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY** / Reporter

Officials have revealed renderings for a multi-city redesign of Artesia Boulevard that includes a new mural and other quality of life improvements to increase pedestrian activity and safety.

The \$20 million project would include work across the east-west thoroughfare that spans multiple cities, including North Long Beach. The project is expected to break ground this winter, Eric Lopez, the city’s Public Works director, told residents at a recent meeting at the Doris Topsy-Elvord Center at Houghton Park.

Artesia Boulevard is a heavily-trafficked strip of road running through Compton, Bellflower, Paramount, Artesia and Long Beach.

Multiple regional committees, including the Gateway Cities Council of Governments in Los Angeles County, selected the Artesia improvement project as the No. 1 regional project out of 25 others to support following a transportation plan that began in 2012.

The overwhelming attention to improve the east-to-west roadway helped city planners secure funding for the Artesia Boulevard project, Lopez said.

“We are talking about a \$20 million plus investment,” Lopez said. “That doesn’t happen every day, every decade—literally once in a generation.”

So far, planners have secured roughly \$12 million from Metro funding and Measure R—a state ballot initiative from 2008 that was approved by voters to pay for transportation projects. Planners are confident the remaining \$8 million will soon be allocated as well.

The designs exhibited during the meeting emphasized pedestrian safety crosswalks and street improvements to control traffic. The plans called for aesthetic art murals that run along the middle and sides of the road.

Carl Hickman, a senior traffic engineer with Long Beach Public Works, said 12 traffic signals will be upgraded and some intersecting streets will include turning lights to enhance motorist safety.

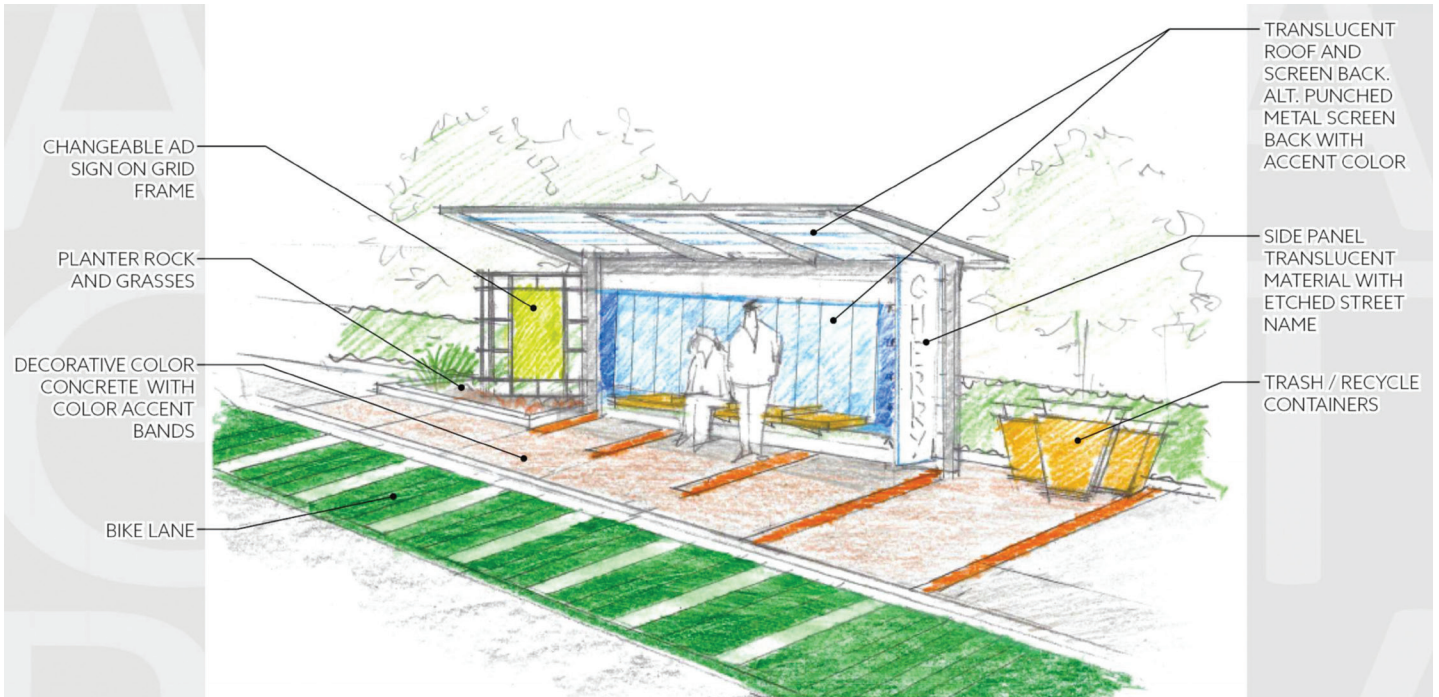
Hickman added that CCTV cameras for traffic management will also be installed in order to monitor traffic from traffic control headquarters in Downtown.

“We can monitor things to make sure traffic is flowing safely,” Hickman said.

The improvement project will include shaded bus stops and protected bicycle lanes. Near the end of the redesign construction, the street will be repaved and repainted as well, planners said.



Proposed designs of improvements along the Artesia Boulevard in North Long Beach. Rendering courtesy of Councilman Rex Richardson’s office.



The proposed design for bus stops that will be included in road improvements along the Artesia Boulevard in North Long Beach. Rendering courtesy of Councilman Rex Richardson’s office

Councilman Rex Richardson, who oversees the area of North Long Beach that includes Artesia Boulevard, said the street projects will also give the neighborhood a sense of pride.

“Today we can finally show you the great Artesia Boulevard project,” Richardson said. “It’s going to speak to the attention and respect we deserve here in North Long Beach.”

Wednesday’s community meeting

was the first in a series of public gatherings where residents will have a chance to speak with city planners and have their interests known as developments take place in North Long Beach.

Other events will kick-off next month including:

- Aug. 11, 6 to 8 p.m.: “Rise Up” for Economic Opportunity: The economic progress of the 90805 and

our vibrant future

- Aug 21: “Activate Uptown” Open Streets event, sponsored by SCAG Go Human campaign
- Aug. 25, 6 to 8 p.m.: “Catch Up” for Social Connections: Placemaking for Neighborhood Empowerment
- Sept. 8, 6 to 8 p.m.: “Lift Up” for a Healthy and Active Uptown
- Sept. 22, 6 to 8 p.m.: “Look Up” Towards a Brighter Future for Youth ■

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Neighborhoods Split

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disenfranchise the communities in the 7th that are west of the 710 Freeway.

Dela Cruz said that the needs of West Long Beach don’t align with Cal Heights or Bixby Knolls, which are generally more affluent and have more community-serving businesses than his neighborhood, and a fraction of the environmental pollution caused by the Port of Long Beach and adjacent businesses.

“If you were able to combine the westside we could battle the industry as one,” Dela Cruz said.

There have been calls to consolidate the communities west of the 710, some of which are currently in the 1st district, and Dela Cruz is supportive of that idea but said the lines need to be drawn more carefully this time around.

“I think it has to be done in a very delicate way,” Dela Cruz said. “But right now, we’re not connected and there’s a

lot of distrust.”

It’s still unclear what the commission will use for a starting point when it begins drawing lines. It has the choice to start from scratch or use existing lines as a model, something that has already become a political lightning rod.

John Mosquera owns Derricks on Atlantic in the 7th District and hopes that the southern end of the Atlantic corridor can be united with the northern half in the 8th District, where he says a more organized business corridor exists.

The last round of redistricting left a sour taste in Mosquera’s mouth but he’s cautiously optimistic that this cycle will be guided by the community rather than being politically driven. And the community needs to get involved, Mosquera said.

“This is our representation, this is our government, this is what we build on,” Mosquera said of the redistricting process. “To say you don’t care...I can’t accept that.” ■



Former Councilwoman Rae Gabelich holds up a postcard that was circulated to community members during the 2011 redistricting process to get residents to pressure the City Council to keep Bixby Knolls together. Photo by Jason Ruiz

Early campaign contributions show wide fundraising spectrum in 2022 city races

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Early financial filings for the June 2022 election in Long Beach show several incumbents running unchallenged and a wide-open mayor’s race.

Five of the city’s nine City Council districts are up for reelection in 2022 in addition to the mayor’s office and other citywide offices. Here’s what the initial fundraising reports show:

1st District

The 1st district includes parts of Downtown and the Port of Long Beach and is currently represented by Councilwoman Mary Zendejas. Zendejas, who won a special election in 2019 after the seat was vacated by Lena Gonzalez when she won a special election for a State Senate seat.

Zendejas’ initial filing showed that she raised just over \$40,000 between January and the end of June. That’s substantially more than Steven Estrada, who identifies himself as a community organizer and is the only other challenger who has announced he will run for the seat. Estrada’s campaign reported \$2,322 during the sixth-month filing period.

3rd District

Incumbent Councilwoman Suzie Price is the only person to file papers to run for the 3rd district seat that represents southeast Long Beach

and other areas including Cal State Long Beach, Belmont Shore and the Recreation Park area.

Price is pursuing a third term, something made possible by the passage of Measure BBB in 2018 that allowed a third term for elected officials while eliminating the ability to be elected by write-in after that.

Her campaign reported about \$79,000 in contributions through June 30, which is about \$30,000 less than she raised during the entire 2018 campaign, according to financial documents filed with the City Clerk’s office.

5th District

The 5th district, which includes El Dorado Park and the neighborhoods east of Long Beach Airport, so far has two candidates—neither of whom is incumbent Councilwoman Stacy Mungo Flanigan, who is eligible to run for a third term in office.

Former Councilwoman Gerrie Schipske, who preceded Mungo Flanigan in office, is utilizing the opportunity to run for a third term and announced her candidacy in March. However, Schipske has raised just \$35 in campaign contributions, with an additional \$200 in the form of a loan to herself, according to campaign documents filed with the city.

Attorney Michelle Dobson has also announced her intent to run for the 5th

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Grand Prix Track

Continued from page 13

expo that’s held inside the Convention Center and in the media areas, which are also indoors.

The race is typically held in April but organizers pushed this year’s event to September in hopes that state guidelines would allow for fan attendance. The state lifted many of its COVID-19 restrictions in June and sporting events, concerts, fairs and conventions are all underway across the state.

Because of the scheduling shakeup for this year’s Long Beach Grand Prix, which is normally held near the start of

the NTT Indycar Series season, the Long Beach race will now be the last race of the season and could have championship implications, Michaelian said.

“Because of the tight battle there is for the championship right now, we’re looking forward to the champion being crowned on the streets of Long Beach September the 26th,” Michaelian said.

Other new additions to the race weekend are the Global Time Attack event, which will include heavily modified street-cars trying to set the fastest lap time on the Downtown course over the three-day weekend.

The race weekend will also feature Formula Atlantic cars, a throwback to 1970s-era racing that will compete in

two races on Saturday and Sunday.

Michaelian said the race will rank among the most challenging his organization has put on since the very early days of the Grand Prix being in Long Beach but added that the entire team is excited to reward those vendors and fans who didn’t ask for refunds last year, as well as those buying tickets this year, with an exciting race environment at the end of September.

“The first few years of this race for us here were very difficult financially,” Michaelian said. “This event will fall in right behind those in terms of all the challenges, the consternation and the variables that have gone into the planning of this event.” ■



Harbor Commission elects former Councilman Steven Neal as board president

By BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Steven Neal, who represented North Long Beach on City Council from 2010-2014, has been elected president of the Board of Harbor Commissioners.

The five-member board, which sets policy for the Port of Long Beach, also elected Sharon Weissman as vice president and Bobby Olvera as secretary. The board elects the three positions for one-year terms every July.

“Over the last year, the Port of Long Beach has surmounted an unprecedented pandemic to keep moving the products desperately needed by homebound Americans,” Neal said in a statement. “I look forward to working with my colleagues, staff and Executive Director Mario Cordero to ensure this port remains a top commercial gateway for decades to come.”

Neal represented the 9th District while on the City Council and remains the senior pastor for LIFE Gospel Ministries and is the co-founder of the Economic Policy Impact Center, a nonprofit that strives to advance economic opportunity for working families.

Previously, Neal has served on the boards of Long Beach Transit and the Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network. Mayor Robert Garcia appointed Neal to the commission in 2019 with unanimous council approval. ■



Jim Michaelian, CEO of the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach, walks a portion of the race track, Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



A construction worker guides a K-rail into place on the first day of track building for the grand prix, Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Campaign Contributions

Continued from page 20

district seat and her campaign reported raising \$13,327 not including a \$10,000 loan Dobson gave herself.

7th District

The city’s 7th district so far has the most candidates, with four people, including the incumbent, seeking the seat. The district includes West Long Beach and parts of Bixby Knolls and Cal Heights.

The field includes incumbent Councilman Roberto Uranga, who is seeking a third term on the council; community organizer Harold Dela Cruz; Connie White, whose occupation wasn’t immediately apparent; and neighborhood activist Carlos Ovalle.

None of the candidates have reported any campaign contributions.

Ovalle and Dela Cruz filed their intent to run for office in mid-July, weeks after the fundraising window had already closed.

9th District

Incumbent Councilman Rex Richardson’s campaign announced on July 30 that Richardson had made “Long Beach history” with his nearly \$170,000 in campaign contributions before the June 30 fundraising deadline.

Richardson is currently running unopposed but has left the door open to make a run for the mayor’s seat if it were to open up. Both Richardson and Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell have been linked to a mayoral run if Mayor Robert Garcia were to opt out of running for a third term next year.

Mayor

There are roughly 10 months until the June 7 election and Mayor Robert Garcia has yet to file paperwork to run for re-election. His departure could cause disruptions in other races if current council incumbents decide to throw their name into the mayoral race.

The last day to file an intent to run for non-incumbents is March 16.

Three candidates have already announced their intentions to run for mayor. The list includes Deb Mozer, J. Raul Cedillo and Alan Gafford, none of whom have filed contribution reports with the City Clerk’s office.

City Auditor/City Prosecutor

Both of these citywide elected positions so far have only one candidate declared and both are the incumbents. City Auditor Laura Doud announced her candidacy in June but has not filed any fundraising reports with the city. City Prosecutor Doug Haubert’s campaign reported over \$71,700 in contributions, which includes a \$15,000 loan from himself.

City Attorney

The City Attorney’s seat will also be on the ballot in June 2022 but no candidates have yet declared an intention to run, including the incumbent, City Attorney Charles Parkin. ■

LBCC to require vaccines or regular coronavirus testing; LBUSD still discussing possible mandate

By MELISSA EVANS / Managing Editor

Long Beach City College will require teachers, staff and students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by the start of classes in August or be subject to weekly testing, officials announced July 28.

Meanwhile, Long Beach Unified—the city’s largest employer—will not require vaccinations yet, but Superintendent Jill Baker has “strongly encouraged” the campus community to get the vaccine by the start of classes on Aug. 31.

“Right now, it is not a mandate to provide proof of vaccination. That is under discussion,” Baker said.

LBCC Superintendent-President Mike Munoz said the fact that the 18-34 age group is lagging in vaccinations means it’s important to send the message they aren’t immune to the virus.

“This virus has been hitting young people particularly hard,” he said at a

media briefing at Cal State Long Beach.

City data shows 53% of the 18-34 age group has received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine compared to 99% of local seniors.

The announcement came a day after the CSU system said anyone using campus facilities will be required to show proof of vaccination or agree to regular tests. The city of Long Beach will also require its employees, as well as health care workers, to follow similar rules.

With 20,000 students expected to return to class on Aug. 23, CSULB President Jane Close Conoley said she did not want the campus community to “become a danger to our Long Beach community.”

The heads of all three educational institutions in Long Beach said they estimate about 70% of faculty and staff have been vaccinated, but that data was still being collected. Officials expected those numbers to be finalized this month.

Baker said in an earlier video announcement that the district would not be doing “surveillance testing” when classes begin.

She said masks would be required indoors on campuses, and that everyone would be screened for COVID-19 symptoms.

But cities and many other employers around the state have quickly implemented vaccination requirements as the more contagious delta variant of the coronavirus has spread.

In Long Beach, as of Aug. 4, the rate of new cases per 100,000 residents has risen to 26.2 from a low of just 1 on June 18.

Officials say loosened restrictions since the state largely opened up on June 15, the more contagious delta variant, and the lack of vaccinations among residents has spurred the troubling rise in cases.

In Long Beach, 70% of residents 12 and older have been vaccinated. ■



Containers are picked up and dropped off at the Port of Long Beach’s Pier G, Thursday, June 10, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Port of Long Beach sets new July cargo volume record

By BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Consumer demand continues to drive a cargo surge through the Port of Long Beach resulting in another record-breaking month in July, officials announced on Aug. 5.

Dockworkers and terminal operators moved 784,845 twenty-foot equivalent units—the standard measurement for shipping containers—last month, making it the busiest July in the port’s 110-year history. The volume marked a 4.2% increase from the same month last year, which set the record for July cargo movement.

“Ships arrived last month to move these empty containers out of the harbor and clear valuable terminal space as

we handle historic amounts of trade,” Executive Director Mario Cordero in an announcement. “These boxes are a valuable commodity in the overstressed global supply chain.”

Imports were up 1.6% last month compared to July 2020, with 382,940 TEUs, while exports decreased 20.7% to 109,951. The decrease was offset, however, by a 22.8% increase to the number of empty containers moved—291,995 TEUs.

“Our loaded exports are likely to rebound this month,” Cordero said.

The port has broken monthly cargo records in 12 of the last 13 months. Through July, Long Beach processed 5,538,637 TEUs, a 32.3% increase from the same period last year.

“Our dockworkers and industry partners have risked their health to keep the gears of our economy turning during this pandemic,” Long Beach Harbor Commission President Steven Neal said in the announcement. “We thank them, and acknowledge their service as we continue a remarkable run of records at the Port of Long Beach.”

Along with setting records, the cargo surge has caused a backlog in the supply chain, including the Port of Long Beach. Ships are sitting at anchor longer, waiting to be loaded or offloaded, containers are sitting longer at ports and, in turn, retailers and customers are waiting longer for their products. ■

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