

# Long Beach Business Journal

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# WHAT IF LOCAL NEWS VANISHED?

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# Long Beach Business Journal

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## WHAT IF LOCAL NEWS VANISHED?

This week, the Long Beach Post and Long Beach Business Journal will launch a comprehensive membership program—it's a way for any of our regular readers to join with the thousands of subscribers who are already financially supporting our independent local journalism with a monthly subscription.

Our subscribers help make our journalism happen. It's helped us grow from four employees in 2018 to 26 employees today. It's helped us sustain over two dozen good paying local jobs in our community, so our journalists can live in the city they cover. It's helped keep the Post and Business Journal free to read, without a paywall.

And the growth of this local newsroom and expansion of journalism in Long Beach is happening with similar success in communities across the country—from Chicago to Denver, Memphis to Santa Cruz, Dallas to Boise.

Unfortunately, for every local success story, there are far more grim outcomes.

Consider:

- The number of working reporters has declined over 60% since 2000.
- Over 1,800 communities have no local news source at all.
- Since the start of the pandemic, around 36,000 journalists have faced layoffs or pay cuts or furloughs.

The fate local journalism has faced in so many other communities is what we're trying to avoid every day at the Post and the Business Journal. That's why we're launching a membership program this week in the hopes you'll help our work continue.

At the same time, this week is also crucial in Congress for the proposed Build Back Better package—the \$1.75 trillion bill with support for healthcare, child care, climate change—and yes, help for local journalism.

That's right—Build Back Better includes a payroll tax credit for local newsrooms that would effectively subsidize the cost of employing local journalists by up to 50% in the

first year after passage and tax credit benefits continue an additional four years.

Just for our newsroom, that amounts to an estimated \$425,000 benefit in the first year alone, which we would be able to reinvest into preserving jobs, hiring additional journalists, launching new long-term investigative projects and providing ongoing training and tools to continuously improve our service to our community.

And it's not just local news in Long Beach that would benefit, but also countless other communities around the country. Simply put, this tax credit will save thousands of journalism jobs and protect local news nationwide.

Passage of the bill isn't guaranteed—it will still need almost every House Democrat and all 50 Senate Democrats in support—but the tax credit provision does have strong bipartisan support.

Our news organization is proud to be part of Rebuild Local News, a nationwide coalition of over 3,000 other newsrooms and organizations, led by our friends at the nonprofit GroundTruth Project, advocating together for stronger community journalism, far beyond the passage of the tax credits in the Build Back Better proposal.

You'll also see a stark possibility on the front page of our print edition and throughout websites—a future where robust, trusted local news might not exist in Long Beach, where local journalists are no longer covering our community.

It's a future none of us want to see happen in Long Beach or in any other community.

We hope you don't either.



David Sommers  
Publisher, Long Beach Post and  
Long Beach Business Journal

### Here's how you can help

#### Become a Member

Directly support our journalism today, with nifty benefits too, by becoming a member of the Long Beach Post Community.

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Contact your Representatives and ask them to vote in support of Build Back Better and the tax credits for local journalists.

Go to [house.gov/representatives](https://house.gov/representatives) to find contact information for your Representative.

#### Learn more about us

Curious about our organization, how decisions work, what our policies are, or our Mission Statement? Our Transparency Portal has the answers.

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Long Beach Fire Department paramedics leave Community Hospital Long Beach after delivering a patient to the emergency room Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021. The ER is expected to close in the coming months. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## COMMUNITY HOSPITAL TO CLOSE ER AND INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, SKIRTING SEISMIC REQUIREMENTS

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

With mounting financial strain and patient numbers well-below expectations, Community Hospital Long Beach will phase out its emergency department and acute medical services in favor of increased wellness and mental health offerings, operator MWN Community Hospital announced earlier this month.

The move lets MWN—and the city—avoid paying tens of millions of dollars for seismic repairs at the property, a burden that prompted the previous operator, MemorialCare, to abandon the facility. But it also means losing the emergency department that residents and local politicians fiercely campaigned to reinstate.

In partnership with the city, the Community Hospital Long Beach Foundation and local stakeholders, the facility will be rebranded as Long Beach Community Wellness Campus. The site will offer numerous inpatient and outpatient services, including behavioral and mental health, urgent care and other medical and social programs.

A timeline has not been released for the transition, but the company said more information would be shared in the coming weeks.

“Today’s announcement confirms the significant challenges of maintaining an acute care hospital at this site,” the city said in a Nov. 4 statement, when the announcement was made. The city owns the property and leases it to MWN.

“Despite all the effort to reestablish and operate the hospital, the operator has informed the City that it is not feasible and there is not sufficient demand for services, even during a pandemic,” the city added, “to keep the acute care portion of the hospital operating.”

The fact that MWN does not own Community Hospital complicates how quickly the operator can make the transition. Long Beach’s current lease with MWN only allows for the operation of a general acute care hospital, so it must be amended for the transition—and any changes to the lease will require City Council approval. Additionally, the hospital will have to undergo another inspection, a process that dragged on for months amid the pandemic.

The city, in its statement, said staff are discussing the lease agreement with MWN, and the mayor and City Council will meet in closed session to decide how to proceed.

Fourth District Councilman Daryl Supernaw, for his part, declined to

comment on the news, citing ongoing negotiations between the city and MWN. Supernaw was one of the most vocal advocates for the reopening of Community Hospital, with his office going as far as pitching in \$250,000 for critical elevator repair.

“The city of Long Beach did everything in its power to get this hospital reopened and the ER functioning,” Supernaw said in a phone call. “I’m proud to say that we accomplished that.”

The planned change in services comes as the facility has faced unforeseen financial hurdles, hospital spokesperson Brandon Dowling said, including increased costs for equipment and supplies due to the pandemic, as well as soaring wages for supplemental nurses as a result of a national shortage.

But the most significant monetary challenge is the ballooning cost of construction for required seismic retrofits. Nine structures on the Community Hospital campus are at risk of collapsing during a strong earthquake, according to a report by the Urban Land Institute.

To comply with state seismic standards for acute care hospitals, those structures

## Hospitals continue to face financial, staffing challenges

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Since the emergence of COVID-19 almost two years ago, medical facilities have faced an onslaught of challenges—from overcrowding to budgetary shortfalls to staff shortages. Some of the challenges were the result of the pandemic and some were exacerbated by it, but many hurdles remain, according to hospital executives.

While hospitals saw increased expenditures due to the need for more protective equipment, they also had a loss of revenues when elective procedures—a major source of income for hospitals—were canceled month after month as a means to slow the spread of the deadly virus. Locally, MemorialCare’s Long Beach Medical Center, which has a fiscal year that begins July 1, received some funding through the federal CARES Act, but it was not enough to salvage 2020 or 2021, according to CEO John Bishop.

*Continued on page 12*

## Preparations for Small Business Saturday are underway

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

The holidays are coming up, and so is the official day to celebrate local businesses: Small Business Saturday.

On Nov. 27, shoppers are encouraged to skip the trip to chain stores and shop with their local small businesses instead. To help sweeten the deal, business improvement districts across the city have come up with activities that give shoppers an opportunity to learn more about the locally owned businesses in their area and even win gift cards for shopping there.

The Belmont Shore Business Association is organizing a scavenger hunt in which the first 25 patrons to complete the quest will receive a gift card for a participating local business. To complete the hunt, shoppers have to find an elf hidden inside the businesses, receive a stamp and complete a line of stamps on a bingo card.

“Small business is really at the heart of what we have to offer here on Second Street,” the association’s

*Continued on page 7*

*Continued on page 16*

**Health Care and Small Business**

Vol. XXXIV No. 23

In This Issue:

**HEALTH CARE ..... 5**

Frontline workers face mixed emotions as pandemic wanes ..... 6

6-month-old's successful heart surgery marks first in new partnership ..... 8

**SMALL BUSINESS ..... 13**

BizCare helps small businesses navigate COVID-19 pandemic ..... 13

With venues shuttered, Long Beach musician launches Mexican seafood business ..... 14

**NEWSWATCH ..... 17**

Harbor Commission approves fee for older, pollution-producing trucks ..... 17

City breaks ground on 88-unit affordable housing project ..... 19

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.

**PUBLISHER**  
David Sommers

**EDITOR**  
Hayley Munguia

**ADVERTISING DIRECTOR**  
Andrea Estrada

**COLUMNIST**  
Tim Grobaty

**VISUALS EDITORS**  
Brandon Richardson  
Thomas Cordova

**REPORTERS**  
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Brandon Richardson  
Jason Ruiz  
Kelly Puente  
Sebastian Echeverry  
Crystal Niebla  
Cheantay Jensen  
Anthony Pignataro

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**  
Candice Wong

**PUBLISHER EMERITUS**  
George Economides

**ADVERTISING/EDITORIAL DEADLINES**

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

Advertising: info@lbbj.com

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**Virtual reality used to distract young patients during medical procedures**

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Medical procedures as seemingly innocuous as a cast removal can be stressful for young children and even teens, according to medical experts. So to alleviate—or at the very least distract from—some of that stress, staff at MemorialCare’s Long Beach Medical Center campus have turned to virtual reality.

“Kids need more than medicine. We normalize the environment for pediatric patients, usually through play,” said Rita Goshert, director of Memorial’s child life program. “Our role is to help comfort and distract patients during uncomfortable or anxiety-producing procedures.”

About five years ago, Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach received its first set of VR goggles in partnership with the Starlight Children’s Foundation, Goshert said, adding that child life programs often don’t have funding for purchases as pricey as VR goggles.

The technology is not new. Virtual reality headsets first hit the scene in the early- to mid-1990s through video game companies, including Sega and Nintendo. Next-generation VR was released in the 2010s in the form of the Oculus Rift and a few others, but the tech still has not taken off on a large scale due to cost, size and setup complications, according to video

game reporter Kevin Webb.

But for basic functions, such as simple scenes for the duration of short medical procedures, the technology in its current form will suffice.

“They’ve evolved over time,” Goshert said of the last five years of use. “It was kind of trial and error of what went well and what didn’t.”

Today, the campus has five VR headsets—all donated by Starlight—each with 12 scenes and interactive games, according to spokeswoman Beatrice Jimenez. Scenes include space and swimming with turtles and other sea life. The goggles are full-immersion and include headphones to drown out sound.

The scenes and games have been vetted by pediatric physicians and child life specialists who have expertise in child development, Goshert said. The goggles are used during a variety of medical procedures in various departments, including cast removal, lumbar punctures, bone marrow tests, blood drawing, chemotherapy and more, Goshert said. Pain is not the only discomfort children and teens face during these procedures, she added.

“Having a cast removed, people think it’s no big deal,” Goshert said. “The sound of the cast cutter can actually be very scary for a child.”

Goshert recalled a time her 15-year-old



Aiden Newell, 11, looks around a virtual world as his cast is removed at the Children’s Village on the Long Beach Memorial campus Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

daughter visited the hospital to have a cast removed from her leg. When the cutter turned on, Goshert said her daughter was visibly nervous and distressed. So the staff pulled out the goggles.

“She was really getting into it and then forgot what was going on,” Goshert said. “I got to see firsthand as a mom that it truly does work.”

While staff does not want any patient to have uncomfortable or negative memories associated with the hospital, Goshert said it’s especially important

for patients who require frequent visits. She said staff are not only charged with handling the patient’s physical medical care but also their mental health.

While Memorial may not have pioneered the use of VR in the clinical setting, Goshert said the hospital is definitely an early adopter. As with most things, the medical field has been slow in adopting VR, she said, adding that anything “new” takes time before it becomes the norm in the medical world.

*Continued on page 10*

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Sign up at lbbusinessjournal.com for Monday Morning Coffee and BizBrief.

FREE email newsletters about issues, events and meetings for the week. Monday Morning Coffee is sent out at 7 a.m., and BizBrief is news of the day, sent out Wednesday and Friday afternoons.



Paul Lovely, executive director of the CARE Center at St. Mary Medical Center Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

**Founded during one global epidemic, St. Mary’s CARE Center is helping Long Beach’s LGBTQ community battle another**

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

Tucked into a tubular office space inside an auxiliary building, just a quick cross-campus walk away from St. Mary Medical Center, the hospital’s CARE Center is easy to miss. But behind the unassuming door sits a powerhouse that has been serving Long Beach’s LGBTQ

community for more than three decades.

Founded during the AIDS epidemic of the mid-80s and early 90s, the CARE Center at St. Mary Medical Center was once squarely focused on helping HIV-positive patients survive the deadly disease. Today, helping patients in the LGBTQ community take care of their mental health, alleviating housing

insecurity and prevention are at the core of its mission—and so is helping them escape the grasp of a new pandemic.

During the early days of the AIDS epidemic, the situation was dire. “There were few services, there was a lot of fear, there was a lot of stigma,” said Paul Lovely, the center’s executive director. Scores of gay men would end up in the

hospital’s emergency room, ravaged by the disease for which there was no cure and, at the time, little relief. “They were very sick and they had nowhere to go,” Lovely said.

Seeing the devastation, infectious disease specialist Dr. David Tillmann, social worker Jennifer Andrews and hospital President Sister Lucille Desmond decided it was time to create a center at St. Mary Medical Center that focused on helping the city’s underserved LGBTQ community in this time of crisis.

“They were just dealing with survival,” Lovely said.

Slowly, the center began expanding its services from merely connecting HIV-positive patients with medical care providers and social services in the region to providing those services on-site, with a team of dedicated social workers, physicians, therapists and even dentists.

Today, the center provides wraparound services that can meet almost any needs patients may have, from substance abuse treatment to dental fillings. “All with the goal of keeping patients with HIV in care,” Lovely said.

Joey Hubert, 68, has been using the center’s services for almost two decades. When he was diagnosed with cancer in 2019, the center provided him with an in-home caretaker. Recently he had his teeth fixed there, too. During the pandemic, Hubert, who is retired and receives social security, relied on

*Continued on page 11*

# Between hope and frustration: Frontline workers have mixed emotions as pandemic wanes

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

Clad in plastic bags and double-masked. Overworked and exhausted.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, frontline health care workers have been the face of the global health crisis.

As the pandemic has waned and infection rates in the U.S. have remained below those of last year's surges, hospital nurses, paramedics and caretakers of the elderly have seen some respite. Still, mixed in with relief and hope are fear and frustration about those who refuse to be vaccinated or follow safety protocols, and the ongoing risk of infection.

Claire Balingcongan, a licensed vocational nurse who has worked at the Bixby Knolls Towers senior living facility for 19 years, said she's still hesitant to go to public places like restaurants and movie theaters with her children, who aren't fully vaccinated yet.

"I'm still scared to even bring them to parks," she said.

Both Balingcongan and her husband work as nurses in congregate settings. Scared to bring the virus home, they would take their two sons from the family home in Carson to her sister's house in Lomita for days at a time whenever one of them had been exposed to a positive patient. During the winter surge, there were no hugs or kisses in the Balingcongan household; meals were taken in separate places to limit the risk of infection.

Balingcongan said the situation affected her children deeply, leaving them calling her constantly whenever they were apart, just so she could assure them that everything would be OK. "They were scared," she said.

Even now, the family remains vigilant, and her youngest son is eager to get his vaccination, Balingcongan said. "My younger one is always asking: When can I get the vaccine so I can go to the movies?"

To understand the persistent fear Balingcongan, her husband and other workers in the healthcare field have dealt with, it's helpful to know the scope of the problem. At Bixby Knolls Towers, there were cases of COVID among both staff and residents.

Angelica Trejo was one of them.

The 43-year-old nurse caught the virus during the winter surge in early December. She stayed home for two weeks, then returned to work, still dealing with shortness of breath and memory problems. "When I came back, I wasn't the same," Trejo said.

Neither were her patients.

Trejo remembers one patient in particular, who had been lively and friendly before she left. Now sick with COVID, the woman was on an oxygen



Long Beach Fire Department paramedic Richard Crawford demonstrates the use of protective equipment at Station 4 Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

tank, unable to eat and extremely weak. "It was not the same person that I left," Trejo said. The patient died shortly after. "It was really heart-wrenching to see them, because I couldn't help them," Trejo said. After suffering from the illness herself, she knew how painful it was even for someone her age, healthy, and imagined how hard it must have been for her elderly patients. It wore on her and her colleagues, she said. "We were healing ourselves while we were here supporting our patients."

Adding to the emotional and physical toll were the new responsibilities and long hours many health care workers faced as their colleagues fell sick and patient needs increased.

Cheryl Seckington, a registered nurse at MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center's orthopedic joint replacement center, said staffers in her unit became all-around caretakers for their patients, taking on every single task from drawing blood to cleaning up rooms, in an effort to limit exposure.

What's more, instead of caring for patients after elective surgeries, they were now dealing with the victims of a highly infectious disease. During the winter surge, there were 98 such patients in her unit.

"It was incredibly stressful," said Seckington, who has worked at the hospital for nearly two decades. "When we were at the height of the pandemic we really just conditioned ourselves and showed up, because we had to."

Despite ongoing breakthrough infections and the spread of the virus

Continued on page 11

## Community Hospital

Continued from cover

must be retrofitted. The cost of the retrofit project has nearly doubled since the company signed a lease with the city in December 2019—up from \$40 million to \$75 million—which the operator attributes to the pandemic-induced surge in construction and labor costs.

But by transitioning its services, the state law requiring seismic retrofits for acute care hospitals would no longer apply to the facility, Dowling said.

The law, California Senate Bill 1953, was signed in 1994 to require acute care hospital operators to adhere to higher seismic standards. Community Hospital's deadline under the legislation was Jan. 1, 2020, but the passage of Assembly Bill 2190 allowed for an extension of the deadline for Community to July 1, 2022.

Under the existing lease agreement, which the City Council approved, MWN has the option to walk away from the facility if the cost for seismic retrofit exceeds \$52.5 million, Dowling said, but instead opted for the transition.

"Our primary goal has always been to ensure that the residents of East Long Beach have access to quality healthcare services and the [campus] will answer

critical community needs," John Molina, a partner at MWN, said in a statement.

In the lease, the city agreed to reimburse MWN up to \$25 million over 15 years for retrofit expenses—funding that will no longer be necessary.

The hospital reopened less than a year ago after closing in summer 2018. But since receiving its first patient in two years on Jan. 5, the hospital has not seen sustainable patient volumes despite the ongoing global pandemic.

Community's inpatient occupancy rate has averaged just 32.4%, with only about 25 of 79 licensed beds used each day, the company stated. The hospital also averages less than one surgery per day.

The emergency department, which reopened in May, has been similarly underutilized by the community, the company said. Prior to its closure, Community's emergency room averaged about 90 patient visits each day, but under MWN, the facility is seeing less than 24 patients per day on average—only one or two of which require emergency services, according to the operator.

Ambulance services returned to Community Hospital on May 21 but certain conditions, such as brain bleed and stroke, require a higher acuity facility than the East Long Beach center provides, Dowling said.

The company intends the rebranded

facility to be a one-stop hub for health and wellness care by bringing in various providers to operate on the campus, Dowling said. No partners have been announced at this time.

Some employees will be terminated as a result of the transition, but MWN did not say how many staff would be impacted.

The operator did say it is partnering with Professional Resources EAP and the city's Pacific Gateway Workforce Innovation Network to provide impacted employees with counseling support, job training and career coaching to help them find new jobs.

### A need for mental health and wellness services

MWN cited the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services' 2019 Community Health Assessment, in which greater access to mental health care was listed as a top health priority, as evidence of the need for a campus focused specifically on behavioral and mental health.

"There is clearly a great need for these services in Long Beach," the city said in its statement.

The announcement by MWN came days before the Long Beach City Council approved an item from 9th District Councilman Rex Richardson that recommended city

staff work with the health department to determine how to establish a "more robust infrastructure for mental health services." The item had six goals:

- Increase access to mental health services across the city, including for schools.
- Increase direct funding for mental health services.
- Localize and improve crisis mental health response and connection to services.
- Streamline the city's processes for coordination and access to services.
- Expand the availability of residential care facilities and access in Long Beach.
- Provide more opportunities for engagement with local colleges and universities and expand opportunities for social work and nursing students.

Long Beach saw over 1,000 more mental health-related 911 calls in 2020 compared to 2019, according to Richardson's memo. The local spike mirrors a national trend: The share of adults experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression skyrocketed from 11% to a high of 43% during the pandemic, according to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

With the pandemic seemingly under control, the number of adults experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression has eased slightly but

Continued on page 11



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Shenica Hadaway strokes the face of her daughter, Zhavia, 6 months, at Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach after a successful heart surgery Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY:  
BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter**

Six-month-old Zhavia Hadaway has a bright future following a successful life-saving surgery at MemorialCare's Long Beach Medical Center last week that corrected a heart defect she was born with.

On the Hadaway family's home island of Barbados, there is not a pediatric surgeon capable of performing the operation. But

through a new partnership between World Pediatric Project and Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach, Zhavia and her mother, Shenica, were flown to Southern California for the procedure.

Zhavia's surgery was the first for the partnership, which brings patients from less developed countries directly to doctors for treatment, as opposed to doctors traveling abroad.

"I'm happy," Shenica said after the Nov. 9 surgery, adding that she is still

nervous seeing her daughter connected to machines with tubes and wires. "But I feel a lot better."

Zhavia was born with a condition known as Tetralogy of Fallot, which causes oxygen-poor blood to flow out of the heart and into the rest of the body. The disorder is caused by a hole in the wall between the two lower chambers of the heart, along with several other defects with the organ.

Symptoms of Tetralogy of Fallot include a bluish skin color, problems

eating, failure to gain weight, development delays and episodes of passing out. The condition's severity varies patient-to-patient, and Zhavia's case was moderate to severe, according to Dr. Saar Danon, medical director of pediatric cardiology and congenital cardiac catheterization at Miller Children's.

"She would probably be OK for a few more months and then eventually become more and more blue," Danon said before the operation. "And then



Surgeons work on 6-month-old Zhavia Hadaway's heart at Long Beach Memorial Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.



A doctor administers anesthetics to 6-month-old Zhavia Hadaway before her life-saving heart surgery at Long Beach Memorial Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.

## 6-month-old's life-saving heart surgery kicks off new program at Long Beach Memorial

she'd likely not be able to survive into late childhood."

The focus of the surgery was to fill the roughly 7 millimeter hole between the two heart chambers using tissue from the lining of the heart. Surgeons Dr. Shaun Setty and Luke Wiggins opened Zhavia's chest cavity, exposing the tissue, known as the pericardium. Performing a procedure known as a pericardiectomy, the surgeons removed a portion of the tissue, which was treated and used to close the hole.

During the operation, surgeons also cut a valve that was too small to allow blood to flow freely. This is a temporary fix, and Zhavia will need to have a valve placed in 10 or 15 years, Setty explained.

"Everything went great, exactly how we planned," surgeon Dr. Shaun Setty said following the surgery. "We didn't have any problems during the case. The ultrasound looks really good."

After being discharged from the hospital, Setty said Zhavia will return

over the next few weeks for checkups, including X-rays and ultrasounds.

Since arriving in Long Beach, the Hadaways have stayed at the Ronald McDonald house, with all meals and transportation either donated or provided by the World Pediatric Project. The medical care, including the time of doctors and nurses, also was free of charge.

The World Pediatric Project has helped over 15,000 since its founding in 2002. Setty, who has taken part in

more than a dozen missions trips providing medical care to underserved communities around the world, said he looks forward to the continued partnership. He will perform as many pro bono surgeries as World Pediatric Project wants, he said.

Shenica, meanwhile, is ready to return to life on the island after the gift her family has received.

"I'm really grateful," Shenica said. "After the next few days and weeks pass, it's good to get back to being normal." ■



Shenica Hadaway sits in the waiting room of Long Beach Memorial while her daughter, 6-month-old Zhavia, undergoes heart surgery Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.



The tiny foot of 6-month-old Zhavia Hadaway during her life-saving heart surgery at Long Beach Memorial Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.



Pediatric surgeon Dr. Shaun Setty performs a heart surgery on 6-year-old Zhavia Hadaway at Long Beach Memorial Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.



A blood bag used during a heart surgery for 6-month-old Zhavia Hadaway at Long Beach Memorial Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021.

Virtual Reality

Continued from page 5

To help expedite the use of VR in more clinical settings, Carol Cunningham, a family nurse practitioner at Memorial's orthopedic clinic, is working on a research project on the use of VR during cast and pin removal. Cunningham is in the process of getting institutional review board approval, so patient data collection has not begun, Jimenez said.

"I really believe having the research to back it up is really what we need more of—there's a little bit out there, but not a lot," Goshert said. "Research is key to really prove it's working."

Fully immersive distractions are not for all patients, however, Goshert said. Adaptation is key: Some patients can't handle the headsets and instead are better distracted by games or movies on a tablet. And some patients simply are more comfortable watching the procedure, she added.

But for plenty of patients, VR has proven its worth.

"The ability to fully immerse them in this setting, whatever it is—swimming with dolphins or whatever—really takes them out of the clinical setting," Goshert said. "It takes them out of the cast removal room to another place." ■



A nurse shows Angie, 6, VR goggles that she will wear while her casts are removed from both legs at the Children's Village on the Long Beach Medical Center campus Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Frontline Workers

Continued from page 6

among the unvaccinated, her floor has returned to normal as elective surgeries have resumed, Seckington said. "It's been great, we're getting back to what we do best."

Across the board, the pressure has come off.

"We've seen a pretty dramatic dip," Richard Crawford, a firefighter paramedic with the Long Beach Fire Department, said of the number of COVID-related calls he and his colleagues respond to at the moment.

But the pandemic has served to expose the fragility of the health care system, he noted. The department's nine ambulances were stretched thin, and so were the emergency rooms they were taking patients to, often leaving paramedics "holding the wall" for hours as they waited for beds—and missing other calls in the process.

"Our job as it is can be really stressful," Crawford said. "The pandemic really threw a wrench in an already stressed system."

After working through several surges of infections, critical nurse lead Brandon



Long Beach Fire Department paramedics Riley Whaling, left, and Richard Crawford examine supplies inside their ambulance, Rescue 4, Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

Gatling said hospitals have a handle on the situation and can process COVID patients more effectively. The fact that the current wave caused by the delta variant hasn't produced the same number of severely ill patients as previous surges has helped as well.

"Now it's just another reason people come to the hospital," Gatling, who works in the wound care and negative pressure

unit at Long Beach Memorial, said.

But the relief he feels has been tainted by frustration. After powering through wave after wave of infections, Gatling said he can't help but feel betrayed by those who refuse to get vaccinated or follow precautionary measures.

"It's been this marathon," he said. Now, he added, it's the community's turn to help. ■

Community Hospital

Continued from page 7

remains nearly three times higher than pre-pandemic levels, Richardson's item said.

Though the pandemic amplified these issues, they were plaguing the city for years prior, data from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health shows. From 2012 to 2016, Long Beach exceeded the county in suicides and unintentional drug overdoses per 100,000 residents. The city averaged 10.4 suicides and 8.3 unintentional overdoses, compared to the county's 7.6 and 6.6, respectively.

"We are committed to keeping this as a healthcare campus promoting mental and physical well-being while addressing pockets of deep need throughout Long Beach," hospital CEO Gwen Ocampo said in a statement.

"We truly have a unique opportunity ... to plan for and secure a future that will allow this campus to answer our community's evolving needs for decades to come."

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

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Cheresse Mari Lauhere Children's Village

CARE Center

Continued from page 5

bi-weekly food donations from the center.

"I've been poor basically my whole life, but I take care of myself," Hubert said. The center has played a significant role in taking care of his basic needs. "The best thing of it all is that it's all in one place."

Once focused on mere survival, today the center deals with a plethora of medical and social challenges. Trauma, substance abuse and housing insecurity are among the most common needs to address, Lovely said. "There's still a lot of damage."

The current pandemic has added a dimension of need among the center's patients, especially with regards to their mental health. Mental health visits doubled as the pandemic triggered memories of the worst days of the AIDS crisis, mixed with fear and isolation brought on by this new public health emergency.

Licensed clinical social worker John Blasco said he's been working nonstop since the pandemic started, talking patients through their depression, anxiety and increased substance abuse.

"Those kinds of anxieties were activated a lot more strongly with long term HIV survivors," Blasco said. "They're traumatized by the previous pandemic."

Despite the challenges brought on by the current pandemic, work at the center has its bright spots, according to Lovely, the executive director. "There are all these challenges, but you see people come out the other

side and you see people's lives that are transformed," he said. "They thought they were just coming here to get a prescription filled for their HIV medicine and then we were able to give them so much more."

One of the more recent highlights has been the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP, which prevents HIV-infections among at-risk patients, many of them young gay men. Roughly 400 of the center's 2,000 patients are HIV-negative, and receiving their PrEP medication through the center is helping them avoid infection.

The significant progress made in HIV treatment is another. What was once a toxic cocktail of "handfuls of pills," as Lovely describes it, has now been reduced to once daily pills or even once-a-month shots that suppress almost all symptoms of the disease. "Now, people who get diagnosed early, they'll never be sick a day in their life," Lovely said.

The center's patient population has a 90% viral suppression rate, which is significantly higher than the state average of 66.6% and meets the goal set by the national "Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America" initiative.

Sustained HIV viral suppression virtually eliminates HIV transmission to sexual partners, improves the health of people living with HIV and is widely used as a marker for the health care quality patients receive.

The center's patients are getting older, too. Most of them are now in their 40s and 50s, according to Lovely, which he says is a good sign. "It means that they're living." ■

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CNBC PUBLISHED FRI, OCT 8 2021:06 PM EDT  
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**Bill calculator.** [longbeach.gov/energyresources/](https://longbeach.gov/energyresources/)



## Staffing Challenges

Continued from cover

“We were significantly in the red in our fiscal 2020, and then some CARES Act funding came through in 2021,” Bishop said. “If you average the two years, there was clearly a huge detrimental impact. The federal funds were not nearly enough to offset the overall impact.”

Bishop said campuses with children’s hospitals, such as Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital, were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to their inability to receive COVID-19 funding. While children’s hospitals certainly saw increased costs and loss of revenue similar to other facilities, they did not treat high numbers of coronavirus cases, a prerequisite for receiving the emergency federal funding, Bishop said.

The pandemic also caused delays in care for various reasons—some patients were scared to visit hospitals with coronavirus patients, while others were told their procedures would be put on hold—which has caused an influx of patients as the pandemic has waned.

“The hospital is extremely busy due to deferred health,” Bishop said. “And our patients are sicker than they have been historically.”

At St. Mary Medical Center, emergency room volumes continue to climb with non-coronavirus patients, President and CEO Carolyn Caldwell said in an email.

At Memorial, the deferred health needs of the community are stabilizing, Bishop said, and operations—COVID aside—are back to pre-pandemic levels. The money generated from the deferred care boom should leave the hospital breaking even or with minimal losses at the end of fiscal year 2022 on June 30, he added.

While coronavirus numbers remain low, dozens of people remain hospitalized at local facilities, according to city data. Bishop said the vaccine is playing a major role in keeping people out of the hospital, noting that almost every COVID-19 patient at Memorial is unvaccinated.

“The importance of taking the vaccine couldn’t be clearer,” Bishop said.

Over 80% of Long Beach residents 12 years and older have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, according to city data, and more than 72% of those 12 and older are fully vaccinated. The city recently began vaccinating children ages 5-to-11, and with that age group factored in, more than 73% of eligible residents have received at least one dose.

“We are very encouraged now that the CDC and FDA have recommended vaccines for children ages 5 to 11,” Caldwell said. “This is another opportunity to protect another 28 million people across the country.”

Bishop said the city is approaching herd immunity, which is a necessary milestone. He explained that the longer the pandemic remains active, the more



MemorialCare's Long Beach Medical Center CEO John Bishop stands in front of the hospital Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

chance there is for new mutations, or variants, of the virus that could evade the vaccine, prolonging the worst health crisis in a generation.

Along with the patients who survived the virus and the loved ones of those who have died as a result of it, nearly two years of COVID-19 has taken a toll on frontline workers.

“Staff is doing OK. It’s just been a really trying [time] for everyone,” Bishop said. “I would say morale is good but people are tired.”

Early in the pandemic, hospital leadership put out online tools and resources to assist staff who felt overwhelmed or burned out. However, feedback from staff was that they did not have time to access those resources, so leadership has shifted, creating resources that can be pushed out directly to staff.

The hospital created the Tender, Love and Care Workstream, which was a group of people meant to actively support staff. The group put out an anonymous well-being index survey to get a barometer to see how staff were doing and found that some areas were impacted more than others, Bishop said.

Some outcomes from the survey were a weekly email called Caring With Compassion that includes links to online resources, Tea for the Soul, which is a tea time in a relaxed, “zen” environment for staff to decompress and debriefing sessions with mental health professionals with time off for staff to meet with them.

“In this field, more than any other, the burnout rate is very real and accelerated,” Caldwell said. “The demands on our people and their selfless dedication to serve our patients are unmatched.”

The St. Mary leadership team makes daily rounds to the hospital’s various

units to check on the well-being of staff, Caldwell said. The hospital opened a new relaxation room for staff to unwind and recharge, the Spiritual Care team provides support for employees and an assistance program offers a variety of benefits, she added.

Nationally, vaccine mandates have been a hot topic for many industries. Healthcare was one of the first to adopt a vaccination mandate. At Memorial, around 99% of about 6,000 staff have been vaccinated, Bishop said. A small number received a medical or religious exemption and an even smaller number quit, he said.

“It really hasn’t had any significant impact on us from an operational perspective,” Bishop said, noting that the holdouts were not from any specific job type, but spread out among departments.

About 92% of St. Mary staff has been vaccinated, Caldwell said. A small number of staff opted to leave their jobs, and the hospital has formally granted 44 religious exemptions. Dozens of staff were placed on a 90-day unpaid leave of absence and must comply with the mandate within that time or lose their job.

Like Memorial, those out of compliance with the mandate are from a mix of departments, Caldwell said.

Many feared the vaccine mandate could further exacerbate the national nursing shortage, an issue that has plagued the industry for years. Amid the pandemic, as hospitals found themselves overrun and short-staffed, supplemental nurses (those who travel where needed) began receiving premium pay upward of \$2,000 per shift.

“As in all industries, we are experiencing challenges with the workforce,” Caldwell said. “We are

actively recruiting in our community and across the country to fill any openings.”

On average, 10-15% of St. Mary nursing staff is supplemental, Caldwell said.

At Memorial, the “vast majority” of nurses are full-time employees, Bishop said. But supplemental nursing levels remain higher now than prior to the pandemic, he added, noting that that’s the norm across the industry.

While some nurses have left the industry over the vaccine mandate, others have left full-time positions to take advantage of the premium pay of traveling nurses, Bishop said. Others still have left the field for other reasons, including burnout and a shift in priorities.

“The pandemic caused people to reexamine their values,” Bishop said. “We had employees decide they were going to go live with their parents or near their children. There were a lot of different reasons people left our organization, and it wasn’t for historical reasons of promotion or pay difference. It’s because they were trying to do what was most important to them.”

As winter approaches and the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic continue to diminish, Bishop said the new challenge is the return of the seasonal flu. This year, Memorial already has seen more pediatric flu cases than it did last season. The 2020 flu season was extremely tame due to measures put in place to stymie COVID-19, Bishop said, including masking, social distancing, stay-at-home orders and virtual learning.

“But the flu remains a serious illness that historically has killed up to 60,000 people in some years,” Bishop said. “Flu levels were so low last year, it results in less residual immunity, and there is concern that we may be in for a much worse flu season than normal.” ■

# FROM THE EDITOR: A year in, BizCare continues to support Long Beach small businesses

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

Forced to shut down for much of last year because of the coronavirus pandemic, small businesses in Long Beach and across the world struggled to stay afloat. The collateral damage was inevitable, and while many businesses managed to survive the stay-at-home orders, not all of them did.

In an attempt to centralize how it assisted businesses through the crisis, Long Beach announced last November that it was launching a new program called BizCare as a kind of one-stop-shop for small business owners.

So one year into the program, I was curious to learn how successful it’s been in its mission.

The program’s website shows that it’s assisted 771 business owners, visited 907 business sites, answered 1,029 emails, took 6,188 calls and engaged 24 community organizations to date.

Those numbers are helpful, but I also wanted to get a better sense of just how the city assisted all those businesses. I reached out to Long Beach’s Economic Development Department and spoke with Business Development Officer Eric Romero last week.

First, Romero said, the website numbers were pretty up-to-date, but some had grown since they were posted. The team has now visited 956 businesses, for example—though only 734 of those visits led to connecting with the business owner, which comes out to a roughly 77% success rate.

Still, he said, Long Beach’s commitment to meeting business owners where they’re at—physically, but also in other ways, like reaching out in Spanish, Khmer or Tagalog for those who don’t speak English—has been fruitful.

That’s clear in part based on how the BizCare program has evolved throughout the public health crisis.

“We started with our BizCare hotline,” Romero told me. “We just needed to stand up a call center to respond to a variety of questions, mostly about health orders at the time, so: ‘Can my business operate? If so, in what capacity?’, ‘What rules do we have to follow?’, and it grew once we had those local, county, state and federal resources available, to answering questions about that.”

The hotline, though, was only accessible to those who knew about it. So as Long Beach prepared to roll out its own small business grant programs, Romero said BizCare staff “knew it was important for us to reach small business owners that have not historically been connected with the city.”

The next phase of the program, then, was to create pop-ups focused in underserved areas, particularly Central, North and West Long Beach.

“We’re really aware of the digital



The city’s BizCare Outreach Team works with a local entrepreneur. Photo courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

divide,” Romero said. “So we knew that we needed to make scanners, printers and internet available to help people complete and submit applications” for assistance.

Four days a week, BizCare staff posted up in front of parks and libraries. At first, the program was supposed to last through the end of 2020. But the pop-ups were useful enough that they’re still going strong—and while the program’s website says they’re slated to end Dec. 31, Romero told me they will continue on indefinitely in the new year.

With funding coming soon for the Long Beach Recovery Act, for example, “the BizCare team is going to be extremely important in ensuring that we prioritize equitable distribution of resources in Long Beach,” he said, “and I imagine that this program will likely become a core service for the Economic Development program going forward.”

That doesn’t only apply to the pop-ups. The BizCare program has expanded its services throughout the pandemic to include outreach teams that visit business storefronts and partnerships with organizations that have long-standing relationships with underserved communities.

Beyond providing information on regulations and grants related to the pandemic, the BizCare team is now also assisting small businesses with issues regarding licenses, taxes, fees and more.

The program, though, hasn’t only

focused on how the city can help business owners. Through a grant-funded partnership with Long Beach’s Pacific Gateway Workforce Innovation Network, people who were unemployed have been able to join the BizCare team.

“Through Pacific Gateway, they were able to start interning with the Business Development Bureau, and were getting some great hands-on learning experience in supporting businesses,” Romero said, “and we’ve actually kept them on beyond the workforce development grant, and they’ve become members of our team.”

And BizCare will continue to change and expand along with businesses’ needs.

“This will continue to be an iterative program, so as we continue to learn about the needs of small business owners and assess those needs, we’ll ultimately try to design resources to support them,” Romero said. “I think we’ve done a good job with this BizCare program. It’s going to keep evolving over time, and we want to continue to engage with small business owners.

“As we work through this economic recovery, it’s still a challenging time,” he added. “It’s going to be a team effort.” ■

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## With venues shuttered, Long Beach musician makes taste buds dance instead

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

Sitting at the dining table inside his family's North Long Beach home, surrounded by the smell of empanadas frying in a pan nearby, Juan Antonio "Tony" Tafoya looked a little tired, his eyelids heavy. He had been out until the early morning hours, playing a concert with his band, which performs traditional Mexican banda music in nightclubs and at parties around Los Angeles and Orange County.

Playing music used to be Tafoya's main gig. But starting in early 2020, with events large and small prohibited to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, Tafoya was out of a job.

"I went from playing six, seven days a week, to none," Tafoya said in Spanish. "It was very difficult."

Short on funds, the professional trumpet player began looking for other ways to support his family of five—

*Continued on page 17*



Elva Garcia, left, Tony Tafoya and Rossey Garcia hold food places at Mariscos El Compa Ivan Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## Long Beach startup Closed Loop Plastics looks to expand



Closed Loop Plastics co-CEO Aldrin Lupisan inside the company's processing facility in West Long Beach Wednesday Nov. 10, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

Closed Loop Plastics, a Long Beach-based startup working to broaden the types of plastic materials that can be recycled and reused, is looking to

expand operations from its Westside warehouse to at least one more location in California.

After completing the Long Beach Accelerator program as the only Long Beach-based company this year, the

founding trio is now in the early stages of fundraising for an expansion that will allow them to build out a recycling facility closer to the waste processing plants that supply their base material, polystyrene.

"They're smart and they're energized, and they have a very interesting idea," said Peter Greenthal, who mentored Closed Loop Plastics' founders Sharon To, Aldrin Lupisan and Will Amos throughout the year as part of the accelerator program.

Now, it will be up to the trio to secure funding.

To open its new facility, Closed Loop Plastics is looking for \$1.2 million in funding from investors and accelerators like the one they just completed in Long Beach.

Potential locations include San Luis Obispo, where the company has a longstanding partnership with the Cold Canyon landfill that currently supplies them with base materials. The company is also looking at properties in Marin County and Los Angeles.

Being closer to a waste processing plant or landfill would allow the company to significantly scale up its

operations. But: "It's all relatively new," Lupisan said. "We're still moving past the introductory stage."

Through its proprietary technology, Closed Loop Plastics uses pre-sorted Type 6 plastic resin, which is then shredded, washed, dried and fed into a machine designed by the company to produce filament and resin used in 3D-printing and plastic molding.

While other companies already process other types of plastic like polyethylene terephthalate or PET, Type 6 resin is still largely underutilized, according to Lupisan. "[We're] trying to tackle the rest of the plastic types that aren't really widely recycled."

Andrea White-Kjoss, director of the Long Beach Accelerator, from which the Closed Loop Plastics team graduated in October, said she's confident that the trio will be able to grow its technology at scale and drive development in the recycling industry.

"Their team is really fantastic," White-Kjoss said. "The solution that they have is head and shoulders above what else is available out there." ■



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After shredding plastic cups, the remaining flakes are washed, dried and melted into filament or pellets. Photo by Alena Maschke.



At its West Long Beach facility, Closed Loop Plastics turns party cups into filament and pellets to be used in 3D printing and plastic molding. Photo by Alena Maschke.

Small Business Saturday

Continued from cover

executive director, Jessie Artigue, said. “We wanted to create something to give our community a chance to come out and support.”

The Downtown Long Beach Business Alliance will be hosting a similar event, where up to two shoppers can win a \$500 gift card from a business of their choice if they make purchases and collect stamps at eight local businesses.

Shella Garcia’s children’s clothing store Sweet Threads on Second Street will participate in the Belmont Shore scavenger hunt. She’s also planning to host another local brand of children’s clothing as a special one-day pop up on Nov. 27.

“I love supporting other businesses,” Garcia said. Small Business Saturday, she said, is a welcome opportunity to make up for lost time. “A lot of the major events we usually do, we didn’t do in 2020.”

Making it through the last year was far from a given for many small businesses. In California, 19,200 businesses permanently closed during the first six months of the pandemic alone, according to a Yelp report.

For Miguel Perez, it will be the second Small Business Saturday since he opened his Bixby Knolls restaurant,



A server delivers food to a table inside MeeMa’s restaurant in Bixby Knolls Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

MeeMa’s, just before the pandemic started. Last year, indoor dining was still prohibited.

“It was a really tough time for restaurants,” Perez said. But the ongoing support from patrons throughout the crisis made them feel valued, he added.

“The community really, really rallied

around us.”

Now, Perez can use all the support the community has to offer. MeeMa’s just reopened after losing one of its prep cooks, whom Perez had known for over a decade, to COVID. “It’s been really tough on us,” he said.

Understanding the human stories

behind local small businesses is an important part of Small Business Saturday, said Blair Cohn, executive director of the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association.

“Behind every little storefront, there are people,” Cohn said. “You’re supporting your neighbors.” ■

How a family’s banana pudding recipe became a successful business

BY CHEANTAY JENSEN / Reporter

In Toran Grays’ family, it was a well-known fact that on the rare occasion banana pudding was served at a family function, you better grab a plate before it was gone.

“My aunt and my mom would make a couple trays and literally they [friends and family] would eat it before they would eat dinner,” Grays said.

The coveted dessert was a family recipe created by Grays’ great-grandmother, Agnes White, and passed down generations to the women in his family.

“When I was a kid, I loved when my great-grandmother was making it,” the 38-year-old said. “But I never thought about turning it into a business.”

It wasn’t until a Thanksgiving dinner in 2018 that a life-altering thought entered his mind. His family had, yet again, demolished trays of the dessert, and as he watched the frenzy, he wagered that other people might be just as enamored with it.

His mother and aunt readily passed along the recipe at his request. He decided to tweak it, mainly by dialing back the sweetness, and he began making it for friends and family with great success. But a retirement party that he catered for the Navy in San Diego, his hometown, is where demand really began to skyrocket.

“I was busy for four months straight,” he said. “They were calling me every weekend.”

In between his full-time job as a general manager for Catalina Offshore, San Diego’s premium fish market, Grays devoted all his free time to selling pudding. Eight months later, he had saved \$20,000 to open his first brick-and-mortar in La Mesa, a city in San Diego County,

on March 14, 2020.

A year-and-a-half and over half a million dollars in banana pudding sales later, Grays opened his second location in Long Beach. Grays said he became captivated by the city while visiting a friend for their birthday.

“I loved the whole atmosphere of the city. Everything. And I was like, you know what, maybe this would be a great place for my second location,” he said.

On Oct. 2, nearly 300 people visited Extraordinary Banana Pudding to support and celebrate the new business on Long Beach Boulevard.

“It was a really nice day,” he said. While it might seem remarkable that a modest banana pudding shop might garner such popularity, to Grays the only surprise was how quickly his business took off.

“I knew I would do good, but I didn’t think it would take off instantly,” he said. “It was crazy. You know, sometimes I think about it, and I’m just like, you know, it’s got to be God.”

Of course, some credit can most certainly be pointed to Grays’ ingenuity. While the classic banana pudding recipe is, hands-down, his best-seller, Grays has taken the family recipe and run with it.

Extraordinary Banana offers 25 banana pudding flavors—from Oreo to red velvet to strawberry cheesecake to butterscotch to pistachio—and they’re packaged in all sorts of ways. There are banana pudding pies, cakes, cupcakes, popsicles, sandwiches, even tacos (the pudding is cradled in a hand-made vanilla wafer shell). And, because no person ought to be without banana pudding, Grays also offers sugar-free, vegan or



Owner Toran Grays stands in front of a refrigerator full of different banana pudding flavors at Extraordinary Banana Pudding near St. Mary Medical Center Wednesday, Oct. 6, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

gluten-free puddings.

“I do everything under the sun,” he said.

Grays is now splitting his time between his two stores, driving from San Diego to Long Beach four times a week to prep and cook—as it turns out, no one can make the pudding quite as well as he does, but he’s working on finding some apprentices. Though the specifics of his recipe are a secret, Grays has made it a point to share his craft online.

“I want people to interact with me,” he said. “I show videos on Instagram and show people how to make it ... so people can actually see what’s going on.”

Grays said he’s on his way to opening

a third location in Atlanta, Georgia after seeing success from pop-ups in the area.

“I did five pop-ups out there last year. I sold out in an hour, and I’m talking about over 1,000 puddings,” he said. “It’s crazy the amount of support I’ve had down there.”

In Long Beach, Grays said the support he’s received from the community and other neighboring small businesses has been touching and a strong indication he believes he’s made the right move coming to the city.

*Extraordinary Banana Pudding is at 1208 Long Beach Blvd. Hours are Monday-Friday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.* ■

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A solution for businesses with at least 10 employees

Musician

Continued from page 14

himself, his wife, Rossy, and their three children. That’s when Mariscos El Compa Ivan, their family business delivering freshly made Mexican seafood, was born.

The kitchen wasn’t entirely new terrain for the 39-year-old, who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico in the early 2000s.

Just after moving to the U.S. from Guanajuato, Mexico, the then-bachelor came up with a spicy concoction of boiled shrimp, chile de arbol, onions, cucumbers and tomatoes that he would cook for himself and his friends. After his wedding to Rossy, the recipe quickly found fans among his new family, friends and neighbors.

So when the pandemic started and the music suddenly stopped, a friend asked: Why didn’t he make some of his famous shrimp to sell? They’d be his first clients, he told him.

“I had made it before, at home, but only for the family,” Tafoya said. “I never thought that one day I would sell it.”

But Tafoya and his wife, an expert scorer of grocery deals, didn’t hesitate.

“By that point, I didn’t have much money left, because I wasn’t working enough,” he said. So they took the last \$100 he had saved and went to a local supermarket to buy as many shrimp as they could, along with a few other ingredients. Then, they made their first order of camarones estilo Ivan, his signature dish, named after the couple’s youngest son, 3-year-old Ivan.

“We started doing that and people started to like it,” he said. “And then we made a different dish and another.” People kept asking for their favorite seafood dishes: empanadas, ceviche, aguachile. “We said we’ve never made them, but we’d try.”

Many of the ingredients are sourced from the Mexican state of Sinaloa.

Every year, Tafoya’s wife’s family travels home to Sinaloa to visit her father’s grave in honor of Dia de Los Muertos, the annual celebration dedicated to honoring the dead. The chiles de chiltepin they bring back from their trips have become a favorite among customers who like their seafood extra spicy—the size and shape of cranberries, they rank at about 50,000 to 100,000 units on the Scoville scale. Still, they have to be rationed—demand regularly outpaces supply of the fiery imports.

The octopus and scallops used in Mariscos El Compa Ivan’s seafood trays, too, come from Sinaloa, by way of a local food truck that imports and resells them.

The presentation of their trays on social media—colorful, perfectly lit and neatly arranged—is the domain of Tafoya’s sister-in-law, Elva Garcia. An enthusiastic amateur photographer, Garcia early on purchased a small light box to help their creations shine—much to the dismay of her frugal sister, the business’s unofficial accountant.

“She’s the money lady,” Garcia said with a serious inflection. “I had to prove to her that it was worth it.”

Her strategy worked.

Since she started an Instagram page for their business in July 2020, the volume of orders has grown exponentially. “We started getting orders from random people, which was really exciting,” Garcia said. Customers place their orders via the business’s Instagram page or by phone.

Where during the first few weeks, they would be preparing \$300-\$500 worth of orders each week, that number quadrupled when order volumes hit their peak a year later.

Since, then, “things have slowed down a little bit,” Garcia said. But that

hasn’t curbed their entrepreneurial spirit. “Our menu is expanding and we’re evolving,” she said. “We’re learning so much.”

Part of that evolution is a recent move into a shared kitchen with professional appliances. Since Nov. 6, Mariscos El Compa Ivan has rented a slot at Feel Good Salsa, a newly opened shared kitchen in the Hellmann Historic District, on the weekends. Garcia and her sister now do most of the cooking and they’re even thinking about hiring new staff as Tafoya returns to the stage.

“We’re excited,” Garcia said.

While he’s back to playing music nearly every day and his wife has taken over the reins in the kitchen, Tafoya isn’t ready to give up his love for cooking altogether.

“Music runs in my blood,” Tafoya, who grew up in a family of musicians and has been playing since he was 11, said. But, “I love the kitchen too.” One day, he hopes to open a restaurant together with his wife and her family.

“A little restaurant, so people can come and eat, feel comfortable, with a little beer, maybe a michelada, and some shrimp. Having a good time,” he said. “That’s the dream I have.” ■



Cargo trucks drive along the 710 Freeway in Long Beach below smog-filled skies Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## Harbor Commission approves clean truck fee with controversial natural gas exemption

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

After years of planning, study and community input, the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners voted unanimously earlier this month to approve the implementation of a fee for older, pollution-producing trucks at the Port of Long Beach, including a controversial exemption for natural gas vehicles.

The Clean Truck Fund Rate program charges a fee for every shipping container moved into and out of the port complex aboard diesel trucks. The fee—\$10 for each 20-foot equivalent unit, the standard measure for a container—will be charged to cargo owners and used to fund truck initiatives to reduce emissions with the ultimate goal of reaching zero emissions by 2035 at the port.

Zero-emission trucks will be exempt from the fee. Collection will begin April 1, 2022.

The item also included a temporary exemption for natural gas-powered trucks purchased and registered with the port on or before Dec. 31, 2022, with an expiration date of Dec. 31, 2031. But the item was approved with amendments from board Vice President Sharon Weissman, which exempt natural gas trucks through Dec. 31, 2034 if purchased before Dec. 8, 2021 and owned by the original purchaser, and through Dec. 31, 2031 for trucks purchased by July 31, 2022 that are registered with the port within 30 days of receipt from the manufacturer.

“We are stewards of the port for all of California and we must use our resources wisely and do whatever we can to reduce emissions today,” Weissman said during the Nov. 8

meeting, noting that natural gas trucks significantly reduce greenhouse gas and nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions. “I cannot support the delay of reducing harmful emissions any longer.”

The natural gas exemption was at the heart of controversy after a joint investigation by the Los Angeles Times and news outlet Floodlight in partnership with the Guardian found that gas companies paid at least 20 local residents to push for natural gas trucks during public meetings and press conferences in 2017. A company called Method Campaign Services was paid at least \$10,000 by Clean Energy Fuels Corp., which owns natural gas fueling stations, according to the Times report.

At least some of the residents were told they were “standing up for sustainability” as part of an environmental campaign, the Times reported, unaware they were taking the side of fossil fuels.

“Sadly, the Port of Long Beach has been the target of a deceptive gas industry astroturf campaign, which has been driving this false solution since 2017,” Long Beach resident Elliot Gonzales said in a statement. “Those of us who breathe pollution from the port day in and day out have been clear from the beginning that we want the port to use this revenue source to support the transition from diesel to clean, electric trucks.”

In May, commissioners approved a lifetime exemption from the fee for natural gas trucks. After public pushback, however, the board added the sunset date for the exemption.

As of August, there were 19,994 trucks in the Port Drayage Truck Registry, according to a staff presentation. Of those, 9,384 trucks

are 2014 or newer, which make 48% of moves. About 70% of registered trucks meet 2010 EPA standards.

There are 911 natural gas trucks operating at the port, performing 5% of moves. Only 28 battery-electric trucks are registered with the port.

The rate collection mechanism is still being established but is slated for completion in March. Based on current cargo volumes, the fee is expected to generate about \$90 million for the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles combined annually in the early years, according to port documents.

Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said the port would first prioritize incentives and programs to increase the number of natural gas trucks that operate within the port, with 10% set aside for zero-emission trucks. At the Port of Long Beach, upward of 6,000 outdated diesel trucks must be replaced within the next two years.

“The choice today is not between low-NOx and zero-emission trucks, it’s between low-NOx trucks and diesel,” Cordero said during the meeting, noting that those trucks could be replaced with newer diesel trucks rather than widely available natural gas trucks unless the exemption was included. “We have chosen to emphasize the low-NOx option to reduce emissions today and not wait for tomorrow.”

Zero-emission trucks are not widely commercially available, which makes a faster transition impossible, Cordero said. The use of natural gas trucks in the interim is the best option to fill the gap, while reducing emissions when compared to diesel trucks.

“Zero emission is coming,” Cordero said. “But there is an alternative now.” Since the San Pedro Bay ports implemented the Clean Truck Program in 2008, diesel emissions have been cut by as much as 97% compared to 2005 levels, according to a Port of Long Beach announcement issued after the vote.

Public comment was a mix of support and opposition of the natural gas exemption for various. Many in favor of the exemption were from within the fossil fuels industry, such as fueling station operators, trucking associations and truck manufacturers. Many felt the deadline for purchasing and registering a natural gas truck was not feasible due to supply chain issues that are slowing the delivery of trucks.

Those opposed to the exemption were local residents and environmental advocates that, like Gonzales, urged the commission to prioritize zero-emission trucks, noting that natural gas will not solve the pollution issues that have plagued people living in port-adjacent areas, including along the 710 Freeway.

“We have been treated like a sacrifice zone for so many years,” Gonzales said. “We deserve real, clean energy solutions that will deliver immediate air quality benefits, not more polluting technologies pushed by the fossil fuel industry at the expense of our health.” ■

## With sky-high consumer demand, Black Friday sales could set records

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

As a record number of cargo ships continue to linger in the San Pedro Bay, one thing is clear: The coronavirus pandemic has not tamped down consumer demand. And experts agree that high demand will continue through the holiday season, making for strong Black Friday sales.

While officials have, for months now, cautioned folks to start their holiday shopping early because of the supply chain bottleneck, Cal State Long Beach’s Economics Department Chair Seiji Steimetz said there are no signs demand will slow anytime soon.

“What’s causing all the shortage and backups we’re seeing is simply a massive surge in demand for goods,” Steimetz said. “We’re importing more into this country than we ever have before, and that’s due to an unprecedented increase in demand.”

In September, the most recent available data, national retail sales were up 22% compared to two years prior, Steimetz said, so “we’re well above pre-pandemic demand for goods.”

And there are several factors pointing to that trend continuing.

“Considering the strength of the economy, the overall surge in demand for goods, the extraordinary purchasing power of consumers (aided by coronavirus relief spending), and the ‘shop early’ messaging,” he said, “I wouldn’t be surprised if we have a record-setting Black Friday and holiday shopping season.”

While it’s clear that retailers will benefit from strong sales, what’s less apparent is whether those sales will translate to the long lines and frenzied malls of Black Fridays past—or if the sales will take place primarily online.

That’s because e-commerce has driven the recent surge in consumer demand, with online national retail sales in April of this year 57% higher than in April 2019, Steimetz said. Brick-and-mortar retail sales, meanwhile, have not seen similar gains.

“It’s hard to say” what stores will look like on Black Friday, Steimetz said. “You have two things working against each other: More purchasing power—the economy rebounded very quickly, and there’s a lot of purchasing power, especially when you consider, for example, stimulus spending. So there’s money out there, so that would increase the amount of people who might be lining up at the doors. But the thing is, there has been an increase in online shopping.”

But Zoe Engstrom, a consumer

Continued on page 25

## Classic waterfront Naples home is latest attempt at reaching the \$10 million mark

BY TIM GROBATY / Columnist

The game is again afoot for the most money ever paid for a home in Long Beach.

It’s a game for the wealthy; looky-loos aren’t even granted a peek inside homes of this caliber in which proof of funds is but one hurdle to gain a gander of the property.

Keith Muirhead listed a property late last month at 15 The Colonnade in, of course, Naples, at a price of \$10.6 million. If the home fetches that initial asking price, it would be the new leader in the top-dollar contest by a wide margin of more than \$2 million.

“I’ve already had a few calls about the property,” said Muirhead. Yes, and a couple of them were from me, and they were about \$10.5 million shy of the list price; I have no proof of funds. As Muirhead noted, it’s going to take a person with a lot of millions to buy the place.

Is the house worth the price?

Well, it’s not not worth it. It’s on a massive lot (not by, say, Montana standards, but certainly gigantic in Naples) of more than a quarter acre, encompassing three waterfront lots, with 112 feet of water frontage and 146 feet along the adjacent The Colonnade Park.

Does it have a boat slip? It does not.

It has a marina, big enough for multiple watercraft and to allow the owners to snicker at neighbors who only have private “docks” for their yachts.

This isn’t the first run at the thus-far elusive \$10 million mark in Long Beach. Bob and Audrey Langslet’s Casa Ocean estate on the bluff just west of the Belmont Pier was initially listed at \$12 million before it eventually sold for \$7.25 million last year. A Naples home sold by Muirhead at 5558 Naples Canal, was listed within pocket change of \$10 million with a list of \$9.95 million. It sold for \$8.2 million in 2007, a record high at the time that lasted through the recession until a home at 55 Vista del Golfo, listed at \$10.9 million, sold for \$8.5 million in 2015.

The latest property to take a hard run at a historic high was an off-water mansion at 93 Giralda Walk that listed at \$9 million but has since been reduced to under \$7 million.

The home on The Colonnade was built for automobile dealer and big-game angler Art Hall in 1948 by George Montieth, who is part of the pantheon of great Long Beach architects. His works include numerous residences, the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, the Long

Beach Yacht Club and various schools and churches.

Among his more notable residences, in addition to the one on The Colonnade, are the Kresl Residence in Los Cerritos at 3924 Pine Ave., and his own house, Casa Sereno, in Park Estates at 5340 El Prado Ave.

For the Hall residence, Montieth built the home for outdoor living. Already well known for his Mid-Century Modern style (famed Mid-mod architect Paul Tay worked for Montieth on his way up), Montieth pulled out all the stops, with tiered banks of paned glass coursing across both floors, affording awesome views of the water—the home sits at the intersections of Naples, Rivo Alto and Colonnade canals as they spill into Alamitos Bay. You don’t cover up a vista like that with lath and plaster.

The residence is the polar opposite of a tiny house. It’s huge, and it gives off more of a resort hotel vibe than a funky beach pad (which is how we like our Naples homes, though the whole beach-pad thing works better on the Peninsula). Long wings that run away from the main part of the house resemble a resort hallway that you might be striding toward your room, bellboy in tow with all your garments.

Between those wings is an utterly authentic Mid-Modern kidney-shaped swimming pool of the sort that people of a certain age may recall seeing advertised on the back of your television guide in the Sunday paper.

In many ways, the pool is the highlight of the house, discounting the home’s location and its expansive views.

At over 6,000 square feet, your biggest problems in this house would be locating scattered family members and buying enough furniture to fill the place. The living room and two master bedrooms are black holes for beds, chairs and couches; after being appropriately furnished they still have enough excess room to throw a rodeo.

Other features of the home include a guest house with its own bath and shower, a full walk-in wet bar, wood-paneled walls in the formal dining room with its 10-foot ceiling, an oversized marble fireplace in the living room as well as in one of the master bedrooms, master baths with custom wood closets and make-up rooms and a grand formal entry with 20-foot ceilings and a sweeping staircase leading to the top floor.

If you want to tour it in person, just make sure you can prove you can afford it. ■



A Naples Island home recently hit the market for \$10.6 million. Listing photo.



Interior of the Montieth-designed Kresl Residence in Los Cerritos, recently sold by Nate Cole of Unique California Property. Listing photo.



Ten-million-dollar views of Alamitos Bay and the canals of Naples from the home at 15 The Colonnade. Listing photo.



A mid-modern icon: A kidney-shaped pool in the courtyard of the home at 15 The Colonnade. Listing photo.



Cargo ships unload containers at the Port of Long Beach Monday, Oct. 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## White House unveils funding to ease supply chain crisis, with LA and Long Beach ports being a top priority

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AND BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The Biden administration announced plans last week to identify and pay for possible upgrades to U.S. ports within the next 90 days in the hopes of ultimately tamping down the inflation being caused by ships waiting to dock and a shortage of truck drivers to haul goods. The ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles specifically will be a top priority, a senior administration official told the Long Beach Business Journal.

As the U.S. emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, the economic recovery has been hampered by congested and aging ports. The mix of inflation and the potential for empty store shelves during holiday shopping has created a sense of frustration for many Americans and hurt President Joe Biden and Democrats politically.

Senior administration officials said that the Transportation Department will allow port authorities to redirect any leftover money from grant projects to address the supply chain issues. For example, the Georgia Ports Authority will use \$8 million to convert its inland

facilities for the port of Savannah into container yards, freeing up dock space and speeding the flow of goods to their final destinations.

“The supply chain in this country is in serious need of investment in capital improvements. This funding allows us to fast-track infrastructure projects that will speed the movement of goods and allow our ports to grow sustainably amid forecasted cargo growth into the future,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero, who is also the current chairman of the American Association of Port Authorities, said in a statement.

“The President clearly recognizes how important ports and the supply chain are to the U.S. economy.”

Port of Los Angeles officials declined to comment.

White House officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the forthcoming plans, which come on the heels of the House backing the bipartisan infrastructure package. The package includes \$17 billion to improve coastal and land-based ports that can help to tackle the challenges in the longer term.

“If you look at where investment dollars can do more,” a senior official told the Business Journal, “the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach stack up very well.”

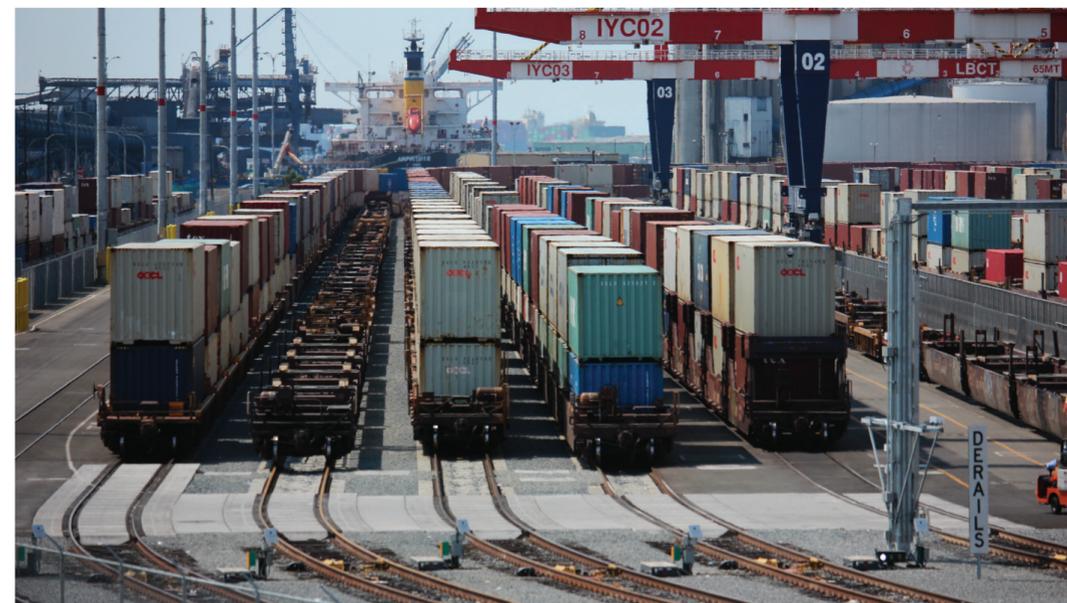
Rail, roads and electrification upgrades are some examples of the types of projects that will be considered for the funding, the senior official said.

Biden’s team is moving straight ahead in promoting the possible benefits from the broader infrastructure package, though they’ve largely shied away from claiming that Americans could see clear and demonstrable changes to their lives before the 2022 midterm elections. The focus, instead, has been on how the spending on roads, bridges and broadband will help the U.S. economy compete against the rest of the world.

The president in remarks to Democratic supporters on Nov. 9, the day of the announcement, signaled that he will look to remind voters in the months ahead of the infrastructure win. He noted “the last president” promised to pursue legislation but failed to deliver. “So it was left to us,” Biden said at the virtual event hosted by the Democratic National Committee. “We got the job done.”

Administration officials said the port initiatives would make the supply chain faster, more efficient and environmentally friendly in the medium to longer term.

*Continued on page 24*



Shipping containers are loaded onto rail cars at the Long Beach Container Terminal at Middle Harbor Thursday, Aug. 19, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## Ports of LA, Long Beach identify rail as top priority for funding initiative to enhance faltering supply chain

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The U.S. Department of Transportation and Gov. Gavin Newsom late last month announced a federal-state partnership, dubbed the Emerging Projects Agreement, to identify funding for infrastructure projects at California ports, including the San Pedro Bay complex that handles 40% of U.S. imports. While potentially in the billions, the funding would come in the form of loans to the Long Beach and Los Angeles port authorities.

The announcement came amid an unprecedented supply chain crisis that has been plaguing the twin ports since late last year.

The “partnership will ensure the creation of local infrastructure projects aimed at improving freight movement between the San Pedro Bay ports complex and distribution centers in the Inland Empire,” Port of Long Beach Executive

Director Mario Cordero said in an email. “This plan builds on our ongoing efforts to identify immediate and long-term solutions that will expedite cargo shipments and address an historic cargo surge and forecasted cargo growth.”

The program will be funded in part through two DOT credit assistance programs: the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act and Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing. Funding amounts were not identified in the announcement, and neither port has indicated there are any estimates.

The loans are meant to expedite a network of projects, rather than moving forward with a “piecemeal approach,” according to the announcement. The funding could be used for port-specific upgrades, expanding rail capacity, developing inland port facilities for increased warehouse storage, highway upgrades and more. Spokesmen for both

port complexes said the top priority would be on-dock rail expansion.

Both ports already have plans for numerous rail projects. In Long Beach, on-dock rail expansion accounts for \$1 billion of the port’s projected \$1.6 billion worth of capital improvement projects planned for the next decade, according to spokesman Lee Peterson.

Though created in response to the current supply chain crisis, the initiative will do little to alleviate the current backlog, both port spokesmen acknowledged in separate emails. Rail projects take years to design, approve and complete.

The Pier B On-Dock Rail Support facility in Long Beach, for example, has been in the planning stages for over a decade. The \$870 million project on the Westside is not slated for completion until 2032, after portions of tracks open in 2024 and 2030. The first phase alone will double the capacity of the existing

Pier B rail yard.

Nonetheless, the funding would help ensure the ports do not face similar backlogs in the future, Port of LA spokesman Phillip Sanfield said.

“Having our federal and state transportation agencies working in unison to help fund infrastructure is exactly what we need,” Port of LA Executive Director Gene Seroka said in an email. “We have projects in need of funding that will reduce cargo delays, improve efficiency, reduce emissions and improve safety for waterfront workers and motorists throughout the region.”

The partnership is the latest in a series of steps taken to address the ongoing crisis. Locally, the San Pedro Bay ports have already implemented strategies to address the backlog, including a pilot program that expanded one Long Beach container terminal to 24-hour-per-day operations four days a week.

Long Beach officials also suspended a portion of the city’s municipal code that limited container stacking heights outside the port complex.

The most recent action taken by the port authorities was the announcement that a surcharge will be paid by shippers for every container that sits on the dock for extended lengths of time. The charge—\$100 per container, which increases \$100 per day—is likely to generate millions of dollars since 40% of containers currently fall into the categories outlined by the program.

On Oct. 20, Newsom signed an executive order formalizing efforts already underway to address supply chain shortfalls. At the federal level, the Biden-Harris administration created the Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force, which continues working with stakeholders across the supply chain to shift to a 24/7 model.

“Our supply chains are being put to the test, with unprecedented consumer demand and pandemic-driven disruptions combining with the results of decades-long underinvestment in our infrastructure,” U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a statement. “That’s why this administration is working around the clock to address both near-term and long-term challenges to our supply chains, including investments such as those in the bipartisan infrastructure deal.” ■

## Long Beach breaks ground on 88-unit affordable housing project

BY CITY NEWS SERVICE AND ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

A new affordable-housing complex is on its way to Long Beach’s Cambodia Town neighborhood.

Officials with the city, the Long Beach Community Investment Company, TCC Family Health and BRIDGE Housing broke ground earlier this month on the \$57.7-million development at 1500 E. Anaheim St. The project will feature a community health and wellness center on the ground floor and 88 affordable apartments above, along with a parking structure for clinic staff, clients and residents.

“We are so thankful to be partnering with BRIDGE Housing to bring not only health, wellness and healing programs to this vibrant community, but also much

needed quality, affordable and supportive housing,” TCC Family Health CEO Dr. Elisa Nicholas said in a statement.

TCC will create jobs and offer health care to the community that includes services in women’s health, dental health and behavioral health, along with acupuncture and a pharmacy. The wellness center will include meeting spaces, a teaching kitchen and a courtyard. TCC will also partner with Pacific Asian Counseling Services, Khmer Girls in Action and other community-based organizations in the neighborhood.

To qualify for the one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, families will have to earn between 30-60% of the area’s median income, according to the developers, while 20 units will be reserved for formerly homeless seniors.



A rendering of the 88-unit affordable housing project on the corner of Anaheim Street and Walnut Avenue, where construction started on Monday, Nov. 1, 2021. Rendering courtesy of BRIDGE Housing.

Rents will range between \$398 and \$1,762 per month depending on the size of the apartment. Mental Health American Los Angeles and YMCA

of Greater Long Beach will provide resident services.

Construction is expected to wrap up by the end of 2023. ■

## Dozens of businesses eligible to stack containers higher to fight supply chain crunch

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

As many as 37 businesses are eligible to stack additional shipping containers in the city because of an executive order last month that temporarily lifts height limits in the hopes of easing the backlog of ships outside the Port of Long Beach.

City Manager Tom Modica issued the order Oct. 22, which lifted the city's rule limiting containers to being stacked two high outside of the port area. There is no limit inside the port-related industrial zone. The order lifted the limit for the following 90 days and allows businesses to stack up to four containers high, or as high as five containers if city officials deem it safe, in other areas of the city.

In a Nov. 9 presentation to the City Council, Development Services Director Oscar Orci showed a map of businesses that could potentially accept more shipping containers from the overflowing port complex. The sites were largely clustered just above the port and in North Long Beach—though not all could take advantage of the temporary change.

“Specialized equipment is needed, so it may limit stacking activity,” Orci said of operators wanting to stack more than two containers.

Meanwhile, dozens of ships have been

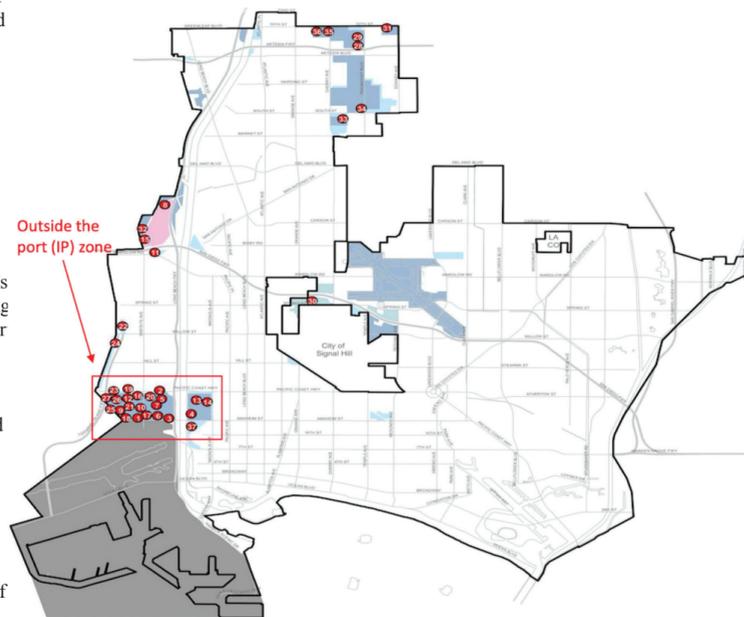
anchored off the coast of Long Beach for most of the year as the port has struggled to process a historic influx of cargo.

Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said during the City Council presentation that he believed that the port would at some point move beyond the current crisis and called the lifting of stacking limits a temporary measure to help goods movement in the country.

The council supported the measure and voted to formalize the city manager's order, with Councilman Al Austin calling it a “painful” move being made to support the supply chain's return to normalcy. But Councilman Rex Richardson raised concerns that this situation might not be as temporary as everyone hopes and said that if it persists there needs to be more public outreach.

“What we don't want to do is take these neighborhoods' approval for granted,” Richardson said. “We don't want for the way that we address this national crisis, for it to be on the backs of those most impacted.”

Richardson said that if the problem extends past 90 days, that the affected communities should be consulted about any extension of the suspended container stacking rules. ■



A map presented to the City Council showing potential sites where additional container stacking could occur.



A man walks over the 710 Freeway jammed with semi-trucks as he heads west along Anaheim Street Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

The port attributed the 2020 pollution reduction in part to participation in green programs, newer ships, replacement of older equipment and switching to low-sulfur fuel.

About 16% of the cargo-handling fleet, about 235 pieces of equipment, is now powered by electricity, officials noted.

“We are absolutely committed to showing the way forward for sustainable goods movement,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement. “At the same time, our industry partners and other stakeholders deserve a great deal of credit for cleaning the air. We could not have accomplished this without a shared commitment to cleaner operations.”

While the ports have both made gains over the past decade in air emissions reductions, progress in recent years has slowed as the harbor complex continues to see record cargo movement. The port in 2020 saw a 7% increase in greenhouse gas emissions and a 1% increase in carbon monoxide, which officials attributed in part to “cargo-handling equipment and heavy-duty truck activity related to record activity.”

The report comes as the harbor complex is grappling with a mass shipping bottleneck that is causing a nationwide shortage of goods and increasing air pollution in neighboring communities.

A September report from the California Air Resources Board found that increased cargo movement and congestion resulted in 14.5 extra tons per day of smog-causing nitrogen oxides in March.

The report also found an extra 0.27 tons of particulate matter compared to pre-pandemic base levels. The increase was equivalent to exhaust from nearly 50,000 large diesel trucks.

Sam Pournazeri, chief of the Mobile Source Analysis Branch for the state air resources board, said the report measured point-in-time air emissions in March, and that emissions now are likely twice as high, as a record number of cargo ships sits offshore waiting to unload.

The state agency expects to come out with a more extensive report next year showing emissions spikes from the backlog. ■

## Port of Long Beach saw slight decrease in air emissions for 2020, before mass cargo backlog

BY KELLY PUENTE / Reporter

The Port of Long Beach last year saw a slight drop in air emissions despite a 21% increase in container movement, but with an unprecedented global shipping backlog this year, emissions will likely be higher, experts say.

The Board of Harbor Commissioners reviewed the Port's annual emissions inventory late last month, which logs air pollution from the ships, truck

traffic and rail systems that move cargo. The ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles together make up the busiest harbor complex in the Western Hemisphere and move 40% of the nation's imports.

The report found that for the first time, the Port of Long Beach has reached all of its 2023 emission-reduction goals outlined in the San Pedro Bay Ports Clean Air Action Plan, despite moving record cargo volumes.

The inventory report found diesel

soot was down 90%, while smog-forming nitrogen oxides have dropped 62% compared to 2005 base levels. Sulfur oxides decreased 97%.

Last year, cargo movement halted in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and was followed in the third quarter by a record surge. The pandemic caused other unique factors that affected emissions last year, including fewer oil tankers arriving to the port and the halting of cruise ships operations.

## Long Beach Airport traffic still in recovery

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Passenger traffic remains well below pre-pandemic levels at Long Beach Airport, with percentage changes from 2019 to 2021 remaining flat from

August to September, according to data released late last month.

In September, 181,360 people traveled through the small municipal airport. While that marks a nearly 230% increase over the same month in 2020, it remains more than 37% lower than September 2019. August 2021 passenger traffic (203,940) also was just over 37% lower than the same month in 2019.

“We saw a slight reduction in passenger traffic during September, as expected with the end of the summer travel season,” airport Director Cynthia Guidry said in an email. “Our airline

partners have already begun increasing their flight schedules and we are looking forward to stronger numbers during the fall.”

For months, the airport had seen significant improvements in passenger traffic, with the difference between 2019 and 2021 levels reaching its lowest point in July, when passenger traffic was only 29% below the same month in 2019. At the onset of the pandemic, passenger traffic plummeted as low as 98% below normal levels.

But Long Beach is not alone. Air travel across the country remains

well below pre-pandemic levels, according to Transportation Security Administration data. In September, on average, 500,000 fewer passengers traveled each day compared to 2019.

Year-to-date, 1.37 million people have traveled through Long Beach Airport, a more than 55% increase from the same period last year. Compared to 2019, year-to-date passenger traffic is down more than 48%.

In September, a total of 1,322 tons of air cargo passed through the airport, up nearly 20% from the same month last year but down more from 15% from 2019. ■

## Inclusionary housing policy updates lengthen affordability requirements, tie fees to new home values

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Changes are coming to Long Beach's inclusionary housing ordinance, in which developers in Downtown and parts of Central Long Beach are required to incorporate affordable housing into their projects or pay a fee to fund future affordable housing development.

Long Beach is updating how it will charge developers who choose not to include affordable units in their projects and how long affordable units must remain affordable under the city's inclusionary housing policy, which was approved earlier this year.

Changes to the city's policy, which the City Council approved Nov. 9, will now require affordable units to remain affordable for at least 55 years or the life of the project, whichever is longer. The same applies to units that are created under the city's no-net-loss provision, which requires developers to replace affordable housing demolished to build new units at a one-to-one ratio at minimum.

The city's inclusionary housing policy applies to new construction in the Downtown area and extends up the Long Beach Boulevard corridor to the 405 Freeway. The remainder of the city is not subject to the policy that will eventually require 11% of units

in a rental development, and 10% of ownership developments, to be set aside as affordable units.

The policy applies to developments with more than nine units.

Mayor Robert Garcia said during the Nov. 9 meeting that the policy was crafted by housing advocacy groups, developers and industry representatives over the course of years. While the policy isn't something everyone loved, Garcia said it was a big step forward for Long Beach.

“This was viewed as an absolute step forward so that every single development built has affordable housing built into it,” Garcia said.

The City Council first approved the inclusionary housing policy in January, after years of discussion of how it would be implemented.

However, when the council approved the policy, it asked for amendments to be brought back to decide how long the units should remain affordable and whether a sunset clause, which allowed developers to demolish low-income housing without replacing it, should be kept in place.

One of the changes made was to strip away a developer's ability to build the affordable units offsite without the City Council's approval. Now, a developer

Continued on page 26

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A few hundred people gather at Bixby Park along Ocean Boulevard for a climate change rally Friday, Sept. 27, 2019. Photo by Stephen Carr.

## Long Beach to create Youth Climate Corps with \$5 million in state funding

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach took the first step toward creating a Youth Climate Corps program last week, when the City Council forwarded a request to its Climate Action and Environmental Committee to begin public outreach on how to use \$5 million in state funding it secured earlier this year.

Mayor Robert Garcia proposed the program after the Big City Mayor's Coalition, a group of mayors from California's 13 biggest cities, successfully lobbied Gov. Gavin Newsom to include funding for climate change in the 2021 state budget.

Newsom approved \$150 million to support a youth workforce jobs

program in the state, and Long Beach was awarded \$6.3 million. Garcia said that \$5 million would go toward creating the youth program, while the remaining \$1.3 million would go to administrative costs and shoring up existing workforce development programs in the city.

"This is a significant amount of dollars," Garcia said. "\$5 million to start, for a program like this, is a great start."

The program could create local jobs for youth focused on climate change and adaptation and create career paths to public service and other climate-focused industries. Garcia added that the program could be aligned with the federal civilian climate corps that

is under consideration by the Biden Administration but has yet to advance out of Congress.

The federal program, which is in line for tens of billions of dollars in funding if Congress can approve a massive spending bill aimed at addressing the climate crisis, could put people to work in short-term jobs focused on renewable technology and climate change resilience. It's inspired by the Civilian Conservation Corps, a depression-era program started by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that put millions of Americans to work on the country's infrastructure.

Aligning the city program with the potential federal program could put the city in a position to get additional federal funding down the road, something advocates asked the council to consider while forming the Youth Climate Corps.

Kenny Allen, a member of the Sunrise Movement Long Beach, a chapter of a youth organization focused on stopping climate change, said that the jobs provided through the program should pay a living wage with benefits and pave a path toward meaningful career opportunities.

Allen added that the communities most impacted by climate change should benefit most from the jobs created.

"Our generation is ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work building a world beyond fossil fuels, a world that centers care and community," Allen said.

It's still unclear what kind of limitations may be placed on the funding, and what they can ultimately be used for, but the details of what the program will look like are expected to be discussed at the Climate Action and Environmental Committee before returning to the City Council for approval. ■

## White House Funding

Continued from page 20

Biden highlighted the administration's efforts by visiting Baltimore's port the following day. It's part of a broader effort to show that the administration will tackle the inflation that has left Americans feeling more pessimistic about the economy.

The Baltimore trip was designed to highlight the types of investments that the administration believes will help unlog the supply chain. The port in Baltimore is adding container cranes and adding a 50-foot berth where ships can be unloaded. The administration has also approved grants so that the Howard Street Tunnel—a train artery that opened in 1895—can be expanded to ferry double-stacked containers on railcars.

The Biden administration earlier helped broker an agreement to increase the hours of operation at the Port of Los Angeles, but it's been difficult to immediately fix this challenge.

Additional steps include launching a \$240 million grant program in the next 45 days to modernize ports and marine highways. Within 60 days, the government wants to identify repair projects and opportunities to deepen harbors for larger ships that can be a guide for more than \$4 billion in construction by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The government will also look over the next 90 days at which ports of entry should be upgraded and expanded as part of a \$3.4 billion investment. It also plans within 90 days to open the first round of more than \$475 million in grants for ports made possible through the newly passed infrastructure package. ■

## Black Friday

Continued from page 18

affairs lecturer at CSULB, said that after last year's coronavirus-induced stay-at-home orders, shoppers are ready to take advantage of Black Friday deals in person.

"This year for Black Friday, there is expected to be big crowds," she said. "It's expected to be back because of the nostalgic factor in in-person shopping. Going out with family, having lunch, seeing Santa—all of that was denied to consumers last year, so that's something that's much more popular this year."

Steimetz and Engstrom both agreed, though, that because of the supply chain bottleneck, the availability of specific items will be a concern.

Steimetz, for his part, said that while he believes the idea of stores with completely barren shelves "is a little bit alarmist," shoppers may need to be more open-minded about what they buy depending on what's in stock.

Engstrom pointed to the fact that cargo backlogs are largely impacting international shipping as evidence that consumers may be better served by seeking gifts made domestically.

Still, behemoths like Amazon, Costco and Walmart have had the resources



Shoppers leave Walmart on the Lakewood-Long Beach border Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

to charter their own ships, which will likely mitigate some of the supply issues at larger retailers.

Supply of goods, though, isn't

the only aspect of the retail industry that's been impacted by the pandemic. Stores are also struggling due to labor shortages. With that in mind, Engstrom

had advice for shoppers this year: "There are staff shortages, so there may be a change in service level. So there is a lot of patience to be had." ■

## State legislators discuss solutions for supply chain challenges

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

State legislators convened earlier this month for an extensive hearing to survey solutions to the ongoing challenges in the supply chain that have led to cargo delays and record congestion at the San Pedro Bay ports.

"This is a multi-faceted problem and it will require multi-faceted action," said Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, D-Long Beach, who chairs the state Assembly's committee on goods movement and called for the joint hearing. "There's not one switch you can flip."

Legislators and representatives of different links along the supply chain spoke in the Nov. 3 hearing about efforts already underway, like charging shippers penalties if containers linger too long at the ports, and other avenues that could help moving forward, like intervention from the federal government.

The penalties on shippers at the

ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles went into effect Nov. 15 in the hopes that they will incentivize shippers to move containers off port property more quickly.

Containers lingering at the ports in excess of nine days incur a fee of \$100 per container per day if they are to be transported by truck. The same fee applies if they remain at the port for six days if they're supposed to be loaded onto a train for further transport.

In September, the average dwell time for containers being moved by truck reached 5.94 days, its highest level since the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association began tracking the data point in May 2016. Prior to the pandemic, dwell times were about 2.5 days, according to a spokesperson for the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association.

Container dwell time for rail, meanwhile, was 5.5 days in September.

Mike Jacob, vice president and general counsel of the Pacific Merchant

Shipping Association, although critical of the fee, expects it to be effective in reducing these longer-than-usual dwell times. Getting cargo off the port property and onto retailers' shelves is the core mission of the carriers he represents, Jacobs said. "We need to make sure that they're moving goods to market."

Shippers, he added, are working to increase at-sea capacity to transport goods and empty containers. "We have a capacity shortage, and we're bringing more ships into service," Jacobs said.

In the meantime, the state is looking to identify additional land to be used for storage near the twin ports of Long Beach and L.A. An Oct. 20 executive order issued by Gov. Gavin Newsom directed state agencies to find state, federal and private land for short-term container storage by Dec. 15 and temporarily exempt weight limits on select freight routes.

In another temporary fix to one of the most prominent issues impacting

the supply chain at the moment, David Kim, secretary of the California State Transportation Agency, suggested the federal government might invoke the Defense Production Act to produce chassis, which are mostly produced abroad and currently in extremely short supply.

"That is something we have raised and will continue to do so," Kim said.

In the long term, experts and legislators are hoping to alleviate some of the issues contributing to the current supply chain crisis, such as declining numbers of truck drivers and a need for more infrastructure investments, by emphasizing workforce development in the trucking industry and advocating for more federal funds to go to California ports.

Solving the current supply chain challenges and preventing future crises will have to be a collaborative effort, all in attendance agreed. "Even a large state like California cannot solve this problem on our own," Kim said. ■

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Gio Ferrero stands in front of the Long Beach Art Theatre Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021. Ferrero is debuting her short film at the theater on Dec. 9. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## Former Downtown gym owner pivots to film

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Last year was one of pain and loss for Giovanna Ferrero.

In January 2020, she and her 70-year-old mother, Francesca, were struck by a car while walking Downtown, and her knee is still in pain.

A few months after the crash, COVID-19 arrived in the United States,

something that would eventually claim her Pine Avenue gym, Groundwork Fitness. She was forced to shutter it for good—another one of the pandemic’s economic victims.

Ferrero, a longtime homeless advocate who was thrust into that work after her dad died homeless 16 years ago, said she needed to sell the equipment from her gym to pay her own bills to

avoid ending up on the street.

“I was thinking, ‘Homeless advocate becomes homeless, like her dad, cool,’” Ferrero said. “How are we going to navigate this?”

The answer came in February when Ferrero decided she was going to tap into her college acting days and write and produce her first film, “Lennon,” which she produced and acted in. It’s now set to premiere at The Art Theatre Dec. 9.

“I am nervous as hell,” Ferrero said. “I have continuous butterflies in my stomach. I’ve never done anything like this.”

Before filming “Lennon,” Ferrero already knew the stories of some of the city’s most vulnerable people because of her advocacy work with Keep LBC Fit, a nonprofit that gives people socks with homeless-service resources printed on them. But the film gave her a new way to share that story with others. She started writing the script in February 2021, and by June she was filming.

She said “Lennon,” a 26-minute short film, is about tearing down some of the myths that surround those experiencing homelessness while trying to spark conversation by showing what life is like through their eyes.

“Really it’s about compassion,” Ferrero said. “I really want, with this short, to ignite the part of the heart in people that I feel is getting burnt out.”

Jumping into the film industry was a challenge considering that she had no experience since her days at Pasadena City College, where she earned an associate’s degree in theater arts.

But Ferrero said her experience as a small business owner gave her both the stamina to be a producer and a network of connections to tap into for things like a camera and a filming location.

Much of the film was shot inside Rose Park Roasters on Fourth Street, a favorite hangout of hers that is also owned by a friend who voluntarily closed the inside for three days in June so she could film “Lennon.”

The process from filming to the December premiere at the Art Theatre was all made possible through a community network she developed as a gym owner over the past eight years, she said.

Ferrero said she intends to make more films and is looking into internships and other opportunities to sharpen her skills as a writer and producer. The focus of her future films will likely continue to be marginalized communities who need to have their stories told, she said.

As for “Lennon,” Ferrero said she hopes it can serve as a starting point to develop the type of community that is necessary to begin ending the homelessness crisis that has gripped the region.

“I hope to hell it pushes buttons,” Ferrero said. “I want you to leave thinking about it, and go home and have conversations about it.”

*Lennon is set to debut at the Art Theatre, 2025 E. Fourth St., Dec. 9 at 8 p.m. with doors to open at 7 p.m. Proof of vaccination and mask-wearing will be required. A question-and-answer session will follow the screening. Tickets can be purchased at [arttheatre.easy-ware-ticketing.com/events](http://arttheatre.easy-ware-ticketing.com/events) for \$10. ■*

## XLNT Foods now ships tamales, chili and merch nationwide

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

Fans of Long Beach-based Mexican food brand XLNT Foods can now get the company’s iconic red, white and blue-packaged beef tamales and chili con carne anywhere in the contiguous U.S.

The company announced the launch of its new website earlier this month, where customers can order packages of XLNT’s offerings for shipment. For those who want to show off their love for the SoCal classic, XLNT Foods merchandise like t-shirts, mugs, hoodies, and tote bags is also available for purchase.

“Now, anyone can enjoy the renowned flavors of XLNT Beef Tamales and XLNT Chili Con Carne, even if they’ve moved away from the West Coast,” the company said in a statement announcing the launch.

XLNT Foods, founded in 1894, is one of the oldest Mexican food companies in Southern California.

Orders are shipped using UPS 2nd Day Air services during the warmer months of the year, but in the cooler, winter months they’re shipped with UPS 3 Day Select.

Shoppers have the choice of three different food selections: 12-packs of XLNT Beef Tamales, 5-packs of XLNT Chili Con Carne, and a Chili and Tamale combination pack. ■

## Housing Policy

*Continued from page 22*

will have to submit a plan to the council to build off-site affordable units, but the council could ultimately refuse it.

The in-lieu fees, which were set to be phased in with the largest fees starting in 2023, are now going to be tied to the annual percentage change in new home values.

In January, the council adopted rates that would have a developer pay in-lieu fees of \$47.50 per square foot for rental units or \$390,400 per unit, if they forgo including affordable housing. For ownership units, they would have to pay \$36.40 per square foot or \$430,000 per unit.

Those fees will be put into an affordable housing trust fund that will be used to build very low-income housing units.

The council requested in January that the fees be tied to the actual cost of construction and the land at the time the fees were paid, but an analysis contracted by the city said it would be “time consuming and costly” to gather the data and recommended tying the annual fee adjustments to the annual percentage change in home values.

In-lieu fees were previously scheduled to be adjusted every three years. ■



Radiologist, Dr. Sunayna Bakaya (right), reviews a lung cancer patient’s latest imaging scans with thoracic surgeon, Dr. Amir Abolhoda (left), prior to surgery.

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Apparel with Embroidery and Screen-Print	ITB LB21-099	12/02/2021

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