

# Long Beach Business Journal

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## STATE OF TOURISM

Convention bookings will lead Long Beach’s tourism rebound in 2022

Photo by Brandon Richardson

Article on page 8

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Downtown, Tourism & Hospitality  
Vol. XXXIV No. 26  
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Trucks enter Pier T at the Port of Long Beach Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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Ads: Tuesday prior to publication.

Press releases: two weeks prior to publication. Email press releases to editor@lbbj.com.

The editorial calendar is available at lbbusinessjournal.com.

LONG BEACH BUSINESS JOURNAL

211 E. Ocean Blvd., Ste. 400  
Long Beach, CA 90802

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City Hall demolition to be completed in spring



Crews slowly demolish the old City Hall building in Downtown Long Beach Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

**BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter**

The demolition of Long Beach’s old City Hall is slated to be completed in spring 2022, according to city staff—two years later than originally projected Plenary-Edgemoor Civic Partners new Civic Center.

Under the original agreement, the demolition of the old building was slated for nine months after city and port staff moved into their new digs across the street. The new City Hall and port headquarters officially opened on July 29, 2019, (one month later than originally anticipated) meaning the demolition should have been completed by May 2020.

“We should be further along,” Marilyn Surakus, project management bureau manager for Public Works, said, noting that materials are being meticulously sorted for proper disposal and recycling. “People underestimate how long that’s going to take.”

Money made from recycled materials

stays with the developer to offset the cost of disposing of hazardous materials, Surakus added.

Like all construction nationwide for the last 22 months, another cause for delay was the COVID-19 pandemic, Surakus said. If a crew member tests positive for the virus, the demolition site shuts down for 10 days, Surakus said.

“That definitely slows things down,” she said.

The demolition finally got underway earlier this year with asbestos abatement beginning in June. Since then, Signal Hill-based Environmental Construction Group’s crew of more than two dozen workers has gutted the building and begun working their way down removing each level, floor-by-floor.

The roof and penthouse have already been removed, Surakus said. Floors eight through 11 are slated to be removed in January, followed by floors one through seven in February, along with portions of the basement and foundation. The basement and foundation will be fully demolished in March or April.

Soil remediation and shoring is slated to be completed in the spring, Surakus said.

The demolition was put on hold even



A rendering of the Mid-Block development as part of the Civic Center project. Rendering courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

DLBA to begin search for new president

**BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor**

The Downtown Long Beach Alliance is set to begin its search for a new president.

The organization’s Board of Directors voted during its Dec. 15 meeting to create a nine-member search committee that will be tasked with finding a replacement for longtime president and CEO Kraig Kojian, who, according to the DLBA, “agreed to part ways” with the organization last month after 25 years. His departure came amid a DLBA-led investigation into Kojian for alleged mistreatment of employees.

The search committee will include Bixby Knolls Improvement Association Executive Director Blair Cohn, Studio One Eleven Senior Principal Alan Pullman, Long Beach Assistant City Manager Linda Tatum, Waterford Property Company Co-Founder Sean Rawson, Downtown resident and Executive Committee Member Denise Carter, Linc Housing President and Chief Operating Officer Suny Lay Chang, Pacific Ocean Management/Shoreline Village Enterprises General Manager Debra Fixen, Lee & Associates Senior Associate Graham Gill and Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Steve Goodling.

Pullman, who was the immediate past chair of the DLBA’s Executive Committee, and Fixen, who is the incoming chair of the same group, will serve as co-chairs for the search committee.

Loara Cadavona, chair of the DLBA’s Executive Committee, said during the meeting that the composition of the search committee was decided with the help of human resources consultants, who recommended an odd number of members—and no more than nine, “and that really allows us to be nimble in our process,” she said.

“It’s really important that the membership reflects the organization,” Cadavona said of the search committee, which includes “being diverse in many different ways—area of expertise, in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, the breadth of experience they have in executive searches, etc.”

Now that the board has approved the committee, the real work of finding a new leader for the nonprofit, which supports Downtown Long Beach businesses and manages two business improvement districts in the neighborhood, begins.

Cadavona said it’s still unclear whether the DLBA will hire a recruiter.

“We’re going to be looking at what budget might be available to put towards

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# DLBA rolls out One Downtown initiative to unify the area

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

A new initiative recently unveiled by the Downtown Long Beach Alliance is pushing for an “all for one and one for all” mentality for property owners, businesses and residents of the Downtown community.

Dubbed “One Downtown,” the initiative is a roadmap for the area’s economic recovery that aims to benefit all stakeholders, according to the announcement. The 150-block area includes 33,000 people in six neighborhoods.

“As a leading advocate and services provider for our Downtown, DLBA is well positioned to help the community recover from one of the most challenging periods in our history,” COO Broc Coward said in a statement. “After more than a year of uncertainty, loss and isolation unlike any other period, One Downtown is an ambitious effort that highlights our community and represents inclusivity and culture.”

One Downtown builds on the organization’s effort to support businesses since the COVID-19 pandemic began, which included 15 initiatives totaling more than \$400,000 in grants, funds and programs for local businesses and independent contractors.

The initiative features several programs that are to be rolled out over the next 12 to 18 months. The first phase is already underway, with more than 100 street pole banners installed throughout the area with new messaging: “My Downtown,” “Your Downtown” and “Our Downtown.”

“It reflects the idea that Downtown means different things to different people but there is a shared connection,” the organization said in the announcement earlier this month.

In the coming months, the DLBA will feature businesses through signal wraps and a second round of street pole banners.



The Downtown Long Beach Alliance recently put up new banners around the area. Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

The campaign includes promotions and messaging through outdoor media, the internet and print materials.

The initiative includes several other programs:

- Grants for entrepreneurs of color, women-owned businesses, retail pop-ups and support for other businesses such as restaurants requesting permanent parklets.
- Shopping and dining guides.
- “Meet Your Neighbor,” a video series designed to connect business

owners with Downtown residents.

- “My Downtown,” a social media video series to showcase the daily routines of “various stakeholders enjoying Downtown destinations and businesses.”
- “One Kind Act,” a program to highlight giving in Downtown by building awareness of those who make a difference in the community. DLBA Safety ambassadors also will distribute gift cards at random on the street to encourage giving and

showcasing local businesses.

One Downtown aligns with the DLBA’s recently updated strategic plan, the organization said. The update outlines the organization’s goals to strengthen existing businesses and encourage entrepreneurship while showcasing the area’s merchants.

“The updated DLBA Strategic Plan is foundational,” Coward said. “[It] serves as a guide for One Downtown and it sets the stage for the upcoming renewal of the [business district] in 2022.” ■

## Demolition

Continued from page 3

after city staff moved into the new building, Surakus said, because plans for mixed-use on the site had not been approved. The 580-unit development gained preliminary approval from the Long Beach Planning Commission in March 2020 but within months, the contractor—Irving, Texas-based JPI Development—pulled out of the project.

“When this agreement all started in 2013, it was anticipated that we would have a developer and they’d just be ... super eager to start building,” Surakus said of the city’s public-private partnership with Plenary-Edgemoor Civic Partners for the development of the Civic Center. “Unfortunately, that was not the case.”

The site sat, fenced and deserted, for months. However, due to theft

of materials such as copper pipes and vandalism, the city decided the demolition had to get underway, contractor or not, Surakus said.

Jeffrey Fullerton, senior vice president of real estate development for Plenary Group, said the plan is to begin construction of the previously approved project shortly after the demolition of the old City Hall is completed. Fullerton did not, however, provide a timeline for the project or comment on the search for a new contractor.

Surakus, for her part, said the city and Plenary-Edgemoor are “circling in” on an agreement with a contractor, adding that she does not think the project is “going to be in limbo for much longer.”

Once construction begins, projects of the scope approved by the Planning Commission typically take about two years to complete, Deputy Director of Long Beach Development Services



Crews work to complete the new Lincoln Park Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. The park is slated to open in early 2022. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Christopher Koontz previously told the Business Journal.

The grand opening of the new Lincoln Park, also part of the Civic Center project, is slated for February,

Surakus said. Under the original timeline, the park was expected to open in November 2020 after the demolition of the old Main Branch Library. ■



Construction is underway on the Ammatoli restaurant expansion on the corner of Third Street and Long Beach Boulevard. Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## Downtown’s Ammatoli expands into former BurgerIM storefront

BY MATT MILLER / Columnist

I would like to take credit for this big news because I honestly believed that I willed this expansion to happen. The big news is: The sign at the corner of Long Beach Boulevard and Third Street that was branded BurgerIM now reads Ammatoli.

That’s right: Downtown’s favorite mid-block Mediterranean restaurant is expanding to include the coveted corner location as well where, sources say, they will be able to bake their own pita bread.

Signage is up and work inside is underway. According to a spokesperson, the new addition will expand the dining area to double its seating capacity. The kitchen will also be expanded and will enable the restaurant to produce new bakery and menu items, including house-made pita.

And this is very good news, because if you’ve never had freshly made flatbread of this sort, then you haven’t lived a full and complete life.

Now, let me explain how I did this: One afternoon quite some time ago, I walked over to Ammatoli on Third Street for lunch. It was a simple affair, and I sat and happily admired the interior of Edison bulbs illuminating the greenery that hung from the ceiling of the dining room in a quiet tranquility. It was a perfect late lunch, I thought—sometime between 2 and 4 p.m. And after a simple falafel and an order of baba ghanouj, I was smitten. Truly smitten.

The entire day, and following day,

all I could think about were kebabs, shawarma, creamy labneh drizzled in olive oil, and pickled turnips—those deep-toned and crisp fuchsia bites on the side of the plate so tangy and bright that I wanted to rush home, grab life by the brine, and attempt to make them myself for my midnight craving.

New restaurants were just beginning to open around The Promenade, and I was excited about the options, but rather than go to the next new spot on my list a couple of days later, I went back to Ammatoli. But this time it was during some sort of strange window between noon and 1 p.m. when people seemed to come out of nowhere to eat at the restaurant I had discovered only days before. How could the word have gotten out so fast? There wasn’t a table in the house or on the sidewalk to be had, so I sulked over to BurgerIM next door, which, let me just say succinctly, was bad.

And right there, while I waited for my refund for my burger, I wished that Ammatoli would expand into the BurgerIM space so I would never again be put in a position where I had to go somewhere else just because they had no seats left.

So you see, I had made a pure wish to make Ammatoli big, like a small boy making a wish at an unplugged Zoltar. And just as that boy’s wish came true, so did mine.

... You’re welcome.

*Ammatoli is at 285 E. Third St. (and soon, 295 E. Third St. too), Long Beach. 562-435-0808. ■*

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Leslie Lay and Andrew H. Carroll stand in front of the pop-up of MADE in Long Beach Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## MADE by Millworks to fully reopen in 2022 under new name

BY CHEANTAY JENSEN / Reporter

After pivoting to an online store model in 2020, MADE by Millworks, a gift boutique and gallery space on Historic Pine Avenue, will once again have a permanent brick-and-mortar to call home.

They're not moving far. Next door, actually, to what used to be the Starbucks on 242 Pine Ave. They're undergoing renovations and will reopen in early 2022 under a new name, which hasn't been settled on yet.

"We're still kind of finalizing all the details," General Manager Andrew H. Carroll said. "But it's going to be figuratively and literally connected to MADE and Elinor."

All this means is that this new MADE will operate as it always has. It's still selling all the handcrafted goods made by local and regional DIY artisans. Its in-store, rotating gallery concept stays, too. And even the women-owned beer and wine drinkery, Elinor, which is operated by MADE, will reopen, too.

Part of the forthcoming build-out will include a corridor connecting the new storefront to the drinkery, which will still be stocking only beer, wine, cider, and other drinks made locally or produced by women. And if you're wondering about live music and open mic nights, yes, that'll still be there, too. All that's changed is the location.

The former Starbucks MADE is leasing is about a quarter of the space the original MADE storefront had on 240 Pine Ave.

Some shoppers got a sneak peek in a holiday pop-up that ran through Christmas Eve. Folks found all the familiar merchandise patrons had appreciated before: handmade jewelry and candles, well-crafted bath and body products, clothing, accessories, greeting cards, prints and apothecary items.

Long-time local vendors like POW! WOW! Long Beach, Bike Local, We Love Long Beach and Irwin Bazaar, among many others, are still partnered with the shop, in addition to new vendors, such as jewelry maker Muxer (pronounced "moo-her"). Currently MADE boasts contracts with over 100 local vendors and artists.

To the immediate left of the building's entrance is a modest gallery wall on which hangs its current exhibition "Salon du MADE."

"It's a mix of old and new work from artists we have worked with over the years," Carroll explained.

Dave Van Patten's "Map of Long Beach" is featured, alongside works by Dave Clark, Big Toe, Moze, Sparc (whose mural adorns the storefront's facade), and five others.

But all this talk of what's changing—and mostly not changing—begets the questions of why this is all happening in

the first place.

When MADE by Millworks closed, like most businesses, at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, it pivoted to an online store until Sept. 2020, when it opened a three-month-long pop-up at its brick-and-mortar for the holidays. Amid a second major surge of coronavirus infections that same December, MADE felt it best to pivot back to an online store for 2021.

"In January 2021, it was admittedly a

little scary to be open with the surge and we saw partnering with Antioch [Church] as the best way to serve our community because they were doing some good and we wouldn't be a place where COVID could spread," Carroll said.

At present, Antioch Church is subletting the original MADE by Millworks storefront as its new hub and location center for its Joy in the City Giveaway program. Antioch launched the program at its church around the holidays in 2020 in response to the hardships Long Beach families were experiencing during the pandemic.

Over 2,000 people were given \$150,000 worth of furniture, kitchenware, toys, baby items, hygiene products, household items and other necessities during the three-hour giveaway last year, which saw lines wrapped around blocks from its church on 350 Pine Ave. Antioch sought to continue the program year-round, but the problem was the church is undergoing major renovations.

In 2018, MADE's CEO Michelle Molina sold Antioch the building on 350 Pine Ave., which had once been a premiere music venue known as the Vault 350. Now the church is working to transform the space into both a place of worship and a venue with plans to host plays, weddings, business events and more. It was a match "made in heaven," Molina told the Post in 2018.

With Antioch's church only a block away from MADE's original storefront of 240 Pine, the partnership with MADE seemed ideal.

The yet-unnamed new MADE is slated to reopen after renovations in early 2022, according to Carroll. ■



Andrew H. Carroll and Leslie Lay walk by the art gallery after adjusting the frames on the wall while at the pop-up of MADE in Long Beach Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## DLBA Search

*Continued from page 3*

hiring a recruiter," she said, "and so that's one of the first kind of decisions the search committee is going to make. Ideally, it would be great to have a recruiter, but we want to see what dollars would be available to spend."

Another task for the search committee will include "building up an executive

profile" that will include the desired characteristics in a new president. The panel will likely hold a listening session in the process of creating that profile, Cadavona said.

As far as the timeline is concerned, Cadavona said that her understanding is that "at this level of recruitment, we should expect around a six-month period of time. It could be less, it could be more, but roughly six months."

While she acknowledged the weight of

choosing a new president, Cadavona said she was nonetheless glad to be moving forward.

"I know we've got a lot of work ahead of us," she said, "but it is just going to be really exciting to get this committee up and going after the first of the year."

Michael Berman, a spokesman for the DLBA, reiterated that message in a phone interview. Berman pointed to the organization's strong financial footing, a new strategic plan and ongoing programs to

support businesses through the economic recovery, like the new "One Downtown" initiative that's offering grants, event sponsorships, beautification efforts and more.

"We have a really strong foundation," Berman said. "Yes, there's going to be a change in leadership, obviously, but we have a strong foundation in place, and I think the takeaway at this point is that we believe the best is yet to come for the DLBA." ■

# Long Beach Symphony is proud to present Violins of Hope

Coming to Long Beach for two engagements only --  
Saturday, January 8th at 8pm, and Sunday, January 9th at 3pm.



Join the Long Beach Symphony as they present Violins of Hope: Instruments of the Holocaust, a priceless collection of Holocaust surviving instruments painstakingly restored and documented by Israeli luthier Amnon Weinstein and his son Avshalom. This world-famous collection has been featured in Rome, London, Monaco, Berlin, Madrid, Jerusalem, Washington D.C. and more. Now coming to Long Beach, you too can experience the sounds and incredible stories of these rare instruments, each a testament to the resilience and power of the human spirit. Feel the stirring emotion as the voices and spirits of those silenced by the Holocaust bring their messages of hope and harmony to the Beverly O'Neill Performing Arts Center for two days only.

As part of the collection's world tour, Violins of Hope will take center stage for a stunning, one-night-only performance on Saturday, January 8th at 8pm at the Terrace Theater in the Beverly O'Neill Performing Arts Center.

Programming features Israeli virtuoso Niv Ashkenazi, Long Beach Symphony Principal Cello, Cécilia Tsan, mezzo Teresa Buchholz, soprano Liv Redpath, tenor Jason Francisco and baritone Mark Walters joined by the Long Beach Camerata Singers. Repertoire includes John Williams "Hatikvah" (Israel's National Anthem) from the film Munich, his moving Theme from Schindler's List and Max Bruch's Kol Nidre. The finale is none other than Mozart's compelling and emotionally stirring masterpiece, Requiem in D minor.

Finally, on Sunday, January 9th at 3pm, Songs and Stories of Hope will present an intimate mixed-media chamber concert at The Beverly O'Neill Theater. Featuring Dr. James A. Grymes, author of the book Violins of Hope, Israeli violinist Niv Ashkenazi, mezzo Teresa Buchholz, and Violins of Hope founder Avshalom Weinstein accompanied by the musicians of the Long Beach Symphony. Featuring Barber's Adagio and Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins, this

powerful presentation will delve into the gripping backstories of the instruments while presenting a concert of striking string quartets, impassioned song cycles and rarely heard pieces by Jewish composers who both survived and perished at the hand of the Nazis.

A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, each instrument in this collection stands as a memorial to those who perished and a testament to those who survived. Amnon Weinstein, founder of the Violins of Hope, has spent two decades searching for violins that were played by Jews in the camps and ghettos, painstakingly piecing them back together so they could be brought to life again on the concert stage. He is driven by a passion to reclaim his own heritage, having lost over 400 relatives in the Holocaust. On January 8 & 9, twenty-one instruments from this incredible collection will be on display and embedded in your Symphony orchestra.

"The violin has formed an important aspect of Jewish culture for centuries, both as a popular instrument with Jewish classical musicians and as a central part of social life, as in the Klezmer tradition. But during the Holocaust, the violin assumed extraordinary roles within the Jewish community. For some musicians, the instrument was a liberator; for others, it was a savior that spared their lives. For many, the violin provided comfort in mankind's darkest hour, and, in at least one case, a violin helped avenge murdered family members. Above all, the violins of the Holocaust represented strength and optimism for the future." — Violins of Hope, James A. Grymes

Tickets for these two amazing events and for the Long Beach Symphony's Pops and Classical Series are available at LongBeachSymphony.org or by calling 562-436-3203.





Display at the entrance of ComplexCon at the Long Beach Convention Center Saturday, Nov. 6, 2021. Photo by Sebastian Echeverry.

## Convention bookings to lead Long Beach’s tourism rebound in 2022

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Hospitality and tourism is the backbone of the Long Beach economy, with overnight visitors generating an estimated \$300 million during a normal year of conventions, events and attractions, according to the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. The last two years, however, have been anything but normal, and the sector has been clawing its way back—with notable success, according to CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling.

In 2019, the last full year of conventions before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city hosted 38 conventions with a total of 123,204 room nights, according to CVB data. Already for 2022, the city has 31 conventions on the books, for a total of 94,513 room nights.

While conventions may appear to be tracking behind pre-pandemic levels, Goodling noted that 15% of the city’s convention business is often booked during the year the event will take place, meaning more conventions and upward of 30,000 room nights could likely still be booked for 2022, superseding pre-pandemic figures. (All this without the Jehovah’s Witnesses convention, the city’s largest with 14,000 room nights. The organization canceled all its events worldwide.)

The key to the CVB’s success in ramping conventions back up was the fact that the Long Beach organization was one of the first convention and visitors bureaus to get back on the market, selling

the city to prospective conventioners, according to Goodling. The group first hit the road in September.

Over multiple trips, the CVB sales team was able to muster up dozens of requests for proposals with the potential to generate over 160,000 room nights for the city, Goodling said.

“If we hadn’t been out, we wouldn’t have had that number of leads,” Goodling said.

“I was at the sales mission in Washington, D.C.,” Charlie Beirne, general manager of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, said. “They were pumped to see us.”

The CVB was able to save 30% of canceled conventions from the past 18 months and move them to future years, Goodling said. Because of this and the sales team’s push, the organization is 65% ahead of pace for convention bookings for 2024, 134% ahead for 2025 and 146% ahead for 2026.

While conventions are picking back up in the coming years, the Convention Center had to rely heavily on another revenue stream in 2021: migrant children. For months, the facility housed hundreds of migrant children who crossed into the U.S. at the southern border. The government contract was for \$35 million.

The contract with the federal government to house migrant children also ultimately benefited Downtown hotels, Goodling said.

“In the beginning, we were told there was no expectation of overnight

accommodations needed for those workers because they’d all be local,” Goodling said. “Then, three days out from the arrival of the children, we were getting calls for 600 to 800 rooms per night.”

The room necessities allowed the Hyatt Regency, the city’s largest hotel, to reopen earlier than anticipated, Goodling said. The Hyatt, which relies on conventions for occupancy (it is attached to the Convention Center) suffered massive losses amid the pandemic.

Hyatt General Manager Sid Ramani declined to comment for this story. “[The migrant center] helped us in being able to open up the Convention Center,” Goodling said. “It helped us in being able to open up the Hyatt. It helped us in being able to create occupancy. It helped us in being able to create visitors to go into restaurants.”

“It kind of jump-started our tourism economy.”

The shelter for migrant children closed in late July, just in time for the facility to host its first convention in 16 months in early August. The few conventions that have taken place this year have exceeded expectations, Biernie said. The recent Complex Con, an annual pop culture, music, food and activism event, was expected to draw about 16,000 attendees but ended up with closer to 40,000—still below 2019, but a promising sign of people’s urge to get back to conventions.

Shows also are performing well, Biernes said, noting eight sold out shows—3,000 people per night—at the

Terrace Theater for comedians Bill Burr, John Mulaney and Louis C.K.

With the saving graces of federal money and overperformance, the Convention Center was able to close out the year without any losses, Biernie said, adding that the year was flat. But the facility has not rebounded in terms of staffing, he said. Prior to the pandemic, the facility had about 140 full-time employees. That number plummeted to about 15 at the height of the public health crisis and has grown now to about 50, according to Biernie.

Beyond full-time staff, Biernie said he is having difficulty staffing events. At one December charity event, Biernie hoped to have 95 servers for 95 tables but ended up with only 65.

“They were hustling,” Biernie said of the small staff. “Getting part-time help, even culinary—it’s tough.”

The Convention Center is not the only facility struggling to staff up. Area restaurants, which play a major role in the city’s tourism economy, continue to be short-staffed, according to Long Beach Restaurant Association President Ciaran Gough, co-owner of The 908 at Long Beach Exchange in East Long Beach.

Front of house positions—bartenders and servers—have been easier to fill than dishwashers and cooks, Gough said. Some people decided to leave the restaurant industry amid the pandemic, according to Gough, who said many have not returned, and some never

*Continued on page 10*

## Carnival introduces its revamped ship, Radiance, in Long Beach

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Carnival celebrated the debut of the newest addition to its fleet in Long Beach earlier this month with none other than Lucille O’Neal, mother of NBA legend Shaquille O’Neal.

O’Neal was named the godmother of the Carnival Radiance and, in keeping with tradition, was on hand for the naming ceremony of the latest addition to Carnival’s Long Beach fleet on Dec. 12.

A longstanding naval tradition, all cruise ships have a godmother to bring “good luck and protection to the vessel,” according to Cruise Critic. O’Neal had the honor of pouring Champagne over a traditional ship’s bell, during the christening ceremony.

“It has been such a pleasure to be included in these exciting festivities, so I can only imagine how incredible it will be for guests to sail aboard this spectacular ship,” O’Neal said. “They’re going to love it.”

The Radiance previously sailed as the Victory and first took to the sea in 1998. In 2018, Carnival announced it would give the vessel a complete makeover to the tune of \$200 million.

The average cost of building new cruise ships has skyrocketed since the 1990s, according to data from cruise vacation booking site Gangwaze. Today, the average cost of a new cruise liner is upward of \$800 million, with the largest and most expensive ships costing as much as \$1.5 billion, according to Cruise Deals Expert.

“Carnival Victory was the perfect candidate to add to the Sunshine-class ships as she was the sister ship to Carnival Triumph which was converted to Carnival Sunrise in 2019,” spokeswoman Chelsea Stromfeld said in an email. “Taking a vessel in her mid-life years and adding many popular Carnival-branded venues has proven to be successful [and it] increases the lifespan of the vessel.”

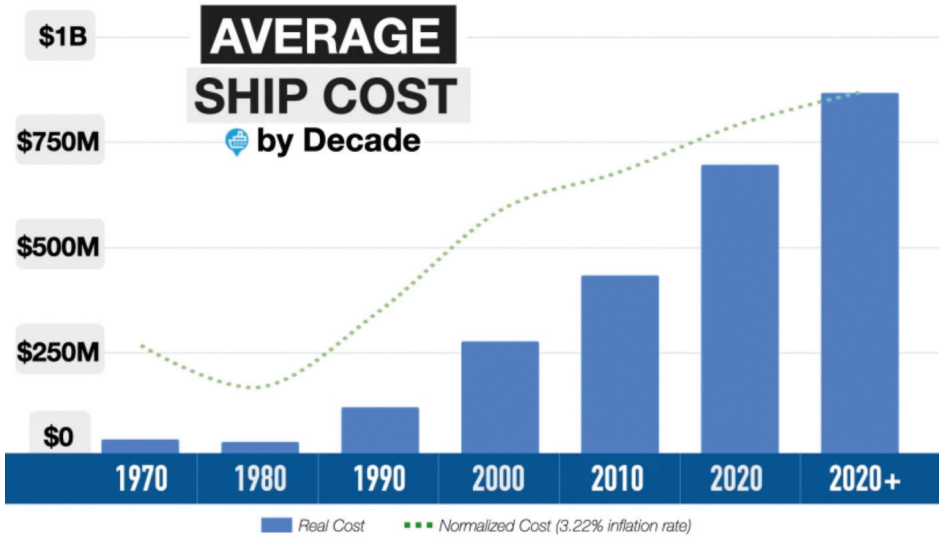


Chart courtesy of Gangwaze.



The recently renovated Carnival Radiance. Photo courtesy of Carnival.

The freshly renovated Radiance has a guest capacity of just under 3,000 and features many attractions, including a comedy club, musical performances, a spa, a casino, waterslides, a ropes course and Seuss at Sea, a Dr. Seuss-themed attraction for kids that includes breakfast with characters, a character parade, an interactive story time and arts and crafts.

For foodies, Radiance features numerous restaurants and bars. The ship is home to Carnival Chief Fun Officer Shaquille O’Neal’s chicken joint, Big Chicken, which offers chicken biscuits for breakfast as well as chicken strips and sandwiches. Together, the mother-son duo cut the ribbon marking the

official opening of the eatery ahead of the christening ceremony.

The first Big Chicken restaurant made its debut aboard Carnival’s Mardi Gras earlier this year.

Guy Fieri also has a restaurant aboard: Guy’s Pig & Anchor Bar-B-Que Smokehouse.

Other restaurants and bars include Heroes Tribute Bar in honor of U.S. soldiers, family-style Italian restaurant Cucina del Capitano, Bonsai Sushi and Caribbean-inspired RedFrog Pub.

“Carnival Radiance features all of Carnival’s fan favorites and more, so we are beyond excited to finally welcome her to the West Coast and to our fleet,” Carnival President Christine Duffy said during the ceremony.

The Radiance sails three-day Ensenada and four-day Catalina Island and Ensenada cruises. The ship joins the Panorama, which sails a seven-day Mexican Riviera route, and Miracle, which sails four-day Catalina Island and Ensenada, five-day Baja Mexico and 14-day Hawaii cruises.

During the naming ceremony, Duffy presented the elder O’Neal with a \$25,000 donation to the Odessa Chambliss Quality of Life Fund, a charity in honor of Lucille O’Neal’s mother, who was a nurse. The fund provides financial aid to nursing and education students.

Carnival moved from San Pedro to Long Beach in 2003 after constructing a \$40 million cruise terminal and has been a major economic driver for the city ever since.

“Long Beach allows us to offer unique itineraries attracting guests from all over the country and is easily accessible to guests coming from California, Nevada, Arizona, Oregon, Utah, and New Mexico,” Stromfeld said.

Through the years, Carnival’s presence in the city has fluctuated based on demand. Prior to the pandemic, Carnival had four ships operating out of Long Beach, including the Panorama and Miracle. The Inspiration and Imagination were sold for scrap in 2020.

Carnival took a massive financial hit during the pandemic, reporting billions of dollars in losses. After being anchored for 17 months, Carnival resumed cruises out of Long Beach in late August.

Long Beach is one of the largest of Carnival’s 14 U.S. hubs. Comparable operations include Galveston also with three ships, Port Canaveral with four ships on a seasonal basis and Miami with five ships, according to Stromfeld.

While the city has been home to more ships at once in the past, Stromfeld said this is the first time the city has hosted three ships as large as the Panorama, Miracle and Radiance at the same time.

“We monitor how all of our markets respond to our deployment plans and are constantly looking for changes to optimize and expand our programs when possible,” Stromfeld said. “We do not expect any change to our Long Beach offerings in the immediate future.” ■



Airport officials expect continued rebound in 2022 with new facilities opening

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

All things considered, Long Beach Airport is closing out 2021 better than expected—and officials say they’re looking forward to increased passenger volumes in the new year.

Passenger traffic bottomed out in April 2020 when travel was virtually nonexistent. Since then, the small municipal airport has rebounded slowly and will close out the year with just over 1 million boarding passengers—slightly lower than projections made at the start of the year, according to Operations and Facilities Bureau Manager Ron Reeves.

“It’s understandable with the delta variant and all of that,” Reeves said, noting that officials could not have predicted two new variants and continued strain from the pandemic.

For comparison, prior to the pandemic, the airport would record around 2 million boarding passengers, Reeves said.

Looking ahead to 2022, Reeves said staff is projecting about 1.5 million boarding passengers. While still below the previous norm, Reeves noted that the projection is a conservative estimate, adding that recent Thanksgiving and Christmas travel numbers give him reason to believe the airport could exceed expectations next year.

“Personally, I wouldn’t be surprised,” Reeves said. “There is pent-up demand—[people] are over this. Folks are ready to move again.”

November marked the start of Southwest, the airport’s leading carrier, utilizing all of its 35 flight slots six days a week. Under the facility’s noise ordinance,



Passengers line up outside Long Beach Aiport’s historic terminal to check in for their early morning flights Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

the airport is limited to 53 flights per day. Southwest took over slots following JetBlue’s departure from the city.

As expected, the increased number of flights boosted passenger traffic, Reeves said.

During the week of Thanksgiving, 32,000 people boarded flights at the airport. The passenger volume was within 10% of 2019 figures for the same week, Reeves said. For the week of Christmas, about 33,000 people boarded flights, which would be close to 98% of 2019’s passenger traffic for the same week.

Passenger fees account for two-thirds of the airport’s revenue, Reeves said. Lost revenues, even though offset in part by federal relief packages, threw a cloud of uncertainty over pending upgrades to

baggage buildings is well underway, with the facilities expected to open to travelers in the spring, Reeves said. However, the remaining projects are in limbo, and the timeline has been uncertain since the onset of the pandemic.

With passenger numbers ticking up and federal assistance, the airport is moving forward with the construction of the new baggage claim area, Reeves said. Just north of the historic terminal, the existing building has already been demolished. Construction will start early next year and is expected to be completed before the end of 2022.

The baggage claim project is budgeted at \$15 million. Funding for the project received a boost with the passage of the federal infrastructure bill signed by President Joe Biden earlier this year. The bill included \$294 million for California airports, with over \$6 million allocated to Long Beach.

Airport staff are constantly reevaluating the facility’s financials to determine when the remaining projects could get underway, Reeves said. For now, there is no timeline for those projects but the books are looking good and staff is reviewing plans for the meet-and-greet plaza as the next project.

“We’re really looking forward to the future,” Reeves said, adding that he hopes to be back up to pre-pandemic levels no later than 2023, if not late 2022. “The first impression of [the city] that many people have is Long Beach Airport. Having these new facilities online and we’re looking forward to being able to serve our passengers in a way that we are proud of.” ■

Convention Bookings

Continued from page 8

will. Additionally, it has become an employees market, allowing new staff to “try out” a position to see if they like it.

“Somebody shows up for a day or two, they go on break and they don’t come back,” Gough said. “That’s what happens commonly. They’ll [get] a job somewhere else because there’s a lot of opportunity out there.”

Throughout the pandemic, Gough said operators have had to roll up their sleeves and pitch in more around the restaurant while understaffed, including working on their days off. The goal was to maintain a consistent customer experience, Gough said.

The staffing challenges have led to considerable wage increases for restaurant staff, Gough said, noting that all area restaurants are competing for the same depleted labor pool. Adding to the financial stress of restaurateurs is the California minimum wage hike that takes effect on Jan. 1, he said—\$15 per hour for businesses with 26 or more employees and \$14 per hour for those with 25 or fewer.

Supply chain issues also have caused shortages for certain food items, much to the chagrin of restaurant owners,

Gough said.

“I’ve made decisions to take things that I would never have accepted before,” Gough said. “We’re taking substitutions that are slightly different—lobster, beef. We’ve been playing this whole game of, ‘What do I need to change this week?’”

When certain items are not obtainable, Gough said most restaurateurs opt for more expensive options that are similar, rather than downgrading the customer experience. That move eats into the eatery’s profitability, he said. Certain alcohols, including older scotches, also are hard to come by nowadays, Gough added.

Another challenge for restaurateurs is inconsistent sales, Gough said. Every new variant, along with the ever-shifting requirements like mask mandates, causes hiccups for the industry, he said. But, of course, it could always be worse.

“Every restaurant is thankful to be open,” Gough said, adding that he is hopeful for a stronger 2022. “The industry has always had its ups and downs. It’s pretty resilient. You just have to be flexible and make the best decisions that you can and just kind of go with it.”

The Convention Center, for its part, is starting the new year strong with Animé Los Angeles 17. The event sold out its



A woman walks her dog past Hyatt Regency in Downtown Long Beach Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

exhibit space months ago and attendance is surpassing projections, Goodling said. The first half of 2022 looks “solid,” he added, with events like the Long Beach Comic Expo, Intersolar North America and the International Salon and Spa Expo.

Looking ahead, Goodling said he and his staff are excited for what’s to come. Most conventions book two

years in advance on average, and the organization is back up to its pre-pandemic number of leads, he said.

“A lot of destinations are still not up to this level yet,” Goodling said. “We’re averaging 85 to 90 leads per month. We’re excited to be back serving our customers and finding new customers.” ■

FROM THE EDITOR: How is the convention industry faring, and where does Long Beach fit in?

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

It’s no secret that conventions are big business in Long Beach. Hotels, restaurants and local shops all benefit from the influx of tourists that conventions bring to the city; the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau estimates that overnight visitors bring in \$300 million annually.

COVID-19, of course, brought the convention industry to a halt. But it seemed to me the Long Beach CVB was quick to pivot, offering virtual—and later, hybrid—events in lieu of the traditional face-to-face meetings.

I’ve been curious about putting the CVB’s response to the pandemic in context. So when Sherrif Karamat, president and CEO of the global Professional Convention Management Association, stopped by Long Beach last month, I took the opportunity to sit down with him and get his perspective on how COVID-19 has changed the convention business overall and how Long Beach is seen in the industry.

This interview has been edited for space considerations.

**HAYLEY MUNGUIA:** This is obviously an interesting time in a lot of industries, but events specifically. So can you speak about what types of pivots have had to happen during COVID and if you have a sense of what things will look like moving forward?

**SHERRIF KARAMAT:** To say our industry was upended is an understatement.

What we were focused on was one channel, and that channel was face-to-face, and we were not focused on any other channel. So if you want to use the “P word,” pivot, the reality is that we had to do things digitally. But why shouldn’t we do things digitally? We’re living in 2021. There’s no reason why we can’t communicate in different modes.

So let’s think back about the sporting industry. It used to be, in the sporting industry, for home games, there would be a blackout on television. They would black them out because they were trying to force you to go to the game. Well, it was having the reverse impact because people weren’t actually seeing the excitement and the pandemonium and all the stuff from the tailgate parties—they weren’t seeing it, and it wasn’t conjuring up the emotions. Instead, what used to happen is that attendance started to drift, and then they realized, “Oh, we’ve got this all backwards. We need to open this up, let people see what’s happening in the stadium and get them excited.”

We need to do that in our business. We need to stop being afraid of digital, and we need to use digital as a platform to drive face-to-face, because they will see what’s going on at these events and what good comes out of these events and that they want to be part of it. So embracing a different thinking and a different logic—we’ve got to realize, delivering an event, we’ve got to deliver it based on human beings and human business. We’ve got



Sherrif Karamat, president and CEO of the global Professional Convention Management Association, speaks to the Long Beach City Council. Photo courtesy of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau.

to base it on their needs, not on what we want to deliver.

**HM:** And I know that Long Beach specifically made a pivot to doing virtual and hybrid events, so I also wanted to get your sense of how common that’s becoming, and where Long Beach stands in the bigger picture of making that transition?

**SK:** There are a couple of things happening: Long Beach was certainly one of the pioneers. They led some of the thinking. They were trailblazers, I would say. What is good about Long Beach is that they are adaptable. They realized that there was going to be a massive shift towards digital, but there was going to be a leveling off as the pandemic is receding and becoming a little bit more endemic, if you will, so there’s a face-to-face reality that’s coming back on board. But what Long Beach has done is position itself towards what we talked about, the sporting analogy, making the options here where you can participate both physically and digitally, or what we call “phygitality,” so that will allow for greater interest in Long Beach as it shows off its assets. So I see that’s how they have positioned themselves, where they are very adaptive to what is going to bring greatest value to the customer, and that’s No. 1.

No. 2, I think what Long Beach has done, which is really different as a city, is understand that performance is not best in four square walls. If you’ve ever gone over to [the Long Beach Convention Center], it’s an inspiration in itself, right? It’s eclectic. It’s interesting. It’s about humans. It’s not about, “Let’s put four square walls and put some desks in and have somebody stand in front of you and talk to you.” It’s anything but. And what it does—it induces a feeling of immersiveness, roll up your sleeves, come together, solving issues. When I go there, I’m inspired.

**HM:** So do you think the Long Beach

model will become more of a standard moving forward?

**SK:** I think that what the Long Beach model says to me is that it’s never going to be a standard. It’s going to always evolve, because what Long Beach has done—they listened to their customers and evolved, and I think that’s what they continue to do. I think they’re going to stay a step ahead of the competition if they keep doing what they say they’re going to do, which it seems that they are. So I think there will be many copycats, but I do believe it’s going to be hard to copy because you have to have that embedded in your DNA, and the boutique-ness of this wonderful city is only going to be replicated in boutique cities, not in grandiose, big, 25-million-people cities. So I think you’ve got something fairly unique, but I also believe the thinking is very—it’s an ongoing thing. It’s not a point in time. So that’s where I say you will have a competitive advantage.

**HM:** So how are you feeling about the state of the events industry over the next year or two? Are you optimistic?

**SK:** I am optimistic for a number of reasons. I think there are plenty of challenges in our world, and I think when we bring people face-to-face, we get to solve a lot of complex problems, human-to-human. So I’m optimistic.

I do feel that there are some challenges and strong headwinds, though. We have an issue with talent. We have an issue with people coming into our industry and finding meaningful employment, and certain sectors of our industry have not been known to pay the highest wages. We have to change that, of course, but you know, if our suppliers in the industry like hotels and convention centers and restaurants are not finding people for work, it’s making it very difficult to keep up service levels, and we’re seeing that as

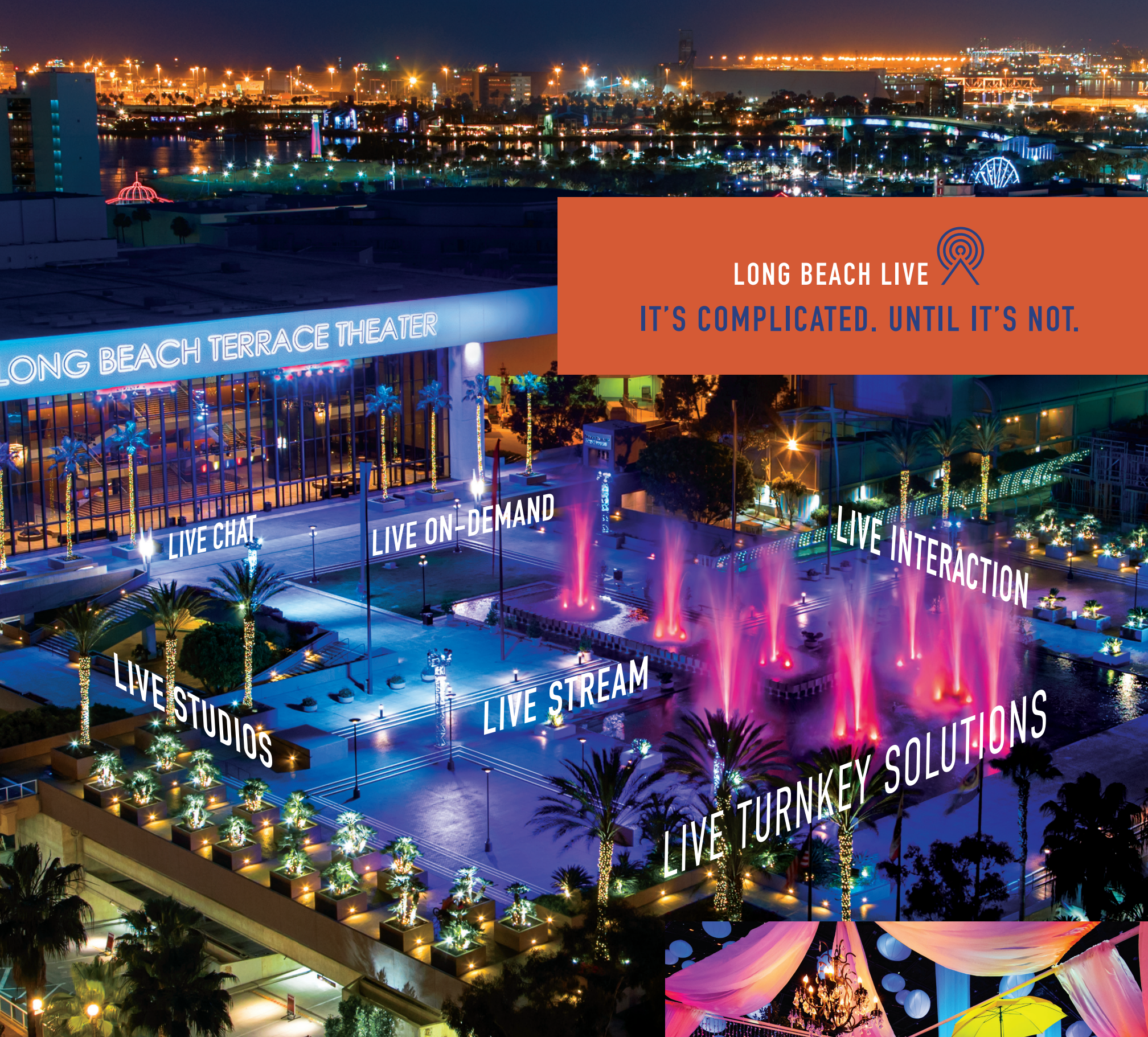
a challenge. So I’m concerned about talent in our industry and attracting talent.

Also, there’s the climate crisis. We’ve got to think about, fundamentally, the types of fuels we are using, the things that are big polluters, how we build buildings, the materials we use to build aircraft. What we’re trying to do is massively change human behavior instead of thinking, “How do we innovate and use our creativity?” If we can send people to the moon, we can start building products that you and I can use and not feel guilty about using. We’ve got to be more inventive in our thinking, so I feel that’s a headwind that reflects poorly in our industry when we get together. You know, [the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference] in Glasgow—as much as that’s addressing climate change, some people view just the gathering as an affront to climate change. I personally think that’s over the top, but until we start doing the things that are making meaningful change around climate change and be serious about addressing major pollutants, that’s a challenge our industry will face.

The thing that I’m really bullish and optimistic on, though, is the fact that the very thing that we fear, which is digital, is going to be actually our biggest, biggest friend. It actually will allow us to grow our business. I remember a gentleman, and I think it was in one of the Midwestern states, and he called his senators and said, “You have to get rid of this thing called the internet. It’s ruining my business.” And I think some of us put our head in the sand in the business events industry and are fearful of digital instead of, “This is your biggest friend you’ve ever, ever known. It’s your brand and marketing arm.” So I’m really bullish about that.

So, there are headwinds, but I’m really optimistic about the future. ■





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## Rocket Lab announces 3rd acquisition of the year



Rocket Lab's Electron rocket blasts off from the company's New Zealand facility for its "A Data With Destiny Mission." Photo courtesy of Rocket Lab.

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

For the third time this year, Long Beach-based spacecraft manufacturer and space launch services provider Rocket Lab announced the acquisition of another firm. The latest addition is Albuquerque-based SolAero Holdings, a supplier of space solar power products, the company announced earlier this month.

The \$80 million deal, which the company announced Dec. 13, is expected to close in the first quarter of next year.

"SolAero is a highly complementary addition to Rocket Lab's vertically integrated business model and strengthens our ability to streamline space for our customers by delivering complete space mission solutions," Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck said in the announcement. "SolAero has established itself as a premier provider of solar technologies, enabling

trailblazing missions that have expanded scientific horizons and advanced commercial space."

Earlier this month, Rocket Lab completed the acquisition of Planetary Systems Corporation. In October, the company announced the acquisition of ASI Aerospace.

Founded in 1998, SolAero's solar cells, solar panels and composite structural products have supported more than 1,000 space missions with 100% reliability, according to the announcement. The firm has been involved in several high-profile missions, including providing the power supply for NASA's Parker Solar Probe and Mars Insight Lander, the largest solar array ever deployed to the surface of the red planet.

SolAero also led the development and manufacturing of the solar panel on Ingenuity, the helicopter that flew on Mars earlier this year. The flight was the

*Continued on page 17*

## Port of Long Beach announces new data-sharing initiative

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Shippers, carriers, trucking companies, terminal and warehouse operators and all other supply chain stakeholders that work to move goods through the Port of Long Beach soon will have a new digital data-sharing platform, officials announced earlier this month.

Dubbed the "Supply Chain Information Highway," the initiative will see the development of a new platform that will allow stakeholders to integrate their already-existing systems to easily share information digitally throughout the supply chain, streamlining goods movement.

"One of the issues our stakeholders continue to raise is the lack of visibility and data sharing," Noel Hagegaba, deputy executive director of administration and operations, said during a Dec. 16 press briefing. "It seems the fragmented structure of the supply chain has also fragmented the flow of data."

The breakdown in data sharing has been an issue for years, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and an unnoticed rise in blank sailings—when a shipper cancels a port call or entire trip—shined a spotlight on the issues, Hagegaba said. The following rapid shift to record cargo then caught the supply chain off-guard, he said, despite there being more technology solutions than ever before.

"These solutions are not connected to enable the seamless transfer of data," Hagegaba said.

"Our goal here is to be

complementary, not reinvent the wheel," he added.

The port has contracted St. Louis-based technology firm Uncomn to develop the platform, which will be accessible to stakeholders for free, Executive Director Mario Cordero said. The port is paying Uncomn \$400,000 for development.

The tool will allow shippers large and small to track their cargo across the supply chain's numerous nodes, Hagegaba said. With over 200,000 shippers that use the port and already have their own systems in place, officials want to ensure the system is flexible, he added.

"This is not a one-size-fits-all solution or dashboard," Hagegaba said, saying each stakeholder's existing systems are like cars, while the port's initiative will act as a highway for the information to be transferred easily.

The platform will allow users to create their own dashboards and other digital tools tailored to their needs, Hagegaba said. With data flowing, stakeholders should be able to better plan their day-to-day operations by tracking, among other things, customs holds, container release and gate moves, to minimize delays.

Port officials expect a soft launch of the system in February. If successful in Long Beach, Hagegaba said there already are plans to scale up. The Port of Oakland has already agreed to join Long Beach in the initiative, Hagegaba said, adding that the hope is to expand to ports across the country.

Expansion of the system would require

*Continued on page 21*

## Long Beach unemployment remains above majority of LA County areas

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Long Beach unemployment continues to slowly improve but remains behind Los Angeles County and over 70% of the region's cities and unincorporated areas, according to data released earlier this month by the California Employment Development Department.

The city's unemployment rate dipped from 8.5% in October to 7.7% in November, according to the EDD. The county, meanwhile, decreased from 7.8% to 7.1%, which is among the highest in the state.

Of the 124 cities and unincorporated areas in LA County, 87 had a lower unemployment rate than Long Beach, while 33 had a higher rate, according to EDD data. Three areas—Montebello, South Gate and Walnut Park—have the same unemployment rate as Long Beach.

The city's standing among other areas has improved 1 percentage point from October, when it trailed behind just over 71% in terms of unemployment.

"Typically, Long Beach has a higher unemployment rate because we have relatively higher concentrations of employment in volatile service sectors including hospitality, entertainment and tourism," Long Beach Economic Development Department Director John Keisler said in an email. "These sectors have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic and concerns about public health."

Across the state, leisure and hospitality employment was up 86,000, according to the EDD. The sector accounts for 35% of the state's total year-over-year employment gains. Arts, entertainment and recreation increased

by 28,500 jobs.

Trade, transportation and utilities led the county's month-over-month nonfarm employment growth, adding 25,000 jobs. Holiday hiring in the retail trade accounted for 14,000 of those jobs, according to the EDD.

While the gains are impressive, they have yet to make up for the devastating number of losses throughout the pandemic.

"Steady employment growth continues but we're not adding the volume of jobs that would put a serious dent in what was lost to the pandemic," Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the UCR Center for Forecasting, said.

Other sectors, including manufacturing, information, other services and financial activities, lost a combined 2,900 jobs, according to the EDD.

Statewide unemployment fell from 7.3% to 6.9% month-over-month, according to the EDD.

"At this rate, it's unlikely we'll see a full job recovery in California in 2022," Osman said, "especially since each new outbreak of the virus is slowing the state's jobs growth."

Long Beach's elevated unemployment rate is a vast improvement from a peak of 19% in May 2020 but remains well above the 4.8% just before the onset of the pandemic.

The city's labor force—the number of people working or actively seeking employment—also has yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. As of November, the labor force was 238,500, up from 235,900 in October. The labor force reached 243,400 in February 2020 and bottomed out at 218,000 in May 2020. ■





Wrigley Coffee's Andrew Nishimoto stands behind his soon-to-be-frequented coffee counter of his new business in the Wrigley neighborhood in Long Beach on Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

# Social enterprise Wrigley Coffee to open at former Fox Coffee House

BY CRYSTAL NIEBLA / Reporter

Having worked with parents with insecure housing, Andrew Nishimoto said that many of them have had jobs that didn't allow them to excel. Fear of being fired for calling out when their child is sick, for instance, or having to work alone during late hours, are just a few factors that make it difficult to navigate the workplace.

To address that, Nishimoto wants to create a trauma-informed space for employees, especially for parents in transitional housing. And he's making it happen: Nishimoto is set to open Wrigley

Coffee, a place for social enterprise to go along with that caffeine fix.

"What we started to realize is while a lot of our families wanted to work and had the desire to be self-sustaining in that way, they didn't all have the necessary skills to do that," Nishimoto said.

Wrigley Coffee will be replacing the former Fox Coffee House at 437 W. Willow St. in the Wrigley neighborhood. He and his team have renovated the space and hope to open the cafe as early as January 2022.

While it's still going to sell coffee, Nishimoto's new coffee shop will be pleasantly disguised as a business

with job training, mentorship and case management. He already serves as the executive director of the Family Promise of the South Bay, an organization that helps homeless families achieve housing stability by providing short-term shelter, food and case management, so he plans to use his newly leased coffee shop as an extension of his work to address the bigger picture of homelessness.

"What if we took part in this and made a business so that they could get something serious, get money, and also a little confidence at the same time to get back on their feet?" said Riley Draghi, coffee program manager for

Wrigley Coffee.

Nishimoto said that he's getting referrals from a transitional housing location, and their case manager at Wrigley Coffee is currently working with those individuals. He did not disclose the location of the transitional housing structures to protect the privacy of those living there.

The customers, he said, probably won't be able to tell the difference between the baristas in the program and those permanently employed. While the program is scripted for 90 days, depending on the circumstance, it might become extended or shortened, he said. And every employee, whether permanent or temporary, will go through trauma-informed training, which means they will be trained to be more sensitive to others' traumas.

Wrigley Coffee will have a partnership with Grow with Google to implement digital literacy training as well as one with City Church of Long Beach that has allowed Nishimoto to stay rooted in Wrigley. He was drawn to the Wrigley neighborhood because of how involved residents are in the community.

"And so we thought, what better place to start something that's all about the community, than a place that already embraces that?" Nishimoto said.

As a way to keep community buzz going, Wrigley Coffee will be offering two temporary rental spaces. The larger one can accommodate for community meetings or small events. The smaller one will be more of a workspace room where students can reserve it for free, Draghi added.

While his teammates are still finalizing the coffee recipes, what's certain is that the coffee beans will be locally supplied by Solid Roasters Coffee, whose owner, Mark Tigchelaar, and two colleagues will be providing training to baristas at Wrigley Coffee for a few weeks. Beverages will be sold at craft prices, Nishimoto said.

"We're super excited and happy to help out," Tigchelaar said.

Nishimoto and his team are awaiting final permit approvals from the city. In the meantime, he's eager to open his doors.

To stay up-to-date on opening plans, hours and pricing, visit [wrigleycoffee.org](http://wrigleycoffee.org). ■

# A classic and familiar Bluff Park home hits the market at \$2.25 million

BY TIM GROBATY / Columnist

The home at 2303 E. Ocean Blvd., fresh on the market and listed at \$2.25 million, is one of those magnificent and venerable old houses that you've seen frequently on your travels along the coast in Bluff Park.

Guarded at the foot of the sidewalk leading to the entry by a brace of concrete lions, the house is in the Bluff Park Historic District, perched on the southeast corner of Kennebec Avenue and Ocean, just across the street from its architectural cousin, the Long Beach Museum of Art, formerly the Elizabeth Millbank Anderson House.

According to a history of the house written by Maureen Neeley of HouStories, the home was built in 1911 for David and Mary Shoop, a couple with strong ties and standing in their hometown of Wauscon, Ohio. They had the house built for a winter retreat, which was a common use for many of the early homes that would follow in what's now the Bluff Park Historic District.

Although the Shoops owned the home through 1934, they ceased visiting it after 1929, and it often stood vacant in their absence, or it was occupied by renters.

Another couple, William Book and his wife Clara, bought the home in 1934 when William retired from his work in Indiana and moved to Long Beach at a time when Midwesterners were coming to the coast in large numbers.

The Books improved the home, adding and upgrading bathrooms and building a master bedroom at the front of the house. Clara continued to hold onto the house after William died in 1940 and, though she moved out in 1942, she rented the house out to another series of residents until 1950.

The next few owners didn't do much to improve, or even preserve, the home for the next 25 years. It was in danger of being demolished until a couple, Realtor Michael Anderson and accountant Jerrell McElroy, bought the home in 1975 and transformed it into the extraordinarily beautiful showcase that it is now.

In restoring the home, the couple visited lumber yards and other sources for clear redwood that they used in beams, doors, cabinetry and walls throughout the house. The wood is absolutely flawless in quality, with its straight and uniform grain that is so perfect it almost seems fabricated.

"I have a friend in the construction business who said it would cost more than \$1 million to do that job today," said listing Realtor Jim Sallinger. "And

that's if you could even find wood this good these days."

In the entire 2,729-square-foot home, there are only two knotholes to be discovered in the wood, and once you stumble upon them, you can't unsee them. "They add character," jokes listing Realtor Jim Sallinger.

McElroy and Anderson did considerable additional work on the house, including jacking it up in order to rebuild its foundation and adding an upstairs master bedroom that runs the entire width of the house.

Their work made the house the showcase that it is today. The two died of AIDS or complications from AIDS: McElroy in 1991 at 52, and Anderson in 1993 at 42.

The home was bought by its most recent owners, Walter Wojack and Melinda Roney in 2004, and it was in good hands, with the owners being avid preservationists. Roney was involved in several preservationist organizations and was president of Long Beach Heritage from 2011 through 2014.

The home is being sold by the family trust, which includes Melinda's son John, who is visiting Long Beach from his home in Atlanta (along with his dog Reggie).

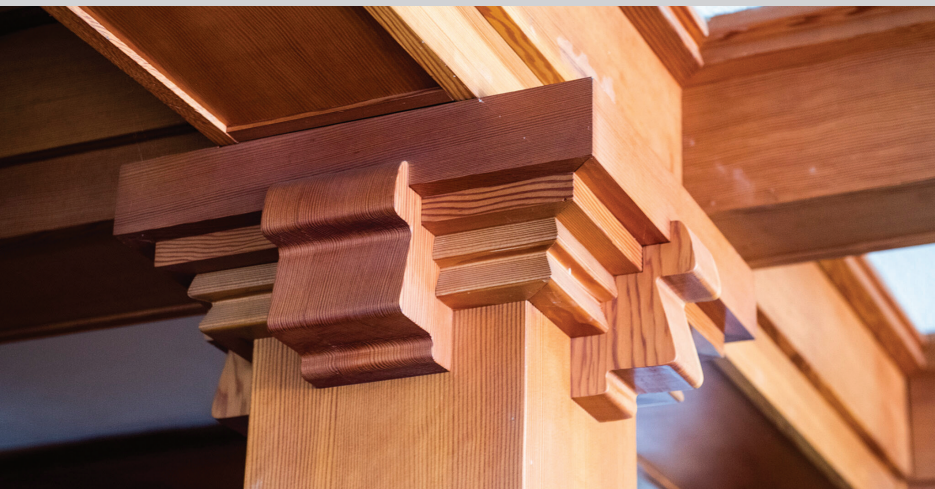
Although he didn't grow up in the house, John said he visited often: "This was the headquarters for all family get-togethers," he said. "There are a lot of great memories here. It broke my heart to see the for-sale sign go up."

The home's architects and constructors were Meyer & Holler, a team responsible for the current Long Beach Museum of Art, built one year after the 2303 Ocean Blvd. home. The team also did Hollywood's Grauman's Chinese Theater and Downtown Long Beach's Ocean Center Building and Walker's Department Store.

It is largely of Craftsman design, with a strong influence of Swiss Chalet style, much like the museum across the street.

It's full of the charming trappings that you find in the older fine homes: things like toe-kick drawers, hidden spaces accessed by pushing panels, little cubbies and a hidden wet bar in the pool room that includes a speakeasy window, allowing you to see who's outside on the entryway. It's likely the new owner will spend a lot of time discovering new (old) features throughout the home.

If you require more than the home's three bedrooms and four baths, there's still plenty of space behind the home to add on, and, because it won't be visible from the street, you might not need to adhere to the restrictions that come when you buy in a historic district. ■



From top to bottom: This 110-year-old Swiss Chalet-Craftsman-style home at the corner of Ocean Boulevard and Kennebec Avenue in Bluff Park is up for sale for \$2,249,900 in Long Beach, Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021.

The living room with warm tones of redwood in this 110-year-old Bluff Park home.

A detail of the woodwork inside the home at 2303 Ocean Blvd.

The game room near the rear of the house in the 110-year-old home in Bluff Park

Photos by Thomas R. Cordova.



Continued decline in enrollment will mean a tighter LBUSD budget next year

BY MIKE GUARDABASCIO / Reporter

Long Beach Unified School District officials see some dark clouds on the horizon for the district’s budget, according to the first interim financial report of the 2021-22 school year presented to the Board of Education earlier this month.

Continued declines in enrollment, as well as a drop in attendance rates, are causing the district to project a loss of \$54.3 million in revenue for the next school year, with ongoing challenges to come, according to Renee Arkus, the LBUSD’s executive director of fiscal services.

The district had expected some choppy waters in the current school year, but federal relief money, as well as a better-than-expected state budget, allayed those concerns. In the 2022-23 school year, however, the LBUSD expects its general fund revenues to drop by \$54.3 million, to \$729.8 million. The biggest causes for the drop are challenging numbers around enrollment and attendance.

“We’ve been experiencing a 2% decline annually in enrollment, but last year was over 3%, and this year is 2.65%,” Arkus said. “We are still experiencing large enrollment drops.”



A Long Beach Unified School District elementary school teacher shows a student what her classroom will look like in March of 2021. Photo courtesy of Alejandra A. Moses.

The district’s enrollment numbers have been slowly but steadily decreasing for a decade, with housing costs the most frequently cited cause. As costs rise, it’s harder for young families to purchase houses or afford rent in the city, lowering the number of school-aged children. This year’s enrollment is listed as 67,422, and the district projects a drop to 65,736 students next year.

The other challenging number is the attendance rate. The state did not count districts’ attendance rates as a funding factor last year due to COVID-19, but it has reinstated that part of its formula this year as campuses reopened. The LBUSD, like many districts statewide, has a lower attendance rate this year. “On average our district has been very good, with a 95-to-96% attendance

rate,” said Arkus. “The impact of the pandemic is upon us, and we’re seeing much lower attendance this year.”

The current attendance number of 91.81% presents a budgetary challenge, as well as an educational one. Arkus said each percentage point in attendance represents about \$7 million.

“That’s why we have hope that we can increase those numbers,” she said.

As revenue drops, the district is also anticipating rising costs over the next three years. Those increases are due to “expiration of one-time funds, increased health benefit costs, and increased retirement system contribution,” said Arkus. “We expect that some COVID-related expenses are likely to continue.”

With no additional stimulus or relief money on the horizon, those continued costs will have to be borne by the district’s general fund revenues.

Despite the warning signs in the district’s projected budget over the next three years, there’s still plenty of cushion. Former LBUSD Superintendent Chris Steinhauer began socking away money for a rainy day following the 2008 recession and subsequent LBUSD layoffs. He vowed not to let layoffs happen again.

Continued on page 21

Operation Jump Start offers support to first-generation college students

BY TESS KAZENOFF / Reporter

The college admissions process can be daunting for anyone, but for first-generation students, it can be even more overwhelming and complex. Between applying to schools (plus the fees that come with that), figuring out financial aid and scholarships, taking the SATs and ACTs, and balancing responsibilities with family, school and possibly work, Operation Jump Start helps steer first-generation students through the college path.

For the past 27 years, Operation Jump Start has helped low-income, high-achieving, first-generation youth to meet their goals of getting into and then staying in college. The organization provides academic resources and mentoring to approximately 250 to 350 students annually, with the hope of getting that number even higher in the next few years.

There are two programs students can participate in: Operation Jump Start’s original program, College Access, that starts in eighth grade and guides students through the college process, and its later addition, College Success, that helps college students graduate with a degree.

“We didn’t want to just get our students into college. We wanted to see them graduate, and we wanted to make sure we were doing everything in our power to make sure that that happens,” said community outreach supervisor Rebecca Ridge. “We’re not college success if we’re just getting them to

college. ... We want to help change legacies, and really be there to support our students.”

Operation Jump Start aids students for upwards of five years through extensive and involved support involving tutors, mentors and counselors.

“One of our former mentors ... (who’s) probably been out of the program for about 10 years now, was telling me that she’s helping her former mentee plan a wedding,” said Ridge. “It’s one of my favorite stories, and we just have so many mentors who went on to have these lifelong relationships with their mentees, and it’s just so beautiful to see.”

According to Ridge, low-income students are significantly underrepresented on four-year college campuses both in California and across the nation. Since the pandemic, this has been exacerbated even further, with low-income students, especially those who are Black or Hispanic, turning more to work opportunities rather than pursuing higher education.

For first-generation students particularly, there can be added challenges to pursuing college.

“I’m a first-generation student myself, and my family did not know what to do,” said Ridge, who was unaware of all the tests and the extent of application fees involved in applying for college until she went through the process. “So part of why we do what we do is we want to give our students the possibilities to do

the framework.”

Besides providing guidance for students who stay in good academic standing throughout middle and high school, there is even more support to offer: a scholarship from Operation Jump Start each semester of college.

Financing college can often be a huge obstacle, but Operation Jump Start helps students navigate scholarship applications while learning to maintain balance between managing grades, extracurriculars, and family responsibilities.

“A lot of our students have a really tight-knit family where they have to take on a lot of responsibility within the household and outside of the household,” said Ridge.

According to Ridge, it can sometimes be a challenge helping students and their families learn why pursuing higher education is important.

To remedy this, Operation Jump Start strives to help the families of students as well with a monthly Parent Academy program, which offers a webinar series to educate parents about the college process.

“All of our parents didn’t graduate college, some of our parents didn’t graduate high school,” said Ridge. “We want to make sure that they have the tools in place to support their students alongside us.”

In March, Ridge is looking forward to the “Operation College Extravaganza” event in partnership with CSULB, that

offers prospective college students and their families a day of workshops exploring both the admissions process and an introduction to college life.

However, for Ridge, one of the most impactful services Operation Jump Start offers is mental health support. By teaming up with CSULB Masters of Social Work interns, Operation Jump Start students are each assigned to a counselor for one-on-one support and socio-emotional counseling, she said.

Initially, this service was only available for students in the College Success program, but since the pandemic, Operation Jump Start was able to expand and offer one-on-one mental health counseling to every student involved.

“We wanted to make sure all of our students are feeling the support that they needed in such a hard time,” said Ridge.

Ultimately, the nonprofit seeks to empower students to reach the future they are capable of, while giving them the tools and resources to do so.

“We’re here to not only offer that support, but let our students know that they can go to college,” said Ridge.

“Some students, depending on their circumstances, or their experience with the college education system, can write themselves off before they’ve even given themselves a chance to acknowledge that they are college potential. They don’t just have the potential to go to college, they can make it happen with their hard work.” ■

LBCC names Mike Muñoz as its next superintendent-president

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The Long Beach Community College District will soon have an official superintendent-president.

The district’s Board of Trustees confirmed at its Dec. 15 meeting the appointment of Mike Muñoz as its next superintendent-president with a new contract that will pay him \$305,000 annually.

Muñoz, who has worked at the college since 2018, had served in an interim role over the past eight months, but the board announced earlier this month that it would appoint him to the full-time position.

The contract will make Muñoz the superintendent-president through at least June 30, 2025, unless Muñoz and the college decide to part ways before then. His term as the school’s new leader will begin Jan. 1.

His salary will make him the highest-paid superintendent-president at LBCC since Eloy Oakley had his contract amended in 2015, when the board

converted parts of his benefits to base-pay in a controversial move that also propped up Oakley’s pensionable salary.

Oakley made just over \$325,000 in base salary before leaving the college to become the chancellor of the entire California Community College system.

Numerous other community colleges across the state pay their superintendent-presidents between \$300,000 and \$400,000 in annual salary with benefits and other pay, often pushing their total contract value up by more than \$100,000.

When LBCC hired its former superintendent-president Regan Romali, the board originally approved a contract that paid her \$250,000 annually before agreeing in August 2018 to extend her contract for four more years and raise her base salary to \$275,625.

The board fired Romali in March 2020 with Romali and the board trading accusations of improprieties.

Lou Anne Bynum, who served a year as an interim superintendent-president before Muñoz took over, was paid



Mike Muñoz was named superintendent-president of Long Beach City College. He is pictured on campus Thursday, July 15, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

\$20,000 per month before the board approved a \$48,000 raise for Bynum in May 2020. Bynum’s pay was increased to over \$280,000 annually before she eventually decided to part ways with the college over a separate contract dispute.

Muñoz’s new contract amounts to a \$35,000 annual raise in salary, not including benefits.

These include the college paying for or reimbursing Muñoz for any memberships required for him to represent the college and related travel expenses as well as a \$500 per month automobile allowance.

Muñoz could also be granted a one-time relocation benefit of \$5,000, according to the contract. ■

Rocket Lab

Continued from page 13

first ever powered, controlled flight on a planet other than Earth.

The addition of SolAero’s 425 employees in New Mexico brings Rocket Lab’s total staffing to more than 1,100 internationally. The firm now has operations in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, New Zealand and Canada in addition to its Long Beach headquarters.

SolAero President and CEO Brad Clevenger will continue to oversee the company’s 154,696-square-foot facility.

“By combining our innovative teams, industry-leading technologies and strong resources, we can advance space exploration and enable our customers to push the boundaries of what’s possible in orbit,” Beck said.

The announcement of SolAero’s acquisition came on the heels of several

others from the company this month. The week prior, the firm announced the successful launch and delivery of two satellites to orbit during its “A Data With Destiny” mission for BlackSky. It was the 23rd lift-off of Rocket Lab’s Electron system and brings the company’s total number of satellites delivered to space to 109.

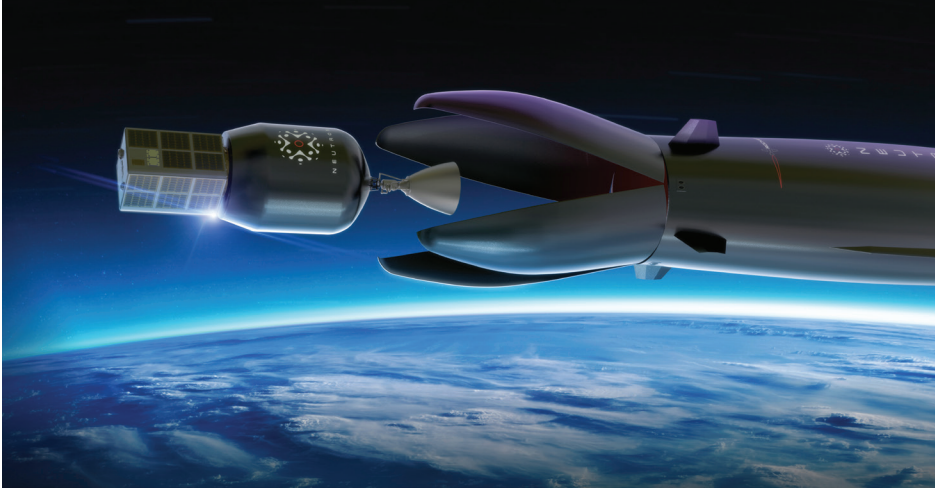
The mission came three weeks after the successful launch and deployment of two other Earth imaging satellites for BlackSky, a real-time geospatial monitoring company.

On Dec. 7, Rocket Lab announced it signed a deal with Japanese Earth imaging company Synspecive for three dedicated launches—two next year and the third in 2023. Each mission is slated to carry a single StriX satellite that can detect millimeter-level changes to the Earth’s surface from space, regardless of weather conditions or time of day.

Rocket Lab launched Synspecive’s first StriX satellite into orbit in



Rocket Lab’s new Neutron launch vehicle. Rendering courtesy of Rocket Lab.



Neutron’s “hungry hippo” design allows the second stage to deploy, leaving the first fully intact. Rendering courtesy of Rocket Lab.



# As Lowenthal retires, Garcia enters congressional race



Rep. Alan Lowenthal and Mayor Robert Garcia enter Exhibit Hall A of the Long Beach Convention Center, where migrant children found at the border without a parent were temporarily housed, in Long Beach on Thursday, April 22, 2021. Pool photo by by Brittany Murray, Press-Telegram/SCNG.

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

A day after Rep. Alan Lowenthal announced he would retire at the end of his current term, Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia shared his plans

to forgo a third term as the city’s leader to run for the soon-to-be-vacant congressional seat. Lowenthal, 80, the patriarch of a political dynasty in Long Beach, said Dec. 15 that he had decided not

to pursue another term in the U.S. House of Representatives so he could spend time focusing on taking care of himself and spend more time with his family, including four grandkids. His term will end in January 2023 when the new Congress is sworn in. “It’s time to take more time taking care of myself and my family and enjoying life and not having all the pressure,” Lowenthal said, noting that he has multiple people scheduling his life in at least four different cities. “I’m always under some kind of pressure.” Lowenthal said that a number of things played into this decision, including the ongoing pandemic and the prospect that the House could be returned to Republican control after next year’s elections, but ultimately spending time with his grandchildren, who range from 7 years old to college-aged. Still, the decision was a tough one for Lowenthal, who has served in Congress for the past decade. “It’s been a powerful couple of days, but I think I’m doing OK,” he said. “Looking after myself is a new thing and it’s something that I need to do and look

forward to doing.” Garcia, meanwhile, said on Dec. 16 that he made the decision to run for Congress to help ensure that the state and the district, which includes most of Long Beach and a host of other cities, gets its fair share of federal funding and representation in the nation’s capital. “For me, I have an immense love of our country and that’s rooted in the fact that my mom and my family worked so hard to become Americans,” Garcia said. “So I’ve always loved our community and our country.” Garcia’s departure from the city creates a major opportunity for other elected officials to run for mayor. Current 9th District City Councilman Rex Richardson and Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell have been said to be eyeing the opening and have expressed interest if Garcia were to leave. Garcia did not say if he would endorse either candidate. “Right now I’m just focused on running for Congress, but we’ll see where that lies and who ends up running,” he said.

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Tina Marraccini reads a book to her kindergarten class on the first day of in-person school at Alvarado Elementary School in Signal Hill Monday, March 29, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## LBUSD and teachers union kick off discussion for full-day kindergarten

BY MIKE GUARDABASCIO / Reporter

Tucked into a quick, unanimously-approved proposal last month was a small item that could lead to a big change for Long Beach Unified and its students next year. The Board of Education voted to accept a list of bargaining proposals between the district and the Teachers Association of Long Beach in a process known as “sunshining,” which included adding discussion of full-day kindergarten. With the board’s approval, the district and TALB have added it to their list of items to discuss over the next few months—a big move toward something that hasn’t been available across the district. Currently, kindergarten students in the district attend a half-day, either arriving late or leaving early. While nothing is guaranteed or certain at the start of bargaining, this move is a significant step forward in a debate that has been long, and complicated. “It’s been a journey,” said LBUSD assistant superintendent Brian Moskovitz, who oversees the LBUSD’s elementary schools.

### Parent advocates

When Alysa Turkowitz moved to Bixby Knolls from New York, she was surprised to find out that the LBUSD offered half-day kindergarten programs. In New York, kindergarten was offered for a full-day schedule. As she did some digging, she found an oft-cited EdSource report that said that more than 70% of students in California were enrolled in full-day kindergarten as well. “I said, ‘Why don’t we have this?’” she recalled. “What’s the hold up? There’s study after study about how valuable this is.” Turkowitz began lobbying the LBUSD Board a few years ago, and formed a Facebook group called Full Day K to help organize parents around the issue. She said that as Long Beach increasingly has households where both parents are working, she sees it as an equity issue.

“Historically I know there were a lot of moms who stayed at home with their kids, so a mid-day pick-up or drop-off maybe made more sense,” she said. “Now to live here most families have both parents working. It becomes a matter of equity. Affluent kids can go to private school or their parents can put them in a better after-school care program. I’ve heard that from so many parents I’ve spoken with, that it’s a burden to pay for care for their children while they’re working.”

### How did we get here?

The journey referenced by Moskovitz has included a few stops in Sacramento. In 2019, the State Assembly passed AB 197, which called for full-day kindergarten across the state. Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed the bill, citing large budget costs associated with expanding facilities and staff to accommodate it. Former Gov. Jerry Brown also vetoed a similar bill in 2014. In California, students aren’t required to attend school until first grade, but there has been an increased push for earlier childhood education here and across the country. More and more districts have added full-day kindergarten programs, and in July the State Assembly passed legislation requiring districts to offer transitional kindergarten, which is a full-day preschool program that comes the year before kindergarten. Over the next few years as that program expands in the LBUSD along state requirements, the current system could create a world where a student attends a full-day TK program one year, a half-day kindergarten program the next, and then a full-day first grade the year after that. That’s not a system that would pass the smell test for the district or for parents. “It’s definitely added some political incentive from the state level, in addition to parent pressure,” said Moskovitz. He pointed out that some parents and teachers have pushed back on full-day

for kindergarteners, but acknowledged many are in favor of it. “There is a strong feeling from parents that it’s something we should be doing, and we’ve been exploring that,” he said. The district had actually planned for the 2020-21 school year to be a potential jumping off point for a big pilot program, and hosted a large meeting in January 2020 at Longfellow Elementary with over 100 LBUSD kindergarten teachers present—some in favor of a full-day schedule, some against. When COVID-19 hit, those plans were tabled. Moskovitz said nobody was interested in putting kindergarteners on a full day of Zoom class while campuses were closed. With campuses back open for 2021-22, the district currently has full-day kindergarten programs running on 11 campuses throughout the city. “We have 11 schools piloting it, because they’re the teachers and schools who volunteered for that,” he said. “We’re gathering input from those teachers and principals about what’s working, what support they need, with the intention that if we were to expand it that we’d have some data and information available.”

**What’s next?**  
A section of the current agreement between LBUSD and the union defines the structure of the work day for kindergarten teachers. That’s the section that was added to the list of “sunshined” proposals, and approved by the board. LBUSD and TALB have already softened that language in the current agreement, making it so that this year teachers had the ability to try out the full-day schedule without fully waiving their contractual rights. Per that section: “Unless and until negotiated otherwise, the extended or full day kindergarten will remain voluntary, but no contractual waiver is required.” LBUSD and TALB bargaining teams began meeting recently to start the process of going through each side’s proposals to begin piecing together an agreement for the 2022-23 school year. Currently on the schedule are two bargaining sessions in January and February, plus one in March. Time will tell if full-day kindergarten is in the cards for Long Beach going forward, although the fact that it’s being formally discussed is in itself a big move in that direction. “I’m glad it’s on the agenda and I hope that it happens,” said Turkowitz, the parent advocate. “It would be such a huge deal educationally but also financially for so many families.” ■

## Millikan twins reject ‘fast fashion’ with their own clothing brand

BY TYLER HENDRICKSON / Reporter

From the soccer field to the volleyball court to the embroidery machine, the Paulson twins are inseparable. Danielle and Natalie Paulson are both standout athletes at Millikan High School who also happen to run an emerging clothing brand on Instagram. It’s called Cozmicwaste, and it’s advocating for a different approach to fashion. While Natalie and Danielle design and stitch their own products, their brand began as a source of thrifed, secondhand clothing. “We first started our account by just selling clothes from our own closet, because we’ve kind of always had a little bit of a shopping addiction,” Natalie joked. “We can’t always just keep taking money from our parents and we weren’t old enough to get regular jobs, so we decided to sell clothes on different selling apps. But then we found this bursting community on Instagram.” As they continued posting and selling their old clothing, they started to cultivate a following. A hundred followers turned into 1,000, then 10,000 within six months. For the past two years, the Paulsons have been discovering and re-selling pieces, establishing a market for secondhand clothing in the digital world.

“Once we started to gain more followers, it kind of raised awareness around thrifting,” explained Danielle, who credits her grandma for sparking the twins’ interest in thrift stores. “I feel like before, especially before COVID, there was kind of a stigma around thrifting and secondhand clothing. But we found beauty in it because you’re able to recycle the fashion and actually make people want to buy that kind of stuff instead of buying from fashion stores.” Cozmicwaste has positioned itself as an antidote to “fast fashion”—a booming industry of cheap, mass-produced clothing often marketed and sold on social media. Brands like Shein and Fashion Nova each have more than 20 million followers on Instagram but have faced questions about their labor practices and criticism about using low-quality materials that could be harmful to consumers and the planet. Natalie said she and her sister are trying to inform their peers about those issues and provide a different path forward: “As we’re spreading awareness around thrifting and more people are into finding vintage clothes, it’s all-around better for the environment.” Another perk of thrifting is finding rare and unique items. Especially as twins, it’s understandable that Natalie

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# Upcoming legislative proposal would ban 710 Freeway widening project

BY CRYSTAL NIEBLA / Reporter

An assemblymember representing Los Angeles County cities said she plans to propose a bill that would ban the widening of freeways in certain communities throughout California, including the contingent 710 Freeway project that has been halted since March. Rep. Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens) said that she wants legislation that would “prohibit the state from funding or permitting highway projects in areas with high rates of pollution and poverty and where residents have suffered negative health effects from living near freeways,” the Los Angeles Times first reported.

Fear over displacement, Garcia said, has always been a subject of conversation in Bell Gardens, which is a predominantly Latino city in the southeast region of LA County near the 710 Freeway.

“This is personal,” Garcia said in a phone interview with the Business Journal. Since the bill isn’t out yet, Garcia’s not sure if she thinks it will get enough support in the legislature. Garcia said her bill would prevent widening in poor and polluted communities who are impacted in negative ways.

Assemblymember Patrick O’Donnell (D-Long Beach) declined to comment on the bill’s concept for the time being. However, he did note “what the state does have is a plan to get cleaner and greener cars on the road.”

Caltrans, the state agency that’s

handling the 710 Freeway project alongside Metro, did not respond to comment by press time.

In March, Metro and Caltrans halted the freeway widening project when the Environmental Protection Agency issued a letter stating that the project didn’t meet federal air quality standards and requested a pollution study. In response to the EPA’s decision and displacement concerns, the Metro Board in May directed Metro to suspend work on the environmental process and re-engage community members and collect renewed input on the project.

Metro and Caltrans then launched the 710 Task Force, a group of about 50 community, industry, public and private stakeholders. The task force is gathering more input from the community.

Garcia said “it sounds insulting” that the Metro and Caltrans still want to go forward with the 710 Freeway expansion project even after a large number of residents and community stakeholders stood against it years ago.

She’s even cited studies published by The Times on how widening projects don’t work. Studies show freeway expansions might even make congestion worse.

Taylor Thomas, co-executive director of East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, said that, in general, freeways shouldn’t be expanded anywhere, especially in working-class communities.

“Not expanding freeways is definitely



The 710 Freeway to the new replacement Gerald Desmond Bridge over the Port of Long Beach Thursday, Oct. 1, 2020. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

something that should be codified in policy,” Thomas said.

In 2013, residents living along the 710 Freeway rallied behind EYCEJ’s proposed alternative, Community Alternative 7 or CA7, which proposed no freeway expansion, lane-widening or displacement. Instead, it had a lane dedicated for zero-emission freight and expanded public transit to promote less car use and local hiring.

Today, Thomas serves as a member of the 710 Task Force. She wants to stay involved in the renewed input process to ensure that there’s a clear strategy and plan to engage the community.

For her part, she wants to help “expand and create a robust community

engagement process.”

Long Beach, meanwhile, is a highly polluted city in LA County due to its proximity to the ports of Los Beach and Los Angeles, refineries and freeways. This year, congestion at the ports increased pollution in Long Beach, particularly on the Westside, which is home to many working-class communities of color.

Garcia said she plans to introduce her bill next month.

“If you have an overburdened community that’s low-income, like the SELA [Southeast Los Angeles] along the 710, then the state should not be getting permits or funding for any of that widening,” Garcia said. ■

## Data-sharing

Continued from page 13

additional funding, Hacegaba said.

“Just as we need to upgrade our physical infrastructure, we also need to build out our digital infrastructure to support the supply chain of the future,” Hacegaba said. “A supply chain that is integrated and digitally connected.”

The initiative is in response to the ongoing supply chain crisis that has seen dozens of ships waiting extended periods of time at sea for a chance to unload their cargo at terminals overburdened with containers. The port has taken several steps to address the crisis, including repurposing 100 acres of vacant port land to container storage to clear docks, moving toward 24/7 operations and announcing a fee for containers that sit for extended periods on docks.

The surcharge for idle containers was set at \$100 per container on the first day with the fee increasing in increments of \$100 for each subsequent day. Collection of the fee, however, has been postponed by the ports of Long Beach and LA multiple times since Nov. 1 because improvements have been seen.

The number of containers at the ports sitting on docks for extended periods has decreased 47%, Cordero said. In Long Beach, the number of containers that would be subject to the fee has dropped 38% after rising in late November and early December, according to port data.



Trucks enter Pier T at the Port of Long Beach Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

“By moving these containers out of the terminals, we are creating capacity that terminals need to bring those ships at anchor to berth,” Cordero said, noting that despite the backlog, the port already has moved more containers in 2021 than in 2020, which was a record-setting year.

With the help of sweeper vessels, the number of empty containers congesting the Port of Long Beach has been reduced, Cordero said. A couple weeks ago, empties accounted for 45% of containers at Long Beach terminals, Cordero said, noting that number is now down to 36%.

The backlog of ships waiting directly off the coast has declined drastically,

down from over 80 ships within 40 miles of the coast several weeks ago 28 as of Dec. 15, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California. The full backlog, however, on Dec. 15 reached a record of 102 ships when vessels waiting farther out at sea and those slow steaming toward the ports are included.

The reduction of those nearby, though, does mean a reduced impact on air quality for residents of Long Beach and surrounding areas, Cordero said.

“We’re not out of the woods yet but we are making meaningful progress,” Cordero said. “With continued collaboration ... we expect to continue to see progress in the months ahead.” ■

## LBUSD Budget

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That unrestricted reserve fund has ballooned to over \$300 million this year under current Superintendent Jill Baker, and it has been a much-needed security blanket for administrators during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 budget world. That blanket will likely need to turn into a shelter over the next three years, as Arkus’ presentation shows the district tapping into the fund to the tune of \$200 million over the next three years, bringing the balance down to \$140 million in the 2024-‘25 school year.

Seeing that slide raised concern for School Board President Juan Benitez.

“The bottom line for me is that the slide that shows where we end up with our ending balance in ‘24-‘25, that puts us below our ending balance five years ago in ‘16-‘17,” said Benitez. “Considerably below, almost \$20 million below.”

Still, the Board was comfortable enough with the district’s finances and its long-term stability to unanimously pass a certification that will be sent to the state saying that the Board has confidence the district can fulfill its financial obligations over the next three years. But the budget still has a long way to go before being finalized. The governor will unveil his 2022-‘23 budget in mid-January, and the district will present its second interim report to the Board in March.

“We will be vigilant on what our financial projections look like next year,” said Benitez. ■

## Clothing Brand

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and Danielle would seek out clothing that shows off their individuality and helps them to express themselves.

“Instead of having to try and find the best new items and new brands, you’re finding the beauty in something that’s different,” Natalie said. “It might be super old, but it’s also super unique and that’s what sets us apart from each other.”

The Paulsons have dedicated a solid chunk of their free time to building their brand, but that can be hard to come by. The twins are two-sport athletes at Millikan, who also play club in both soccer and volleyball, leaving them “in season” practically year-round. After finishing all their homework on Fridays, they find time between games on the weekends to work on thrifting and embroidery.

The twins admitted they often turn down opportunities to spend time with friends in order to focus their attention on the business. They even invested in a top-end embroidery machine so they could speed up production time and put out higher-quality products. That may seem like a major sacrifice to the average teenager—but not to the Paulsons. “We obviously are busy, but we want to actually do this,” Natalie said. “A lot of people have jobs where they don’t



Danielle Paulson, left, and Natalie Paulson, whose secondhand fashion store evolved into their own brand on Instagram. Photo courtesy the Paulsons.

find any joy in it or they don’t have any motivation towards it, and I think that’s the main drive for us to keep posting on our account.”

As high school seniors exploring their options for college, the

Paulsons will soon need to figure out the future of Cozmicwaste. They’ve both been in contact with a few colleges about continuing their soccer careers at the next level, but they’re not sure where that might

happen or if they’ll be able to run the business out of their dorm rooms.

One thing they do know is that with the recent changes to the NCAA’s Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) rules, they’ll be allowed to pursue their business without having their college eligibility revoked. This gives them the option to pursue multiple interests once they get to college, as students, athletes and entrepreneurs.

“We’re excited because it just gives us more options,” Danielle said of the changes to the NIL rules, which went into effect this season. “I feel like it gives us more of a chance to fulfill all possibilities that we want to pursue. They say that these are the most important years of your life, so I think being able to have these different options is really important for us. And even if we decide we don’t want to do it anymore, we get to make that decision and it’s not being made for us.”

In the meantime, the Paulsons will look to guide Millikan girls’ soccer to a fourth consecutive Moore League championship. They’re both team captains and—you guessed it—play right alongside each other as leaders of the Millikan defense.

And if things go as planned this season, they certainly won’t need any help putting those patches on their letterman jackets. ■

# What you need to know about omicron variant in Long Beach

BY ANTHONY PIGNATARO / Reporter

In the first three weeks of December, the omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus went from no recorded cases to multiple recorded cases in 32 states and at least 77 nations, according to the World Health Organization.

The variant is particularly worrisome because it is both highly transmissible and apparently capable, in some cases, of breaking through current vaccines. Long Beach announced its first case of omicron, in someone who had recently traveled internationally, on Dec. 7. Ten days later, on Dec. 17, the city announced its first community-spread case of the omicron variant.

To be clear, there are far fewer COVID-19 cases in Long Beach hospitals right now than at this time last year, according to the city’s COVID-19 dashboard.

Only frontline workers were vaccinated at this point last year, while today, city officials say 68.8% of all residents ages 5 and up are fully vaccinated.

Still, omicron is spreading around the world “at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant,” World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Dec. 14.

Even if infections remain mild, such a vast increase in cases could still overwhelm hospitals.

There’s a lot about omicron we still don’t know, including if such an alarming increase in cases will happen here, but here’s what we do know.

### How serious is omicron when compared to delta and other variants?

It’s very serious, according to UC Irvine epidemiologist Dr. Andrew Noymer. “It’s very transmissible,” said Noymer—far more so than any of the previous COVID-19 variants that became dominant.

Noymer said that, so far, omicron is out-competing delta, the current dominant COVID-19 variant, at a faster rate than delta out-competed the earlier alpha variant. “That’s extremely concerning,” he said.

### How concerned is the city over omicron?

Long Beach health officials say that though COVID-19 case numbers have been fairly stable, unlike last winter, they are still higher than they were over the summer, and the city is currently

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## Congressional Race

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There had been speculation after President Joe Biden’s victory in the November 2020 election that Garcia would be appointed to a position in the administration given his close ties to both Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Garcia was even rumored to be in the running to be appointed as one of California’s senators by another ally, Gov. Gavin Newsom, when that seat was opened up by Harris becoming Vice President.

Neither of those materialized, and with the deadline to file for candidacy in the Long Beach mayor’s race just months away, rumors that Garcia was eyeing Lowenthal’s congressional seat began to spread through the city. When the 80-year-old Lowenthal announced he was retiring after this term, it opened up the opportunity that many said Garcia had been waiting for.

Garcia said he would continue to fight for many of the things that Lowenthal had become known for championing, like human rights, infrastructure and protecting the California coastline. He also said he would work to get California cities more funding. “I plan to be someone that is

amplifying and constantly pushing hard to make sure that California receives what it’s due,” Garcia said.

There are currently two Republican and two Democratic candidates announced for Lowenthal’s seat, which has seen its boundaries dramatically change through the statewide redistricting process this year.

The old 47th District included several Orange County cities and was likely more conservative than the new district, which is now entirely in Los Angeles County and includes cities like Bellflower, Downey and Huntington Park.

Voting-age residents in the new district have jumped from being 29.6% Latino to 52% Latino.

The district includes the old district of longtime Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, who has served in the House since 1993. Roybal-Allard announced last week that she will not seek reelection.

Garcia said he would spend his final year as mayor focusing on economic recovery in Long Beach and helping bring the pandemic to an end in the city. He said campaigning for Congress shouldn’t interfere with his current job.

“Most folks know that I’m a hard worker and I work every day, all day, and that’s going to continue,” Garcia said. ■



Omicron

Continued from page 21

undergoing “substantial community spread of COVID-19.” The city fully expects that the omicron variant will lead to an increase in cases, “which could worsen an already expected winter surge.”

There are reports that omicron mostly leads to “mild” infections. Is this true?

That remains to be seen, according to Noymer. While Noymer is confident in saying that omicron doesn’t seem to be more severe than delta, he also noted that hospitalization surges are happening where omicron supersedes delta as the dominant variant.

“Enough people are going to get omicron that we’ll see an increase in hospitalizations in Southern California,” Noymer said.

To be clear, what constitutes a “mild” COVID-19 infection?

All this means is that people who are infected will see a less severe profile of symptoms. And that means fewer hospitalizations per thousand cases, according to Noymer.

Are people with just one J&J shot or two Pfizer/Moderna shots still considered “fully vaccinated?”

Technically, yes, said Noymer, though

his recommendation is to get a booster shot as soon as you’re eligible because apparently the available vaccines are substantially less effective against omicron when not boosted.

How protected are vaccinated people from catching the virus?

It looks like vaccinated people, especially if they haven’t received a booster shot, can get omicron. But there’s not a lot of good data on this, said Noymer. It’s also possible that vaccinated people can transmit the omicron variant.

Can people who have gotten booster shots still get infected?

Yes, though there’s evidence that they’ll fare a lot better, said Noymer. Omicron has evolved to be quite different from the original virus that the vaccines were designed for. But the booster does seem to keep people who are infected from developing serious symptoms and then having to go to the hospital.

“It’s the reduction in hospitalizations that we’re hopeful for,” said Noymer.

Because of its vastly increased transmissibility and ability to break through vaccinations, will everyone eventually get omicron?

Noymer called that a “narrative” that, while gaining traction, is far from



One man waits in line for a vaccine as workers set up the vaccination site at Long Beach City College’s Pacific Coast Campus Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

certain. Though he did say that, because of how deep the virus has spread throughout the world, it’s likely that, eventually, everyone will get COVID-19.

“Everyone’s going to get COVID-19 before they die,” said Noymer, whether it’s delta or omicron or some new variant that emerges. “Everyone will get COVID.”

This sounds rather hopeless. Will the pandemic ever end?

“Not in the sense most people expect,” said Noymer. Instead, COVID-19 will eventually become endemic—just another virus we’ve come to live with. “We’re not going back to 2019,” said Noymer. “COVID will be with us for decades, if not in perpetuity. It will be here this time next year, and this time the following year. It will become part of life. It used to be that you had to worry about the flu and the common cold. Now, you have to worry about the flu, the common cold and COVID.”

This doesn’t mean dealing with COVID-19 is hopeless—quite the opposite, in fact. It’s now more important than ever that people get tested, get vaccinated and get booster shots, if they’re eligible.

What about the possibility that people with “mild” infection can still get Long COVID, a condition in which some patients suffer from a wide range of debilitating symptoms for months or even years after first being infected?

It seems to be that way, said Noymer, though Long COVID remains rare. Still, scientists know very little about what causes Long COVID or how to treat it.

Right now many outdoor parklets in the city are gone, and restaurants are seating people indoors. Is this still OK?

California is in a good spot right now, Noymer said. While he doesn’t think people should cancel travel plans, Noymer said it’s more important than ever to get vaccinated, get a booster shot if you’re eligible and wear a mask when indoors. “Hiding in the basement is not really called for,” Noymer said.

Though Noymer also said the state is also due for another wave of hospitalizations.

How close is Southern California to having a hospital crisis?

Noymer said he’s more worried about later in January than the next few weeks.

“It’s going to take a few months to build.”

He estimates that hospitals in the state will see an increase in COVID cases by mid-January.

So what should people do if they get sick?

Get tested, especially if you’re experiencing symptoms associated with COVID—fever, chills, cough, body aches. Noymer recommends PCR tests for people who are symptomatic, because of the lower accuracy of at-home rapid tests.

“They should stay at home,” Noymer added. People who are sick should stop going out, seeing people, going to holiday parties and so forth. If their symptoms become severe, they should seek medical care.

“It’s the same advice I would have given four weeks ago,” said Noymer, though getting tested is extremely important right now, because it gives scientists a handle on the extent of omicron’s spread.

Where can people get tested and vaccinated?

A full list of city-run vaccination and test sites are available online. The lists are updated monthly or as needed, according to Long Beach Health Department spokeswoman Jennifer Rice Epstein.

“Anyone who wants a vaccine can get their initial series and/or booster within minutes of making their decision,” said Epstein. “We are prepared to expand sites if demand exceeds the capacity at our existing sites.”

Is the city still distributing masks to the community? What about at-home tests?

The city has distributed 370,000 surgical and N95 masks since March 2020 to skilled nursing facilities, businesses and community members, according to Epstein. The city is also currently distributing 2.7 million masks for children.

City health officials also say they’re “ramping up an effort to distribute more than 10,000 rapid tests to providers, community-based organizations, libraries, health centers, organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness, faith-based organizations, skilled nursing facilities, assisted-living facilities and food pantries to ensure rapid tests are readily available in the community.” ■



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Colorado Lagoon Open Channel Phase 2A Zodiac Inflatable Boat & Trailer	3002120001	01/07/2022
Engineering Design Serv for the Catholic Protection Improvement of Potable Water System	ITB FS 22-014 (EO-3557)	01/12/22
Safe Parking Program	RFP HE21-104	01/13/2022
Strategic Plan Consultant	DV22-007	01/13/2022
Fire Department Headquarters Generator	3005010082	01/18/2022
Rehabilitation of Wells Commission 15 & Commission 18 Project	WD-09-20	01/18/2022
Engineering Constr. Mgmt. & Inspection Service for Rehab of Wells Commission	(EO-3489)	01/19/2022
Constr. Mgmt. & Inspection Services for S-25 Sewer Lift Station	SC-0367	01/19/2022
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