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BAY PORTS AND TRADE**

STATE OF THE PORTS

The backlog of ships and trade war with China continue to drag on. What is happening, and will port operations ever return to normal?

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Containers stacked at the Long Beach Container Terminal on Pier E, Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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San Pedro Bay Ports and Trade

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Port of Long Beach purchases 29 acres of privately owned land on Pier D

By BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The Port of Long Beach is expansive, made up of 3,520 acres of land and 4,600 acres of water with 10 piers and 80 berths. The city’s port authority, however, does not own all of this area, with dozens of acres owned by private companies.

But it appears port officials are looking to change that.

In September, the port announced the purchase of 28.6 acres—about 25% of which is submerged—in the heart of the Harbor District. The waterfront site is made up of three parcels on the north end of Pier D and is currently owned by Sioux Falls-based building materials production and bulk cargo transportation company L.G. Everist Inc.

The port has agreed to pay more than \$65.5 million for the property, which includes a heavy cargo boat ramp used primarily for unloading large rocks and other dry bulk construction materials, according to the announcement.

Once the transaction is complete, the port will take over the leases of the seven tenants that operate on that

portion of Pier D. Tenants include Sause Brothers, Connolly Pacific, SBA Communications, Gambol Industries, Polaris Mineral, Robertson’s Ready Mix and Subsea Global Solutions.

“We’re going to maintain the status quo in terms of the operations of those businesses, and we’re going to support them,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said. “In the long term, it is another opportunity for the port authority to have land at our disposal.”

Combined, the leases are expected to bring in \$3.5 million in revenue annually, according to port officials.

Assuming the purchase is completed, there will still be more than 60 acres of privately owned land within the Harbor District, not including the Valero refinery, according to port spokesman Lee Peterson. Plains All American’s fossil fuel tank farm and NRG’s power plant occupy 45 acres on Terminal Island, and the Craig family trust owns 14 acres on Pier D.

In the North Harbor area, there are 29 smaller parcels with 25 different owners, but port staff does not have an



An aerial view of the San Pedro Bay ports complex. Photo courtesy of the Port of Long Beach.

exact acreage available, Peterson said.

L.G. Everist has owned the property for about five decades, having purchased it from Craig Shipyard, according to port officials. The shipyard was operating on the property prior to state approval for a commercial seaport in Long Beach in 1911.

When and if more of the privately owned parcels become available, the port will work to purchase them, Cordero said. Since summer of last

year, the port has experienced an unprecedented cargo surge, causing delays and forcing many ships to sit idle off the coast. One strategy for alleviating congestion was to set up additional container staging areas on unused land.

“We certainly want to take advantage of opportunities that are available to us,” Cordero said, “because we are learning more and more how important land availability is to the port.” ■

Long Beach, Los Angeles ports work toward 24/7 operations



Ships are unloaded at Total Terminal International on the Port of Long Beach’s Pier T Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. The terminal is the first in Long Beach to move toward 24/7 operations, currently offering 24-hour services Monday through Thursday. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

During a press conference from the East Room of the White House last week, President Joe Biden announced the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have transitioned to 24/7 operations as a means to alleviate the severe bottleneck at the Southern California ports.

But it appears the president spoke too soon.

While the ports are indeed working to speed up the flow of goods, the reality is that it will take time for the busiest port complex in the country to significantly ramp up cargo movement, port officials said after the speech, adding that no terminal operates 24/7.

“It’s a bit of a process, it’s not an overnight thing,” Port of Long Beach spokesman Lee Peterson said in a phone call following the president’s remarks.

During his comments, Biden repeated a claim made earlier in the day by Press Secretary Jen Psaki that the Port of Long Beach began 24/7 operations “weeks ago.” However, no terminal at the Long Beach port currently offers 24/7 operations.

On Sept. 21, four days after the San Pedro Bay ports announced a joint move toward 24/7 operations, Long Beach unveiled a pilot program in which Total Terminal International container terminal on Pier T would expand hours of operations. Monday

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Lio-Nick Gierza, 28, aboard the Santa Carolina, a bulk carrier that arrived in Long Beach from Colombia on September 28, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.

Stuck at sea, sailors grapple with food shortages, crew fights, health issues

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

To Pat Pettit, the 72-year-old manager of the International Seafarers Center, the crew members who visit the landside center at the Port of Long Beach for a place to sleep, a meal or to watch a baseball game are almost like extended family, adopted sons. But recently, she’s seen a lot less of them.

“Normally, we’re at capacity,” Pettit said of the center. Now, the pool table in the common area hides under a plastic cover, a pair of electric massage chairs sit empty in the corner and the lights are out at the center’s small convenience store.

Foreign sailors, usually common visitors at the center, are nowhere to be found.

Travel restrictions that prevent foreign nationals from entering the U.S. amid the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with a clogged supply chain, have left hundreds of seafarers stuck at sea aboard cargo vessels, unable to visit the center. But beyond missing out on the comforts Pettit and her colleagues can provide, the consequences of their predicament can be dire.

Crammed in close quarters with nowhere to go, fights among crew members have become a regular occurrence. Seamen report feeling depressed. Some ships run low on provisions.

“Lately, I’ve just been putting out fires everywhere,” said Stefan Mueller-Dombois, an inspector with the International Transport Workers

Federation, which is tasked with investigating potential mistreatment of crew members.

At the time of the interview, Mueller was waiting for a ship anchored in the bay to come ashore so he could investigate allegations of a captain hitting a crew member over the head with a telescope. A sailor on another ship complained about a lack of food and a captain who refused to allow vaccinations on board. Several sailors had to be taken to the doctor’s office with severe stomach issues in recent weeks, Mueller said.

In addition to conflicts on board that can quickly turn violent, medical issues are often the reason crew members reach out, according to Mueller. Stomach issues are common, likely a result of the added stress, he noted. “It seems more dire now than ever,” the inspector said.

Crew changes, which allow seafarers a break in between deployments, have been delayed during the pandemic, meaning many crew members have to withstand that stress for longer periods of time.

Normally, seafarers are supposed to return home after 11 months on board, a requirement set forth by the Maritime Labor Convention. But travel restrictions, quarantine requirements and a limited availability of commercial flights have made crew changes more difficult, creating what many in the industry are referring to as a crisis.

Every month, around 100,000 seafarers need to be changed over from ships once their contract is finished. They then have the right to be returned home at the expense of their employer, but exercising that right has proven extremely difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the federation.

As a result, an estimated 400,000 seafarers worldwide were stuck on their ships in January, during the peak of what has been called a crew change crisis, the federation reported. Unable to go ashore in the countries they visit and, at times, unable to return home, sailors can spend months without ever setting foot on land.

Finding out who’s responsible for crew members’ well-being can be difficult, even for a seasoned inspector like Mueller. Shipping lines, shipping agents, crewing companies, individual owners and even flag countries all bear a portion of the responsibility—and the number of actors involved is different for each vessel.

“It really isn’t any single company,” Mueller said. This can leave crews at sea—both literally and figuratively. “They don’t have any help,” the inspector noted. “You can’t really find anyone.”

Being stuck at sea and on board their ship for unusually long periods of time is having an impact not just on seafarer’s physical health, but their mental well-being too, said Chaplain Shekhar “Sam” Chauhan, who has worked with the

Seafarers Center for over a decade.

“They feel cramped, they feel stuck,” Chauhan said. Some crew members have reported suicidal thoughts, he said.

Chauhan recalls the case of a captain who lost his father-in-law while he was at sea. The chaplain visited the boat, where the two listened to Indian music—Chauhan, like many sailors, is Indian—and talked. “He needed some company,” Chauhan said. “He needed someone to share a few tears.”

For foreign sailors who are unable to leave their vessel due to restrictions on foreign nationals entering the U.S. during the pandemic, being stuck on board doesn’t just mean a lack of emotional support and restricted access to landside respite like bars, casinos or shopping malls. It also means effectively being stuck at work 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“They’re never off,” Chauhan said. “Even the rest time is work time.”

Chauhan remembers a visit with a ship cook, who said he missed talking to friends, family, anyone who wasn’t a coworker. “In the vessel, it’s only professional,” the cook told him. While ships ordinarily offer internet access, the quality and speed doesn’t compare to that offered on land, making it more difficult to keep in touch with loved ones back home.

Aboard the Santa Carolina, a bulk carrier that recently docked in Long Beach after spending seven days at anchorage in the bay, crew member Lio-Nick Gierza said he was happy that unlike the previous vessel he was on, the ship had a reliable internet connection, allowing him to chat with his girlfriend and 4-year-old daughter back home in the Philippines.

“It’s so hard,” Gierza, who joined the ship three months ago, said of the separation from his family. “Homesickness: that’s the number one problem of the seafarer.”

For the Santa Carolina’s crew, the ship’s bosun Arvin Cabanig said, the number one problem at the moment is a lack of shore leave. But for the most part, his crew members have taken the restrictions in stride, even those who have family members in the U.S. they’d like to visit, like Cabanig, who has a cousin in Long Beach.

“We want to protect our families,” the bosun said, referring to the risk of potentially contracting and spreading the coronavirus.

To make their stay on board a little more comfortable, seafarers who are unable to leave their ship have a few options at their disposal. Some shop online and have their orders delivered to the seafarers center. From there, center staff bring the items to the dock—candy and socks are among the most common orders, according to the center’s live-in custodian.

“They do a lot of shopping online,” Merry-Jo Dickie, the custodian, said of the sailors.

With the usual trips to local stores off-limits and crews’ time at sea

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New law takes aim at “bad actors” in trucking—and the companies using their services

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

Big box retailers moving product through California will soon have to take a closer look at the company they keep—or pay the price.

A state Senate bill recently signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom speeds up the process for companies who have been found to misclassify drivers to be added to a state blacklist, and places additional liability on customers—largely retailers—who continue to use their services.

The list, which is compiled and published by the state’s Department of Industrial Relations, includes the names and addresses of port drayage companies that have not paid judgments issued against them for labor law violations, such as unpaid wages resulting from the misclassification of drivers as independent contractors.

Customers using trucking

companies on the list already shared liability for those unpaid judgments—meaning they could be held financially liable by a worker who, for example, had made a successful wage theft claim that remained unpaid. Under the new law, trucking companies’ customers can also be held liable for resulting losses to the state, such as unpaid state employment assessments.

The bill’s author, current state senator and former Long Beach councilwoman Lena Gonzalez, said the new law marks an important step in the fight against the mistreatment and misclassification of truckers who transport goods to and from the ports of Long Beach and L.A.

Despite record cargo volumes coming into the ports and retailers seeing their revenues surge during the pandemic, Gonzalez said drivers aren’t reaping the benefits of that increased economic



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A bill California Gov. Gavin Newsom recently signed into law will hold big box retailers such as Target accountable if they work with trucking companies that misclassify their drivers. Photo by Brandon Richadson.

activity, in large part because many remain misclassified as independent contractors by their employers.

“The port is making astronomical numbers,” Gonzalez said. “You see all that, and then you still see all of these truck drivers in poverty.”

Repeat offenders—trucking

companies that have previous unpaid judgments against them—will now be added to the state’s blacklist, even if their period for judicial appeals hasn’t expired yet, meaning new offenses will be visible to potential customers within weeks, rather than months or years.

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Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero stands at the Long Beach Container Terminal Friday, Aug. 20, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

‘Decade of underinvestment’: San Pedro Bay port executives call for systemic change in supply chain

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

Congestion at the San Pedro Bay port complex shows no sign of easing, more than one year after a record-setting cargo surge began amid the COVID-19 pandemic, port officials say.

For months, a backlog of ships has been anchored off the Southern California coast waiting for space to open up at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. The number of ships waiting off the coast reached a new record on Sept. 20, when 70 were at anchor or adrift, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California.

Goods movement delays, though, are not unique to the San Pedro Bay ports.

“This is a global supply chain issue,” Port of LA Executive Director Gene Seroka said. “You’ve got cargo ships sitting outside of Savannah and Seattle in the United States, in addition to many other ports. So it’s not isolated here.”

Seroka, who previously worked in the

industry overseas, said he remains in frequent contact with people in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Most east-west trade gateways, he said, are “pretty full these days.”

While blame has largely been placed on the spike in online shopping during the public health crisis, the LA and Long Beach port directors say the current predicament is also the result of systemic issues: poor trade policy and “more than a decade of underinvestment” in West Coast ports have left their agencies vulnerable, Seroka said, to the challenges caused by the uptick in cargo they’re now seeing.

Fueling congestion

The woes at the San Pedro Bay ports began in 2018 when the Trump administration imposed billions of dollars in tariffs on a slew of Chinese imports in an attempt to correct the trade imbalance between the two countries. The tariffs, which remain in

place, had the opposite effect.

“We were outspoken against these tariffs when they were contemplated and then implemented,” Seroka said, calling the Trump trade war a “failure of epic proportions.”

“The end result is that imports have increased, exports have declined and the trade gap with China has widened,” Seroka added, stating that exports have been down 30 of the last 34 months.

Both Seroka and Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero are confident the Biden administration will re-examine the trade war to bring about an end to the tariffs. The port executives did stress, however, that any deals between the U.S. and China should aim to correct the trade imbalance and other issues.

“We will not succumb ... to any trading nation that doesn’t share our ideals on worker empowerment, environmental stewardship and rules-

based trade, but the phase one trade deal has been a failure,” Seroka said of Trump’s partial agreement with China, signed in January 2020.

The top trading partners at the San Pedro Bay ports include China, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan and South Korea, representing over 70% of imports. But high demand to quickly ship goods out of Asian markets has led to a shortage of containers on the West Coast, with a record number of empty containers being shipped back overseas rather than being filled with exports.

Empty containers outbound from Long Beach have consistently been in the mid-to-high 200,000s each month since September 2020, and even broke the 300,000-mark in May of this year for the first time in the port’s 110-year history.

The supply chain in the U.S. is facing other shortages that are compounding delays, including truck chassis. The

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A petroleum ship makes its way under the new Long Beach International Gateway bridge at the Port of Long Beach Monday, October 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

24/7 Operations

Continued from page 3

through Thursday, the terminal operates around the clock. Hours on other days of operation remain limited.

No other terminal at Long Beach has announced any 24-hour operations, Peterson confirmed.

“After weeks of negotiations and working with my team and with the major union retailers and freight movers, the Port of Los Angeles announced today that it’s going to begin operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” Biden said during his speech.

The operational details of transitioning to a 24/7 model are still being discussed and worked out, Port of LA Executive Director Gene Seroka said in an email after Biden’s remarks. The port did announce expanded hours on Sept. 17, but systemic change of this magnitude takes the many branches of the supply chain to work in tandem, a point that Biden acknowledged in his speech.

“The significance of today’s announcement is the commitment from industry leaders responsible for moving goods on behalf of American consumers and businesses to open up the capacity needed to deliver,” Seroka said. “It’s a call to action for others to follow.”

Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero, meanwhile, acknowledged the importance of moving toward 24/7 operations.

“Before this unprecedented cargo surge began, we believed 24/7 operations were the future,” Cordero said in a statement. “After all, consumers can shop online at any time, whether it’s at 4 p.m. or 4 a.m., and 24/7 is already the standard at our partner ports in Asia. The supply chain

truly never stops now.”

Biden announced that Walmart, the nation’s largest retailer, has committed to going “all in” on moving its products 24/7. In the coming weeks, Walmart is expected to increase off peak hour goods movement by 50%, Biden said.

Target, Home Depot and Samsung have made similar commitments, Biden added.

FedEx and UPS, which combined move 40% of packages, are also on board with the move to round-the-clock goods movement at all levels—corporate, small business and individual—Biden said.

“Their commitment to go all in on 24/7 operations means businesses of all

sizes will get their goods on sale faster and more reliably,” Biden said. It’s “a sign of major progress.”

When the Port of LA does successfully transition to 24/7 operations, the facility will be open an additional 60 hours per week, Biden said. With nearly double the number of operational hours, Biden said cargo will leave the port 25% faster.

Biden used his speech as an opportunity to promote his landmark infrastructure bill, which has been tied up in Congress for months. The bill includes \$17 billion for port infrastructure, representing the “biggest investment in our ports in our history,” according to Biden.

In an Oct. 8 interview, Seroka said

Army Corps recommends deepening channels at Port of Long Beach

By **HAYLEY MUNGUIA** / Editor

Plans to deepen channels at the Port of Long Beach, which would allow ships to navigate the trade hub more efficiently, took a step forward this month with the publication of the final feasibility report for the proposed project.

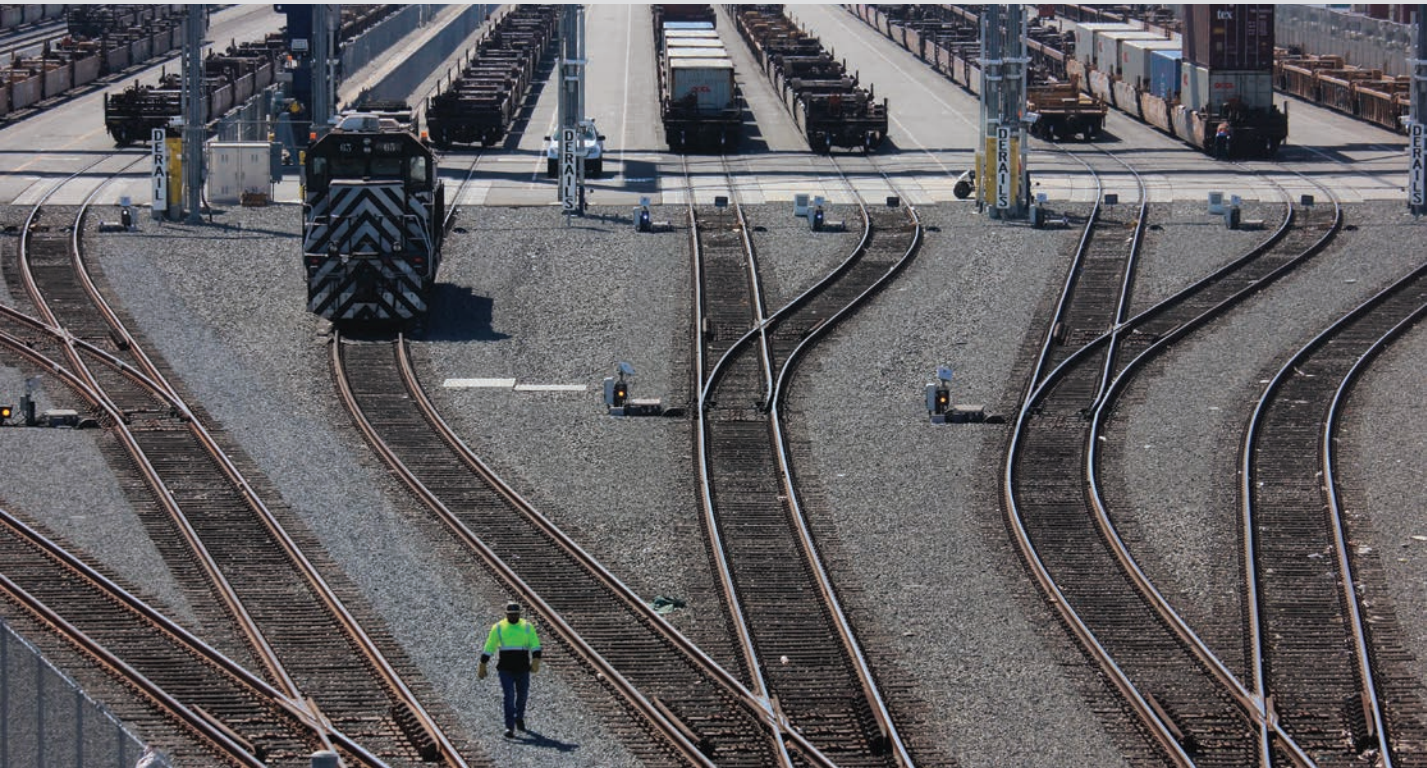
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released the nearly 400-page document,

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A Walmart truck crosses the Long Beach International Gateway bridge onto the 710 Freeway Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Walmart, the nation’s largest retailer, committed to increased off-peak hour cargo movement as part of a larger push to alleviate congestion at the San Pedro Bay ports. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

FROM THE EDITOR: Could the current shipping woes have been avoided?



A worker walks to rail switches at the Long Beach Container Terminal rail yard Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

It’s an understatement to say the San Pedro Bay ports—along with trade hubs elsewhere across the country and the world—have been in the spotlight lately. Cargo backlogs have dominated headlines for months, taking the blame for a shortage of goods, inflated prices and now the possibility that holiday gifts won’t be delivered on time.

The persistence of shipping woes during the COVID-19 pandemic has made me wonder whether any of this was avoidable.

As my colleague Brandon Richardson reported in the cover story of this edition, the Port of Los Angeles’ executive director Gene Seroka believes that if the federal government had sufficiently invested in the West Coast ports in recent years, “you wouldn’t see [dozens] of ships in the bay today.”

But there’s only so much cajoling the ports can do on that front. So my next question was: How have the ports been investing their own money, along with funds they do receive from the federal government and other agencies?

I talked to the Port of Los Angeles’ deputy executive director of development, Tony Gioiello, and the Port of Long Beach’s managing director of engineering, Sean Gamette, to get a sense of their major projects and how they’ll benefit the region and the shipping industry as a whole in the years ahead.

When asked about what they see as the most significant capital improvement projects currently underway at their ports, both Gioiello and Gamette spoke first about rail work. While many folks may think the current backlog comes down to the ports’ ability to unload ships, every link in the supply chain has been inundated—meaning rail, which connects them all, must be addressed.

And the twin ports, Gioiello and Gamette said, are working to do just that.

In Los Angeles, there’s the \$73 million plan to add new railroad storage tracks on Terminal Island and the \$52 million railyard expansion at Berths 302-305, which will increase its capacity by about 10%. And in Long Beach, a \$35 million project will add another departure track for trains from Piers G to J, \$25 million is dedicated to adding 3,000 feet of track to eliminate a bottleneck at Ocean Boulevard, and \$40 million is going toward plans to add about 10,000 feet of track to the wye on Terminal Island, which is a critical junction for the port.

That’s not to mention the Port of Long Beach’s \$870 million project to redevelop the Pier B railyard, which aims to redirect cargo movement from trucks to trains.

“There’s a strategic focus on rail,” Gamette said. “We can move cargo more efficiently by rail, and we can do it in a more environmentally friendly way, right? In 2020, we moved about 1.6 million TEUs [20-foot equivalent units] by on-dock rail, but we forecast that by 2045, we might be needing to move about 2.9 million TEUs by rail.”

Gamette said the Pier B project alone could help increase the share of cargo that’s moved by rail from 25% to 35% or even higher.

“The more cargo we move by train helps us in another way, as well,” he said. “We believe that one train the size of the yard today really can eliminate about 2,000 truck trips, so it’s kind of a big deal when it comes to efficiency.”

Gioiello, with the Port of LA, acknowledged the importance of rail projects and the efficiency of goods movement overall. But he also said other types of investments—like terminal improvements and enhancing public access—are just as critical.

When it comes to funding, though, Gioiello agreed with his boss that the federal government could be more supportive of these major projects.

President Joe Biden, for his part,

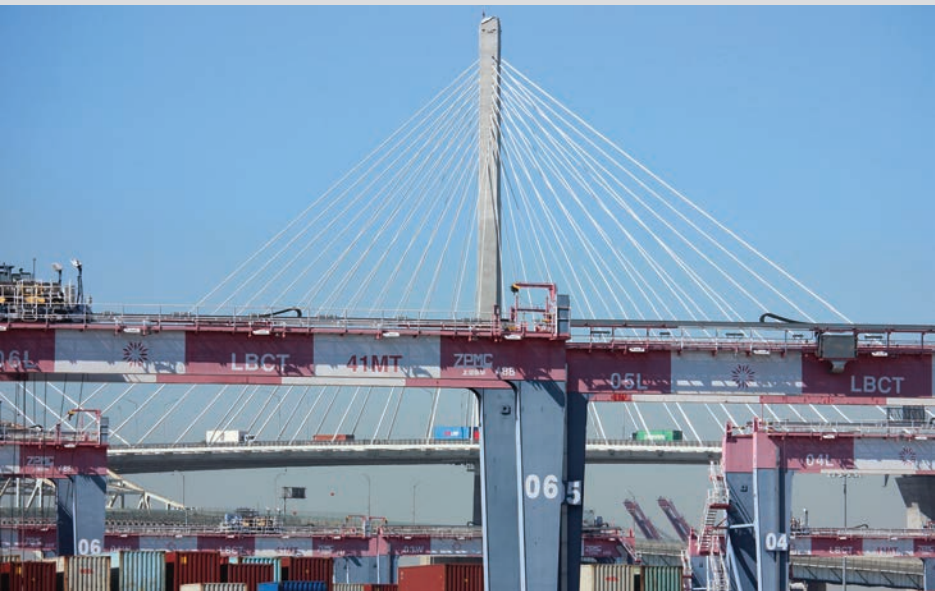
acknowledged the need for infrastructure investment—with a particular focus on investment in ports—in a speech last week. He noted that the infrastructure bill currently sitting in Congress, which includes \$17 billion for port infrastructure, represents the “biggest investment in our ports in our history.”

But Gioiello said changes to how the federal government approves grants for the ports also need to be made.

“It’s very competitive to get those federal funds right now,” he said. “We have found out that sometimes the criteria they’re using to judge projects—maybe they need to be updated.”

As an example, Gioiello pointed to a terminal electrification project.

“We’re looking at grant opportunities—federal grants—for that project, and even though it’s a great environmental project and would have great benefits, the project itself was not increasing cargo through that terminal,” he said. “So the way that grant criterias are written, we weren’t going to be competitive on that.”



Trucks cross the Long Beach International Gateway bridge onto and off of Terminal Island Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Still, Gioiello said the availability of federal funding doesn’t dictate which projects the port pursues. If specific work is necessary, the port will fund the project on its own if it must.

And conversely, he said, “we decided long ago we’re not going to do a project just because there’s grant money out there.”

But the question still stands: If the West Coast ports had more investment in recent years, would they be better equipped to handle the current surge? That’s a question we may never be able to answer. And as Gamette told me, “I don’t know that anybody could have forecast the type of surge we’re experiencing.”

But, to the ports’ credit, there are some investments they’ve made that eased what could have been an even worse crisis.

The new Long Beach International Gateway, for example, is wider and taller than its predecessor, the Gerald Desmond Bridge, allowing bigger ships to travel underneath and easing traffic flow for trucks carrying cargo across it.

“A brand new bridge during this surge is a big deal,” Gamette said. “The new bridge is certainly helping with truck traffic flow, alleviating pinch points.”

And while the bridge and other work has not been enough to eliminate the impact of the current surge, both port representatives said the agencies are indeed working now to overcome the challenges they may face a decade or more down the line.

“I couldn’t be more proud to work for an organization that has got the long-term outlook on capital infrastructure that the Port of Long Beach does,” Gamette said. “When we forecast our capital program, we look out 10 years, and we’re thinking about looking out 20 years now.”

“So we’re planning on that kind of horizon, and what that does is allow us to put things in service that take a while to build,” he added. “Those are all going to increase the efficiency of cargo movement, so they will have an impact.”

But, as we’ve seen over the past year and a half, Gamette acknowledged, “they’re not things that are done overnight.” ■

Stuck At Sea

Continued from page 4

extended, local companies supplying and delivering everything from electronics to provisions have also been flourishing.

Ezequiel Perez, co-founder of Long Beach-based Computer Xpress, said his company’s business has increased by 20% during the pandemic. Computer Xpress sells and rents technical equipment like phones and routers to seafarers.

“The first thing they need is the SIM card,” Perez said. “They’re desperate to get it, because they need to communicate with their family.” Computer Xpress fulfills an average of 15 orders per week, Perez estimated, with each order containing items for several crew members on the same ship.

Requests for deliveries to ships anchored in the bay have also increased, according to José Flores, vice president of San Pedro-based U.S. Water Taxi, which transports provision orders to anchored vessels.

“They need to live off of something,” Flores said of the crew members, whose ships are often stuck just off the coast for days as a result of port congestion, running short on milk, eggs and fresh vegetables.

Flores has spent three decades



John Vidaca hooks up a pallet to a crane as the crew of U.S. U.S. Water Taxi loads a barge with 100 pallets of supplies for a ship anchored in the San Pedro Bay port complex Wednesday, October 13, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

running boats between the port of Los Angeles and ships at sea, but the current situation is unprecedented, he said. “I’ve never seen it like this before.”

Two bridges over, at the Seafarer’s

Center, Pettit keeps busy too, ferrying U.S. sailors to grocery stores for their own speciality provisions or to the airport for their trip home. Soon, she hopes, she’ll be able to do the same for

foreign seafarers once again. Until then, her sympathies go out to the sailors stuck at sea.

“I feel so sorry for them,” Pettit said. “It’s like they’re in prison.” ■



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New Law

Continued from page 5

“It’s really the most egregious of them all,” Gonzalez said. “We need to make sure that those people are put on the list as soon as possible.”

After initially opposing the bill, both the California Trucking Association and the California Retailers Association, the two advocacy groups representing major stakeholders on this issue, both took a neutral stance on the new law.

“We were happy to work with Senator Gonzalez to ensure the bill focused on those who walk away from obligations to pay duly owed wage claims,” Chris Shimoda, senior vice president of the California Retailers Association.

Both organizations declined further comment.

The Teamsters, whose port division represents truck drivers, tug boat operators, ship builders and other workers at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, has supported the bill.

“SB 338 will put California on the path to building an economy that truly protects our essential truck drivers,” Teamsters Port Division Director Ron Herrera said in a written statement. “This new law will give retailers the information they need to avoid working with those same lawbreaking companies.”

Repeat offenders, as well as retailers who use port drayage companies with known previous labor law violations, are the declared target of the new law.

“If they continue to use these

trucking companies that use this model—that’s a problem,” Gonzalez said of major retailers and other customers of port drayage carriers.

“This signals, from the government’s standpoint, that this is not OK.”

The bill is part of a larger body of legislation trying to affect change in the trucking industry in recent years, much of which has focused on the appropriate classification of truckers as either independent contractors or employees.

One of the most impactful pieces of legislation on this issue, Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez’s Assembly Bill 5, tightened the requirements that workers—including truck drivers—had to meet to be considered independent contractors in the state of California.

AB 5 officially took effect on January 1, 2020, but has faced continued court challenges, including one by the California Trucking Association, which is currently seeking review by the U.S. Supreme Court.

A year before AB 5 passed, Ricardo Lara, the state’s current insurance commissioner and Lena Gonzalez’s predecessor in the state Senate, authored a bill that first established the list of trucking companies who had yet to pay judgments against them for unpaid wages.

Lena Gonzalez, whose father worked as a truck driver, said she will continue to legislate on the issue of trucker misclassification at the ports.

“We need to continue to push,” she said, “to ensure that we’re correcting these issues.” ■

Port truckers awarded \$30 million in misclassification settlements



Trucks drop off and pick up containers at the Long Beach Container Terminal on the Port of Long Beach’s Pier E Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

A group of port truck drivers have been awarded nearly \$30 million in a settlement with one of the world’s largest port trucking companies, XPO Logistics, following a court battle that lasted over three years.

In two separate lawsuits, one against Rancho Dominguez-based subsidiary XPO Port Services and one against XPO Logistics Cartage in Commerce and San Diego, hundreds of drivers alleged that they were misclassified as independent contractors by the port drayage carriers. As a result, they claim, XPO Logistics

paid them less than minimum wage, failed to reimburse them for business expenses and didn’t provide meal periods, among other offenses. Of the total \$29.5 million XPO Logistics agreed to pay as part of the settlement, roughly \$19 million will go directly to the qualifying truckers—a

group of nearly 800 drivers—with the majority of the remaining funds going to their legal counsel. All parties have expressed their content with the outcome of the court case. “With the legal and regulatory landscape in California evolving, we reached a settlement on terms that are favorable for XPO and should put this matter behind us,” a spokesperson for the company said via email. The statement refers to a series of state laws passed in recent years that set strict conditions on when companies can classify workers as independent contractors and made customers of port drayage companies—many of them large retailers—jointly liable for wage violations resulting from misclassification. Although the settlement amount represents only a fraction of the damages sought by the drivers, the group suing XPO Port Services considered the outcome a “stellar result,” according to court documents. As part of the settlement, XPO Logistics won’t have to re-classify its current drivers included in the lawsuit as employees. Still, the Teamsters, whose port division represents drayage truck drivers, applauded the settlement. “Today’s victory makes clear to other misclassified drivers that the days of misclassification are coming to an end,” the division’s director, Ron Herrera, said in a written statement. “To employers, these settlements should serve as a clear reminder that depriving workers of their wages or failing to provide them with essential job protections is unacceptable, and they will be held accountable.” The settlements are set for a final approval on December 18. ■

Deepening Channels

Continued from page 7

which analyzed five potential paths forward—including leaving the port channels as they are—and recommended a plan that would:

- Deepen the Approach Channel to 80 feet and the West Basin Channel, Pier J Basin and berths to 55 feet;
- Build a Pier J Approach Channel, a turning basin outside of Pier J South and a new dredge electric substation at Pier J South; and
- Ease bends in the Main Channel and make improvements to the Pier J breakwaters.

The project and its associated costs, the report found, would total roughly \$156 million, with the federal government paying \$56 million and the Port of Long Beach funding the rest. Over 50 years, though, the work would cost about \$5.9 million annually—but generate \$21 million each year.

Representatives for the Army Corps did not respond to a request for comment,

but the port’s Managing Director of Engineering Sean Gamette said in an interview that the project could have a significant impact on the port’s operations. “This is an exciting one,” Gamette said. “Not a lot of people like to talk about waterways, dredging—you know, ‘Well, you’re just pulling out a bunch of mud.’ But it actually is very exciting.” Deepening the waterways, in some cases by as little as 4 feet, would allow some ships to enter and exit the Port of Long Beach much more quickly, according to the report, which would ultimately lower national transportation costs. Right now, larger container vessels have to either wait for high tide to enter and leave the port’s West Basin and Pier J Basin, or they have to carry lighter loads to decrease their depth. Liquid bulk ships, meanwhile, must enter and exit the 2-mile-long Approach Channel one at a time or face the same challenges as their container-toting counterparts; those limitations have historically impacted 5-10% of crude oil imports—about 1-3

million tons—per year, the Army Corps found, and that share has grown to 15% more recently. “The whole basis for this recommended project is to increase transportation efficiencies for container vessels and for liquid bulk vessels that call our port,” Gamette said. Container vessels, when fully loaded, can go 52 feet deep, according to Gamette, so deepening the channels they use from the current 50-foot depth to 55 feet will make a significant difference in their ability to navigate the port. Larger liquid bulk vessels, meanwhile, can be 70 feet deep, he said. But those ships need much more under-keel clearance, so deepening the Approach Channel from 76 feet to 80 feet will also be crucial. While the ability to move ships in and out more quickly would have widespread economic benefits, Gamette noted that the project would also help Long Beach in other ways. “Let’s say a container ship, a state-of-the-art container ship, is waiting on a tide to come into the port,” he said. “If it didn’t have to wait, it reduces air

emissions, for example, right? Because it can come right in and plug into shore power. It’s also loaded to maximum capacity, so we’ve got economy-of-scale there. We can improve our air quality through the project because of those kinds of benefits.” And, of course, moving vessels more efficiently could help ease the type of congestion the port is currently experiencing. But the completion of the feasibility report is just one of many more steps that must be completed before work can even begin on the project—let alone until its benefits are realized. Reports on the project’s environmental impacts, for example, must be approved before plans to move forward can be included in the Water Resources Development Act of 2022. The Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners must also weigh in. Any number of the steps ahead could prove to be stumbling blocks for the project. But if all goes according to plan, Gamette said, construction could begin in 2024 or 2025 and last about two years. ■

Change in Supply Chain

Continued from page 6

majority of chassis are manufactured in China, but tariffs on the crucial piece of equipment have made them less available in the U.S. Seroka said port authorities have asked the Biden administration to exempt chassis from tariffs immediately as a means to get more on the ground, while at the same time incentivizing manufacturing companies to build them closer to home. But the tariffs are not the only cause for the chassis shortage, Seroka said. Dwell times at the ports are at their highest levels ever, he said, with containers sitting on chassis at the port for up to nine days, waiting for warehouse space to open up. The model for chassis provisioning was built on a three-and-a-half day turn time, he added. This also is causing further shortages in empty containers. A lack of truck drivers also is fostering congestion, Seroka said, noting that there is a 20% annual attrition rate in the truck driving business nationwide. “We have to find a way to attract, recruit and retain drivers,” he said.

Not unexpected and avoidable

Increased cargo movement through the San Pedro Bay port complex was not unexpected, Cordero said. In fact, estimates for 2021 are well behind projections made 14 years ago when Cordero was president of the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners. In 2007, the commission estimated some 35 million 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs)—the standard measuring unit for shipping containers—would pass through ports in 2020. Nearly a decade later, in 2016, the 2020 forecast was 19 million TEUs, Cordero said. “So we knew many years ago what the volume was going to be here, so the volume should not be a surprise to us,” Cordero said. “The number of containers coming to this significant gateway are not going to be any less in the coming years.”



A cargo ship unloads its containers in the Port of Long Beach Monday, October 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.



Container ships wait to enter the Port of Long Beach Monday, October 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

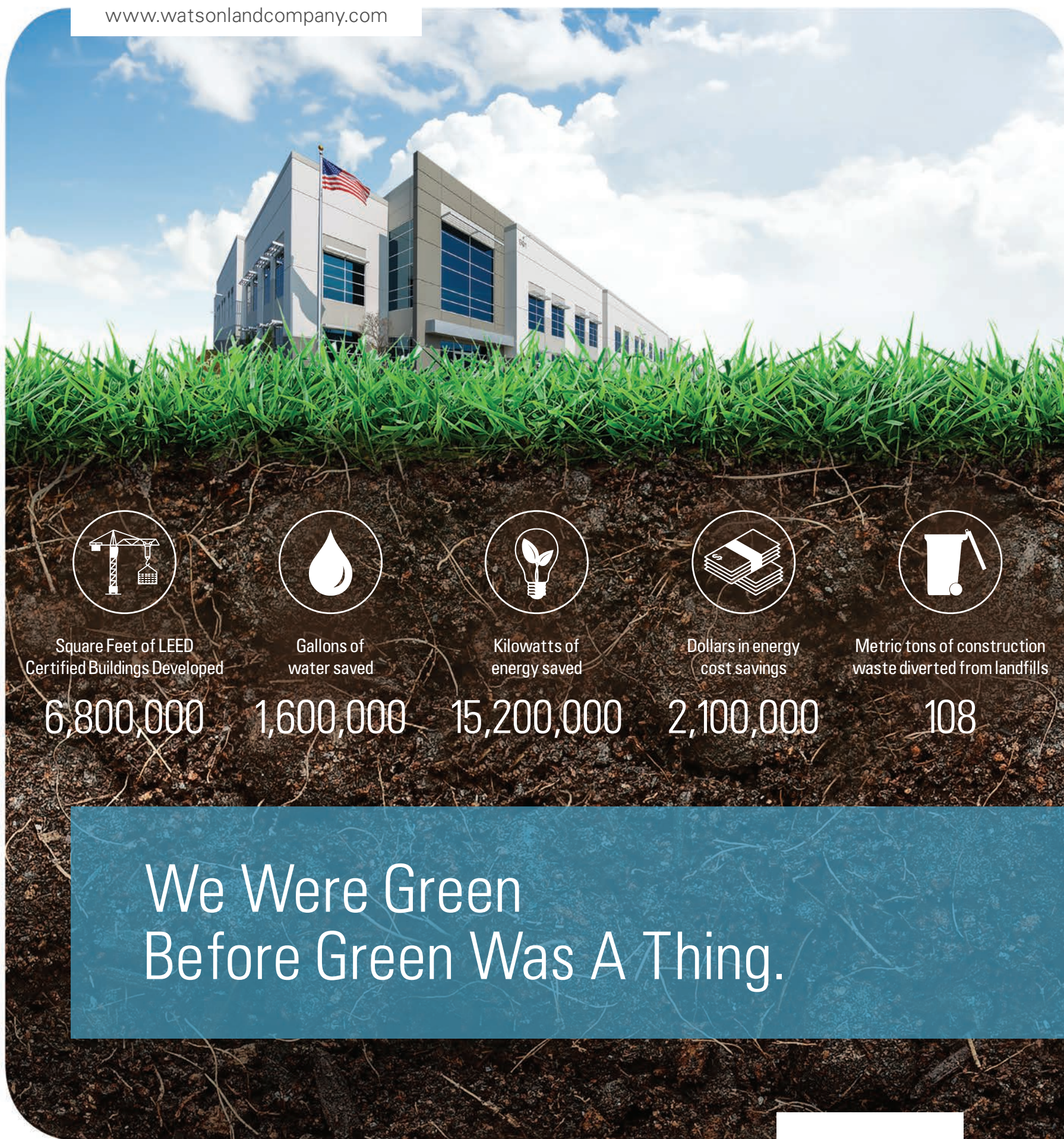
Last year, the Port of Long Beach moved just over 8.1 million TEUs, breaking its single-year record set in 2018 by about 20,000 TEUs. The Port of LA, meanwhile, moved 9.2 million TEUs, its fourth-highest volume in a single year. This year, the ports are on track to surpass 20 million TEUs, according to Cordero, who said he would not be surprised to see 10 million TEUs pass through Long Beach. By 2040, the ports could be processing as many as 40 million TEUs, according to Seroka. For years, the continuous increase in cargo volumes through the San Pedro Bay ports—the busiest port complex in the United States and in the top 10 globally—should have warranted far more investment by the federal government, Seroka said. “What you see right now outside the

ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles is more than a decade of underinvestment,” Seroka said, noting that the federal government has invested \$11 billion in East Coast and Gulf Coast ports, compared to \$1 billion on the West Coast over the last 10 years. “I would argue that had we kept pace with the investment needs for infrastructure here—near-dock rail yards, digital infrastructure, roads, rail connectors—you wouldn’t see [dozens] of ships in the bay today,” he said. The Biden administration’s landmark infrastructure bill, which has been tied up in Congress for months, includes \$17 billion for port infrastructure, in part to reduce congestion. Seroka said the twin ports will campaign to receive their fair share of that money if and when the legislation is approved.

Short- and long-term solutions

At the federal and state levels, Cordero said there are a lot of good ongoing conversations about how best to deal with the challenges the San Pedro Bay complex and other ports face. The Biden administration has even gone as far as creating a Supply Chain Disruption Task Force, which includes the two port executive directors and is headed by John Porcari, who served as deputy secretary and COO of the Department of Transportation during the Obama administration. In recent comments for U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Seroka laid out 10 short- and long-term recommendations to ease port congestion in Southern California and across the country. In the short term, Seroka pushed for incentives for improved cargo flow, enhanced real-time info sharing, adjusted operations schedules and truck gate management, and better use of existing capacity, which is seeing 30% of truck

appointments going unused. In the long term—on top of increased infrastructure investment and improved trade policy—Seroka recommends various agencies and companies work as a multi-modal system rather than silos, improved supply chain digitization and a \$140 million workforce training center to accelerate job growth and create a pipeline of skilled labor. Locally, the ports of Long Beach and LA have taken it upon themselves to push policy to expedite cargo’s movement through the complex. The most recent effort came Sept. 17, when the ports sent a joint statement announcing expanded hours and a move toward 24/7 operations in what Cordero calls the “Amazon state of mind.” Days after the initial announcement, the Port of Long Beach unveiled a pilot program at the Total Terminals International container terminal on Pier T that expanded truck gate hours with a third shift from 3-7 a.m. Monday through Thursday. At Los Angeles, operations have been expanded with additional days and hours, Seroka said. Day and night productivity is up 50% compared to pre-surge figures, and every vessel that calls on the port loads and unloads 11,300 TEUs, on average. But despite their best efforts, delays persist. “I have no expectation that this industry is going to move to [24/7] in the short term, but we’ve announced to the world and to the shippers that the Port of Long Beach is serious about extending gate hours,” Cordero said. “For this to work, for systemic change, it takes the entire supply chain and other stakeholders.” “The onus is not just on the terminal operators, but everybody involved in the supply chain.” ■



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A forklift operator moves materials at the SnugTop manufacturing facility in West Long Beach Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

SnugTop to leave Long Beach after more than 50 years

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

For 56 years, SnugTop has manufactured aftermarket fiberglass truck caps, also known as camper shells, at its 5-acre facility in West Long Beach. But operations ceased for good Oct. 15, according to the company.

“Long Beach has been our home for many years [and] we are proud of the work our team members have done in this location,” John Aleval, president of SnugTop parent company Truck Accessories Group, said in an email.

“Unfortunately, we have outgrown the facility and cannot successfully expand to meet the needs of our customers.”

SnugTop will relocate its Long Beach operations to Mexicali, a move that will impact 123 employees, according to city spokesman Kevin Lee. Long Beach, though, has already begun assisting those affected workers—and is hopeful about what the property’s availability could mean for the area.

Long Beach officials were unaware of TAG’s decision to leave the city until the company submitted a Worker

Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act letter to the city’s Pacific Gateway Workforce Innovation Network on Aug. 17, Lee said. Under the California Labor Code, WARN requires employers to give a 60-day notice to affected employees as well as state and local representatives prior to a plant closing or mass layoff.

Pacific Gateway filed a petition on Aug. 18 to the U.S. Department of Labor to start an investigation to determine if impacted employees are

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Long Beach nonprofit expands to combat human trafficking

By **TESS KAZENOFF** / Reporter

Brave Global is increasing its efforts to combat human trafficking after receiving a \$10,000 donation from the Rainbow Sandals Foundation.

The donation follows the organization’s participation in Sept. 23’s Long Beach Gives event, in which it raised \$6,686.

Brave Global began in 2014 as a grassroots effort at Revive Church in Long Beach before officially becoming a nonprofit in 2017. The group’s work has now expanded to a global movement, with 21 chapters across the United States and five in other countries.

The organization continues to expand and is currently developing a leadership academy program in South Africa, with another chapter “blooming” in Australia as well, said Brave Global CEO Miley Waterman.

“We’re just trying to get in every corner of the world that we can, and of course, continue to nurture our chapters here in the United States as well,” Waterman said.

According to Waterman, it is a misconception that exploitation and trafficking only happen in developing countries.

“That’s why we’re so intent on getting into as many spaces, into as many countries, and into as many cities as possible,” Waterman said, “because the fact is that exploitation and trafficking is everywhere. It’s in everybody’s backyard.”

An integral aspect of Brave Global’s mission is targeting those who are more commonly victims of human trafficking: teenage girls who were previously in the foster care system.

According to estimations by the National Foster Youth Institute, 60% of child trafficking victims are current or former foster youth.

While many factors can contribute to increased susceptibility to human trafficking, Waterman explained that the lack of a support system, along with inconsistent housing, “can really wreak havoc on a young person’s identity, and just understanding their worth and their value.”

As a response to this, over the years Brave Global has worked to connect to Long Beach schools, probation officers, Department of Child and Family Services, the Police Department and foster care services to create an empowerment initiative for teenage girls in foster care. Empowerment is “the goal and the solution,” said Waterman.

What first began simply as a youth empowerment event attended by 200 girls in Long Beach has expanded dramatically. Brave Global still holds empowerment events—its last pre-pandemic in-person event hosted 600

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Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau wins ‘Best in the West’ award for 5th consecutive year

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

Since the Long Beach Convention Center reopened to large-scale in-person events in August, staff at the center and the Convention and Visitors Bureau have been hard at work booking conventions for the upcoming year—and their work has been recognized on multiple fronts.

The bureau and center have once again been honored as the “Best in the West” in Northstar Meetings’ Stella Awards, a nationwide recognition of excellence in the event industry. This marks the fifth consecutive year Long Beach has won the award—more than any other bureau or center, according to CVB spokesperson Samantha Mehlinger.

“Winners are selected by clients and peers, and it is rewarding to see



A man walks by the Terrace Theater at the Long Beach Convention Center Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

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Best in the West

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that we are being recognized for our efforts to deliver exceptional service and experiences,” Steve Goodling, President & CEO of the Long Beach CVB, said in a written statement.

The CVB’s recent work has also been reflected in its booking leads.

Since January, the bureau’s volume of leads for new bookings has grown by 70%, with sales missions to Chicago and Washington netting 100 new leads, Mehlinger said.

The bureau’s close relationship with

the Convention Center has been crucial to its continued success, Goodling added. “We truly work as a seamless unit, and our relationship is what sets us apart and has earned us these prestigious recognitions.”

During the mandatory downtime created by the pandemic, the bureau and center increased in-house production capacity to enable hybrid events, which combine in-person and virtual programming.

The additional know-how and technical capability built during that time, which included the hiring of two staff members focused on creating hybrid event concepts as well as the

buildout of an on-site studio and editing space, have been a major selling point for some clients.

Scott Steen, executive director of the American Physiological Society, said he was highly impressed by the center’s infrastructure and the bureau staff’s vision during a recent site visit. His event, a new spin off of the Experimental Biology conference, is expected to draw 3,000-4,000 attendees—who would come to Long Beach in April 2023, if the contract is signed.

“We had great ideas and we thought, ‘How can we possibly afford those?’,” Steen said, lauding the cost savings of Long Beach Convention Center’s

existing infrastructure, including the necessary technology to host part of the conference online. “It makes a lot of our real dreams for this meeting possible.”

Some of the technological capabilities of the center include increased lighting and robotic cameras to ease video production—but the draw also extends to the furniture and interior design, he noted.

Most convention centers are big, modern, concrete boxes, Steen said. “Long Beach is doing something absolutely unique,” he added, comparing the center’s interior to that of a boutique hotel. “It invites attendees to sit down and really creates community.” ■

Proof of vaccination now required at Long Beach bars, other drinking establishments

By BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Patrons of Long Beach bars and other drinking establishments, what the city calls “high-risk settings,” are now required to show proof of at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccination to enter indoor areas.

The city mandate applies to all bars, wineries, breweries, nightclubs and lounges that do not have a permitted kitchen. While not required, the city “strongly recommends” restaurant owners to require vaccine verification for indoor dining.

“In general everyone was really supportive,” Liberation Brewing Co. co-owner Dan Regan said after the first weekend of enforcing the mandate. “A bunch of people even thanked us and were excited to show their card. They had cute little cases and things.”

Bars and other drinking establishments are most frequently patronized by people in their 20s and 30s, the age group least likely to be vaccinated, according to city data. Less than 64% of Long Beach residents ages 18-34 are vaccinated, compared to more than 67% of people ages 12-17, and over 87% of residents 35 and over.

Employees also must be vaccinated to work indoors in these businesses but may qualify for medical or religious exemption. Exempt staff are required to be tested weekly.

The ordinance expands on Nov. 4, requiring people to be fully vaccinated to work and drink indoors at drinking establishments.

“If folks didn’t have vax proof, it was mostly because they forgot it,” Regan said, adding that the brewery has put up a sign with a QR code for people to

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Alyssandra Nighswonger restocks treats at the latest Romeo Chocolates location inside The Hangar at Long Beach Exchange Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Nighswonger was hired specifically to manage the new location, which is celebrating its grand opening Nov. 6. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Romeo Chocolates opens new location in The Hangar

By CHEANTAY JENSEN / Reporter

Romeo Chocolates celebrated its four-year anniversary in Downtown this month, but these days owner and chocolatier Romeo Garcia has even more to celebrate with the opening of his second store at The Hangar, at Long Beach Exchange.

“We wanted to be in The Hangar for quite some time,” Garcia said. “We thought it would be a perfect footprint for a local Long Beach brand to be in The Hangar... to kind of share our Long Beach story here.”

The award-winning gourmet chocolate shop, nestled between Amorcito and Jay Bird’s Nashville Hot Chicken, is currently open for business. However, a grand opening celebration is expected Nov. 6 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 2 p.m., and Romeo Chocolates will offer special gift boxes and prizes for those who attend.

Romeo Chocolates at The Hangar is smaller than its flagship store on Pine Avenue and doesn’t have a kitchen. As such, Garcia said The Hangar location will focus on providing one-of-a-kind and curated packaged gifts of his chocolates and truffles, brownies, soft-baked cookies, as well as products such as candles or houseplants from other local businesses.

“We support a lot of our local makers because we kind of grew up together as a cohort, as entrepreneurs,” Garcia

said. “So, we want to extend that support forward to other artists.”

Romeo Chocolates will be an ideal destination for holiday gifts, offering special holiday collections and limited-edition creations soon to come, Garcia said. Patrons will be able to purchase Dia De Los Muertos Las Calaveras truffles, or skull candy chocolates, and Garcia said they’re also bringing back the very popular hot cocoa bombs and chocolate-covered strawberries.

And, of course, guests will be treated to the premiere artisan chocolates and truffles that the lauded chocolatier is so well known for. Garcia uses ethically sourced cacao and chocolate from around the world to make his European-centric treats, particularly modeled after Belgium truffle-making traditions. His masterful training in Belgium guides his style, but Garcia’s training also heralds from San Francisco’s Ecole Chocolat Professional School of Chocolate Arts.

Every chocolate, from dark to milk to white, is single-origin, Garcia said, and he will often travel to the locations he sources from, including Ecuador, the Philippines and Hawaii.

“That means that we can dial in to a specific country, or even region within that country, to get the flavor profiles of that chocolate, similar to wine,” he said. “We support ethically sourced, fair-trade chocolates and we make sure that throughout the supply chain we’re supporting the farmers and the makers

in the cacao industry.”

Garcia noted that those who are interested in keeping up with new trends within the company may sign up for their monthly VIP subscription program which, among its many perks, offers monthly chocolate and wine tastings that often incorporate new creations Garcia plans to put on the menu.

Garcia got his start in the world of chocolate while taking weekend cooking classes in San Francisco. He said he became so fond of the craft he left his fast-paced job in higher education to pursue this new creative career. He started by selling his chocolates, made from home, at pop-ups in neighborhoods all over Long Beach until he was able to open his first brick-and-mortar three years later, in 2017.

When Romeo Garcia thinks back on the journey of his life, he’s grateful.

“It was truly a labor of love, because I cashed out my teacher’s retirement, which wasn’t a whole lot to begin with,” he said. “And then we launched a successful Kickstarter campaign, and we were able to open that [first] shop. I think by the grace of just really supportive customers and a supportive community, we survived and are continuing to survive through the pandemic and making adjustments as we go.”

Romeo Chocolates at The Hangar, 4150 McGowen St., is open Thursday through Sunday from noon to 7:30 p.m. ■

Long Beach will simplify rental assistance application in hopes of reaching more tenants, landlords

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Getting relief money into the hands of landlords for tenants who were unable to pay rent during the pandemic remains a slow process, so the Long Beach City Council asked city officials earlier this month to tweak the program to make it more efficient.

The statewide eviction moratorium ended Sept. 30 and landlords can now begin evicting residential tenants who have not already applied for rent relief programs like the one in Long Beach. Those who have already applied are protected from evictions through March 2022.

Long Beach was granted \$64 million in rent relief funds from the state and federal government but has only allocated about \$19.6 million of it to people who have applied for aid, according to an Oct. 4 city memo.

Renters need to have a household income of between 50% and 80% of the area median income to qualify for aid. Those income limits mean a family of four could make between \$56,300 and \$90,100 and qualify for help.

The city is not alone in its slow distribution rate. Just 38% of the \$25 billion in total funding made available in the first round of federal funding has been spent nationwide, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, which tracks rent relief programs in all 50 states.

Councilman Rex Richardson asked city management to look at making a simpler, streamlined application that could allow landlords to apply on behalf of multiple tenants who might qualify for rent assistance.

Richardson’s request also asked for an additional three months of rent to be covered for tenants who apply and for the data to be made publicly available on a dashboard, something many other cities across the country already do.

Richardson said there are nearly 16,000 renters behind on rent, and at the city’s current pace, it wouldn’t use all of its rent relief funding until August 2022. Making the application simpler and broader by allowing landlords to apply for multiple tenants at once could allow hard-to-reach tenants and those unaware of the program to be covered, he said.

“We want to make it easier to protect more people,” Richardson said.

The city has seen nearly 20,000 people register as applicants but only 7,105 applications have been completed, Development Services Director Oscar Orci said in his Oct. 4 memo. There

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Customers purchase cannabis products at Chronic Pain Relief Center in West Long Beach Friday, April 9, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

City Council could vote to allow more cannabis dispensaries early next year

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach could soon start allowing additional cannabis dispensaries to operate in the city, but a decision on how and where they’ll be able to operate—and whether the industry will be taxed more—could be months away.

The additional eight dispensary licenses the council is considering creating would be reserved for equity applicants, or those who have relatively low net worth and have criminal backgrounds tied to cannabis. It could be years before they actually open, but several council members expressed a desire to speed up that process.

The City Council voted Oct. 12 to move forward with crafting an ordinance to address how far new

equity dispensaries should be located from existing dispensaries and how applicants will be prioritized and selected for the coveted eight new licenses.

The council also asked city staff to find a funding source other than a tax increase on cannabis businesses to cover the roughly \$555,000 it could cost to expand the city’s cannabis social equity program to support new business operators.

A proposal from city staff suggested raising the tax rate on some cannabis businesses by .25% to offset the startup and ongoing costs to pay for additional employees to administer the program, something that was opposed by the industry and multiple members of the council.

“Not that I’m opposed to ensuring

things are taxed at an appropriate level, but it does seem a bit counter to what we just did,” Mayor Robert Garcia said of the proposed tax increase and its potential effect on equity business owners.

City Manager Tom Modica said that tax increase was proposed because the extra revenue produced by additional cannabis equity businesses likely wouldn’t be available for another two to three years.

The city could pursue grant funding or reduce positions in other departments to cover the costs for the equity program, Modica said, and those options will likely be presented to the council when the ordinance is drafted.

The ordinance would also allow an unlimited number of delivery-

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A jogger is on a morning run alone Pine Avenue near Shoreline Drive the day after the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach Monday, September 27, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Parts of Grand Prix track to remain in place until May following City Council approval

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach will allow portions of the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach race track to stay in place until May 2022 after the City Council approved a request from race organizers earlier this month that they say will cut back on setup time and costs.

Roughly 1,000 concrete rails will remain in place on Shoreline Drive, Seaside Way and in the “Elephant Lot,” the parking lot next to the Long Beach Arena, with the 2022 race setup window just months away.

Race organizers said that leaving up about half of the 2,400 concrete blocks it put in place for the race

last month would save them about three days of setup time and around \$89,000, some of which will be used to resurface city streets defaced by race activity.

Jim Michaelian, president and CEO of the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach, said that it typically takes about 53 days to set up the track and three weeks to take it all down. Crews began setting up this year’s race in early August.

The association had originally asked the city to leave up more than just the concrete blocks, but its request was reduced to less than half of the concrete blocks in place for the Sept. 25 race weekend.

City Manager Tom Modica said that the location of the blocks, which will be east of Pine Avenue, is not expected to interfere with businesses at The Pike or the Aquarium of the Pacific.

The 2021 race was pushed to late September, as race organizers hoped to host the race during a time of the year where large crowds were allowed to gather with limited restrictions. The race is traditionally held in April, but Los Angeles County had barely entered the “orange” tier of the state’s reopening plan in April, which still disallowed crowds at sporting events.

The 2022 race is scheduled for April 8-10. ■

SnugTop

Continued from page 13

eligible for additional benefits on top of those normally available for dislocated workers in California. The petition was approved on Sept. 13 and will equate to a pool of several million dollars in additional benefits for workers seeking retraining assistance, Lee said.

Dislocated employees have already begun receiving rapid reemployment services such as webinars, one-on-one job search assistance and informational sessions through Pacific Gateway, Lee said.

SnugTop, originally named Custom Fiberglass Manufacturing Co., was founded in 1959 when Bob Kyle began

building aftermarket hardtops for European sports cars he called “Snug Products.” The transition to truck caps came with the company’s move to Long Beach in 1965.

The company was acquired by TAG in 2016. The conglomerate is the largest manufacturer and supplier of fiberglass truck caps for recreational and commercial vehicles, according to an announcement. Headquartered in Elkhart, Ind., TAG also owns LEER, Century and BedSlide brands.

“Closing a facility is never an easy decision,” Aleve said in a press release. “For the security and longevity of the company, we are operating in a responsible manner to help solidify the company’s place in the industry, while

allowing for continued growth and a strong employee base.”

SnugTop will vacate some 5.17 acres just off the 710 Freeway on the Westside, including 117,888 square feet of improvements, according to an INCO brochure. Though operations will end on Oct. 15, it will take the company weeks to fully withdraw from the space, Aleve said, noting they will be out before the end of the year.

Due to its proximity to the Port of Long Beach, vacancy on the city’s industrial Westside is scarce, often with as much as 99% of space leased. The property is a “rare opportunity in the area,” according to INCO Commercial President Bill Townsend, who is representing property owner

Rental Assistance

Continued from page 17

were over 9,700 open cases waiting for approval at that time, Orci said.

Simplifying the application process was widely supported, but some commenters asked the city to lobby for more flexible income requirements, noting that the 80% area median income cap could exclude people who need help but can’t qualify based on their old income.

“That income level is what makes it extremely difficult for everyone in Long Beach,” said Mike Murchison, a lobbyist who represents small property owners in Long Beach. “If that doesn’t change we’re going to be in the same boat months from now.”

Long Beach Deputy Director of Development Services Chris Koontz said that if tenants can prove that they lost their job or have qualified for other aid like food assistance programs, they can be approved for the city’s rental program. Koontz said the city encourages them to apply, but those are more complicated cases and would take longer to approve.

“We are working on those cases that are more complex or difficult, but they require hours of staff time and we have thousands of pending applications,” Koontz said.

The United States Treasury has warned states, counties and cities that it would begin reclaiming unspent funds. But it doesn’t appear Long Beach is in danger of losing any of its money immediately.

Long Beach, in fact, could be in line to apply for additional aid that the Treasury intends to distribute over the next few months after it reclaims it from underperforming agencies.

The city has distributed or is in the process of approving \$19.6 million of the first \$30 million it received from state and federal agencies. Because the allocations were broken up into two batches, Long Beach has actually allocated about 64.9% of its first round of funding as of September. ■

Cannabis

Continued from page 16

only licenses for equity applicants that would allow businesses to deliver cannabis so long as it has a commercial address in the city. Delivery services for Long Beach businesses are currently limited to existing dispensary storefronts.

A feasibility report published by the city earlier this month made a number of recommendations alongside the one to add the eight additional equity dispensary licenses.

The report suggested expanding the city’s “Green Zone,” the areas where dispensaries are allowed to open, by reducing buffers for parks, beaches and schools, with the latter being aligned with the state buffers of 600 feet.

Raising the cannabis tax by .25%, using a lottery to help award applicants that were vetted by a panel of volunteers and experts and amending the city’s municipal code to create more protections for equity applicants were also suggestions contained in the report.

It’s unlikely the city will use a lottery, though, after several council

members asked for the city to use a merit-based approach only, meaning that applicants would go through a traditional request-for-proposal process and the businesses that are most likely to thrive could be selected. Garcia also asked that applicants who have been advocating for these licenses for years be rewarded for those efforts.

“If we have social equity folks who have been engaged with the city for years and they qualify and meet the criteria, should that person have the same or a better chance of opening a dispensary than an applicant coming in?” Garcia said.

One of the focal points of last week’s debate was on the buffer zones that determine the city’s “Green Zone.” City staff recommended reducing the distance dispensaries can be located from schools to the state’s requirement of 600 feet, and eliminating the buffers for beaches and parks unless they have a playground.

However, that received pushback from some members. Councilwoman Suzie Price asked that a density cap, something that would limit the number of dispensaries in a given City Council district, be an option for

when the ordinance returns for a vote next year.

Another recommendation, from Councilwoman Mary Zendejas, was to increase buffers between individual dispensaries from 1,000 feet to 1,500 feet. Not every member of the council was on board with increasing buffer distances.

“We’re trying to reduce the buffer zones and expand the areas where equity licenses can be located in our city and that particular addition makes things less restrictive,” Councilman Al Austin said of the request. “It pushes us in the opposite direction.”

Austin had requested the feasibility report in March and has been supportive of creating additional opportunities for equity licenses. Austin, who represents the city’s 8th City Council District, which includes parts of Bixby Knolls and the Los Cerritos Neighborhood, has just one dispensary in his district.

“For me, the most important thing is that it’s a fair process,” Austin said.

Those in the cannabis industry were widely supportive of the city’s recommendations, with the exception of the tax increase. They said the increase could work to send more potential

customers to the black market that can charge lower prices because of the absence of taxes.

While the city appears on track to create eight new dispensary licenses, there was support from the community and the industry for as many as 34 additional licenses being set aside for equity applicants. Some operators still believe the number should be higher than eight.

The eight licenses would give equity owners a 20% share of the city’s dispensary operations once they’ve all opened shop.

“Twenty percent is what you leave for a tip at a restaurant,” Carlos Zepeda said. “It’s an afterthought.”

The city expects for the ordinance, with all the council requests made, to come back to the council for a vote sometime in February.

It would then hire a consultant to help establish how applications will be evaluated including who would serve on the panel that’s expected to vet each application.

The application process, which could start as soon as May 2022, could end in November, when the city thinks it could begin to issue the eight new dispensary licenses. ■

CITY OF LONG BEACH

BID OPPORTUNITIES

TITLE	BID NUMBER	DUE DATE
Citywide Disposable Waste Bags	ITB LB21-101	10/21/2021
Engineering Services for Water Main Improvement 2-F – Queensway Drive	RFP (MC-5221)	10/21/2021
Engineering Services for Water Main Improvement 3-A – Ximeno Avenue	RFP (MC-5225)	10/21/2021
Engineering Services for the Alamitos Tanks No. 11 & 13 Rehabilitation Project	RFP (EO-3600)	10/26/2021
Emergency Communications & Operations Center, HVAC Upgrade	3005010080	10/28/2021
Engineering & Inspection Svcs. for the 2022 Water Main Bridge Crossings Master Plan	RFP (MO-3820)	10/28/2021
Engineering Design Services for the Alley Water Main Conversion – Pacific Avenue	RFP (MC-5198)	10/28/2021
Engineering Services for the S-7 Sewer Lift Station Rehabilitation Project	RFP (SC-0410)	10/28/2021
Long Beach MUST Facility Phase 1C - Wetlands	R-7187	11/04/2021
Bicycle Racks	ITB PW21-092	11/04/2021

Bidder Registration

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

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First round of City Council district maps is released—and they spell big changes

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Initial maps of possible new council district boundaries show some of the current elected leaders could be ineligible to run in their districts—a change that could dramatically alter the political landscape in the city.

RedistrictingPartners, the consultant hired to help the Long Beach Independent Redistricting Commission draw new political lines, released 10 potential maps last week. Every version seemingly puts at least one incumbent council member in danger of being drawn out of the districts they currently represent.

Multiple versions of the maps would have at least two current council members living in the same district, with one plan creating a situation where there would be two open districts, with no incumbent.

There’s not a single map that puts 3rd District Councilwoman Suzie Price in the district that she’s represented since 2014.

“I am not able to provide any specific reactions regarding the preliminary maps because it’s important that the individual council members not place undue influence on the process,” Price said in a text. “I trust that the commission will make an informed decision based on past and future public input.”

The submissions consist of five maps labeled A through E. The second set of the maps are essentially copies of the first five but with small adjustments so that the population in each district is no more than 5% different. The city’s charter requires the deviation, or the difference in population, to be no more than 10%. After the census data release

last month, the city’s deviation is now closer to 15%.

The maps released last week are by no means the final maps. The commission is meeting Oct. 20 at City Hall to discuss the maps and potentially narrow its options down to three maps, which could include maps submitted by the public, and be further altered during the Oct. 20 meeting.

Those three maps will then be made public for additional review for another week before a meeting on Oct. 27 reserved specifically for public comment on the finalists. A meeting on Nov. 10 is the first time the commission could vote on a final map, and selecting one will require a supermajority (nine votes) of the board to approve of a map.

It would have to take another procedural vote Nov. 17 to confirm the final map. The commission has until Dec. 7 to make a final selection, which gives it some room for disagreement among its 13 members.

Here are some key takeaways from last week’s release:

The 5th District

Lakewood, the city directly north of the 5th, has a city motto of “Times change, values don’t.” The same could be said about the 5th District’s boundaries. The district stands to be one of the least changed in the city if one of the draft maps is eventually approved.

In most of the 10 versions, the district would lose the Artcraft Manor Neighborhood south of Willow Street and some unpopulated census blocks at the Long Beach Airport but would regain the Whale Tale, a chunk of El

Dorado Park that was gerrymandered away from it 20 years ago.

North Long Beach

The city’s northern districts were expected to see some change because of uneven population growth in the area over the past 10 years, but some of the ways the maps divide up the north could leave it unrecognizable. Six of the maps show what is currently the city’s 9th Council district being split into two vertical districts, with one map having the eastern half reach as far south as the Long Beach Airport.

Another version, which sought to consolidate all of West Long Beach, has all portions of the city west of the 710 Freeway, including the Port of Long Beach, stacked into one district. Some neighborhood groups goals of maintaining South Street as a natural border for the 9th District and reunifying the Los Cerritos Neighborhood that was cut in half in 2011 could be achieved, depending on what maps advance.

Southeast Long Beach

While the 5th District could emerge from the redistricting process relatively unchanged, the same cannot be said for the 3rd and 4th Districts, according to the draft maps released last week.. All versions of the maps show the 4th District expanding south while having its current western boundary moved east.

Those moves would see Cal State Long Beach be absorbed by the 4th District while the 3rd District, which includes Naples and Belmont Shore, would push westward. Multiple maps show what is currently the 3rd District

reaching as far west as Alamitos Avenue. Its current boundary ends at Junipero Avenue.

Cambodians

The Cambodian community and the good governance group, Common Cause, helped establish the ballot measure that created the Redistricting Commission with the hopes that it would reunite as many Cambodians in Central Long Beach into one district to restore the community’s voting power.

None of the draft maps show a dramatic increase in the Asian population in the area where 6th District and much of Cambodia Town are currently located. Most of the maps show marginal increases in the overall Asian population, which was 20% in the 6th District after the 2010 census, and the voting age population remained around its 26% mark from 2010 in most of the proposed maps. As was the case in 2010, the proposed maps showed a large Latino majority in the area that is currently the 6th District.

Long Beach Airport

A rallying cry from a persistent group of community members demanding that the Long Beach Airport be touched by as many districts as possible appears to have achieved that. Most of the draft maps have at least three council districts touching airport property.

The airport is currently located entirely in the 5th District, and other residents have opined that without their districts touching it, their voices on airport matters would go unheard.

Continued on page 22



Pedestrians pass the unfinished Alamitos Beach concession stand Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. The city is seeking a new contractor after the original failed to complete the project after more than two years. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

City seeking new contractor for Alamitos Beach concession stand after previous one failed to complete work after more than two years

By JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The city could begin looking for a new contractor to complete the \$9 million beach concession stand at Alamitos Beach after its current one failed to complete work on time, or at all, according to a city memo.

The Alamitos Beach concession stand project was part of an overhaul of the city’s beachfront concession areas. The stands at Junipero and Granada beaches have already been completed, and have food vendor contracts approved.

The City Council is expected to vote this week to approve a takeover agreement that would allow the city to demand that the bonding company for

Klassic Engineering and Construction Inc., which was awarded the original deal, find a new contractor to complete the work.

Joshua Hickman, a manager in the Public Works Business Operations Bureau, said that the concession stand is about 90% complete, but the construction firm showed an inability to complete the project.

Hickman said some of the bigger issues were the non-completion of the permanent electrical system of the stand as well as the contractor’s inability to get the elevator that will be used to transport guests up to its second floor signed off by inspectors.

“It’s less about three to four things not

being done, than a whole bunch that are sitting at about 85% to 90%,” Hickman said of the incomplete work.

While it’s rare for the city to break contracts like this, Hickman said it has happened before, despite the city’s efforts to allow the contractor to complete the job.

The Alamitos Beach concession stand was originally projected to be done by October 2020, but a number of extensions were granted to the contractor before the city finally declared KEC in default of the contract after its inability to substantially complete the build out. Work started on the project in August 2019.

Continued on page 22

Vaccination

Continued from page 16

download their digital vaccine card. “The only pushback has been ‘brave’ comments on social media.”

Liberation has an outdoor patio, Regan said, so the brewery is not turning away customers due to their vaccine status.

The Long Beach ordinance, which is in line with the county mandate, is tame compared to the city of Los Angeles. In a rare move, the LA City Council voted to expand on the county rules, requiring proof of vaccination at indoor restaurants, shopping malls, hair and nail salons, coffee shops, museums and a range of other indoor venues.

Both Long Beach and LA have mostly deferred to county regulations throughout the pandemic.

The LA ordinance expires when the city’s emergency declaration expires. Long Beach, meanwhile, hasn’t “designated a specific sunset for the new vaccine mandate,” according to spokeswoman Jennifer Rice Epstein.

The Long Beach health order also applies to outdoor mega events of 10,000 or more people. Attendees of such events must show proof of vaccination or a negative test from within 72 hours of the event.

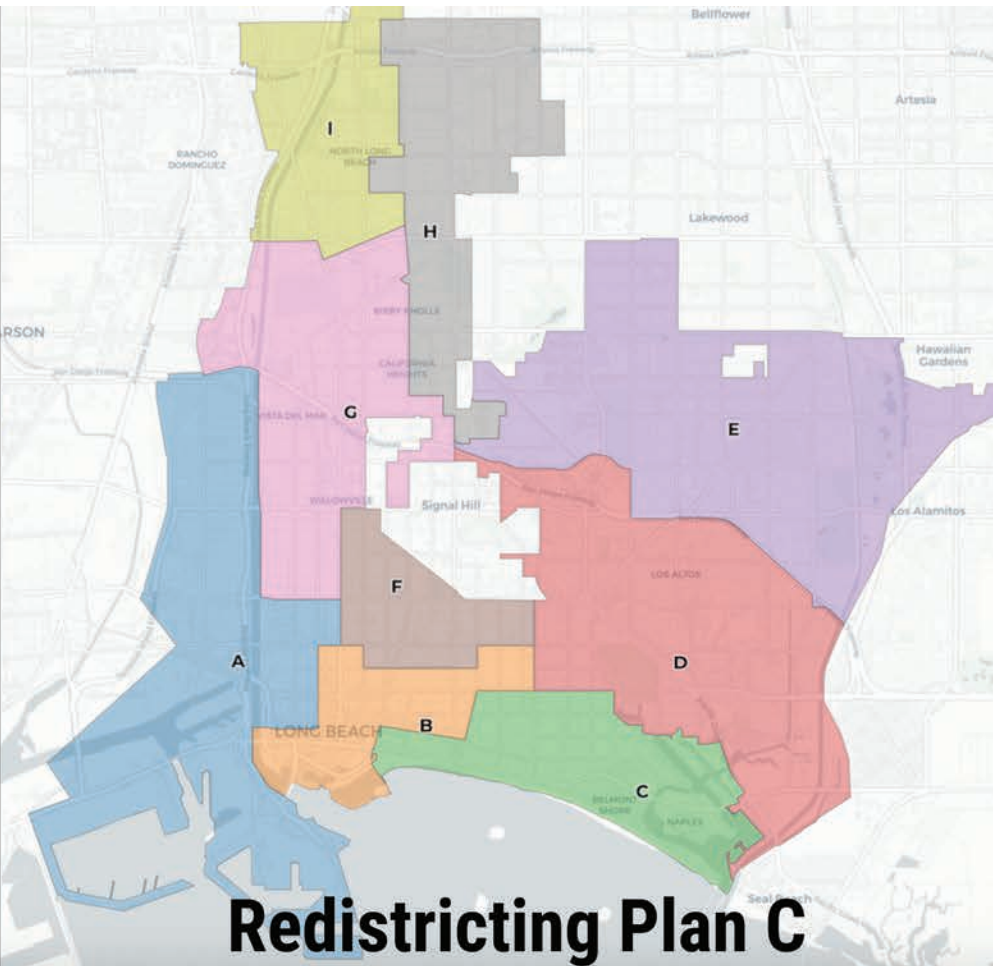
Indoor mega events of 1,000 people or more already require proof of vaccination or a negative test to enter.

In Long Beach, 78% of eligible residents 12 and older have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccination, as of Oct. 11, while 69% of eligible residents are fully vaccinated against the disease.

“We all want to protect our community by reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19,” Mayor Robert Garcia said in a Sept. 21 press release. “Requiring proof of vaccination in high-risk settings is an important step in achieving that.” ■



Redistricting Plan A



Redistricting Plan C

Two of the 10 new City Council district maps released by the city last week. Maps courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

Human Trafficking

Continued from page 13

girls and their caregivers. But the group has also developed its own curriculum, interactive journals and virtual programming—the latter as a response to the pandemic.

The organization has also forayed into the world of book publishing, with the recent release of, “Brave in Real Life: Stories From Women Who Have Overcome Sexual Exploitation.”

For Waterman, it has been exciting to expand into publishing, while working with survivors of human trafficking to

help tell their stories.

“They want to not wear that victim label, and put on a helper label, and really help other people understand the signs of exploitation and trafficking,” said Waterman.

Perhaps one of Brave Global’s most exciting endeavors has been the Leadership Academy, a six-month intensive virtual program that offers young women mentorship along with skills that will help them with everything from building character to succeeding in their professional lives.

The program is currently recruiting for its second year after a successful launch last year, in which it served 10

people. This year, the academy could accept a maximum of 20 participants, but the goal is to keep the number relatively small, said Waterman.

The program is typically \$1,000, but due to Long Beach Gives donations and the recent \$10,000 donation from Rainbow Sandals Foundation, Brave Global will be able to offer \$500 scholarships to several participants.

In addition to offering scholarships, the funds will be used to “beef up our infrastructure, bring on another administrative coordinator, and ramp up our speakers,” said Waterman.

Applications for this year’s leadership program are open until Nov. 20, and

participants will be notified of their acceptance by mid-December, with the program beginning on Jan. 17.

View more information about the leadership academy and apply at braveglobal.org, or by emailing academy@braveglobal.org.

Long Beach Gives exceeds goal

The third annual online Long Beach Gives event so far raised \$2,050,164, through more than 9,000 donations.

The funds will benefit more than 200 nonprofit organizations.

According to Niko Galvez, Long Beach Gives campaign director, many nonprofits exceeded their goals.

“We had 74 new organizations, and they were so excited with the outpouring of support. Some organizations who hadn’t ever done an online fundraising campaign were surprised at the number of donations that they were able to get,” said Galvez.

“I think having that city-wide day of support means so much to them,” said Galvez. ■

District Maps

Continued from page 20

Port of Long Beach

The Port of Long Beach has been part of the 2nd District for the past 30 years, but the maps released last week show it being consolidated into one district, which could likely be the 1st District, if adopted as drawn. Putting the port into a West Long Beach district was a point made by the public so that the councilmember representing the Westside, an area burdened by port pollution, would also have direct relations with the port.

The 2nd District has been one of the more powerful districts in the city because of its boundaries including the port and the Downtown waterfront, but it appears that could be changing during this redistricting process. ■

Alamitos Beach

Continued from page 21

“Given the performance on the project, we are not likely to work with them again,” Hickman said.

Breaking the contract is not expected to cost the city any additional money to complete the buildout, Hickman said. The city will work with Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company to find a new contractor for the site.

Hickman said the project could benefit from a number of subcontractors remaining on the job that could start work to complete the stand in as little as a few weeks. The project is now expected to be completed by early 2022 when the new tenant, Gaucho Grill, can start its tenant improvements.

The concession stand could open for business by summer 2022. ■

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