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Rocket Lab's Electron rocket blasts off from its New Zealand complex in May. The mission, dubbed "Running out of Toes," was the company's 20th launch. Photo by Andrew Taylor, courtesy of Rocket Lab.

LONG BEACH REVIVES AEROSPACE PAST IN NEW 'SPACE BEACH' ERA

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

The U.S. has entered a new era in space exploration, and Long Beach is determined to be right at the center of it. Once ruled by government agencies, the current wave of innovation in the aerospace industry is largely driven by private companies, from Elon Musk's SpaceX to the space divisions of Richard Branson's Virgin. In an effort to establish the city as "Space Beach," Long Beach is now hoping to cash in on its long-standing heritage in the aerospace industry to secure its share of the space tech pie.

"The past and the future [are] coming together in space for the city," Mayor Robert Garcia, who coined the "Space Beach" moniker, said during an economic

forum in July. "It's about satellites, it's about rockets, it's about space—and Long Beach is in the middle of that."

Long Beach's history as a hub for the aerospace industry has proven to be an asset in this effort.

"A lot of the skills that people learned in that traditional aerospace and defense [industry] transition well to space tech," said Nick Schultz, executive director of the workforce development agency Pacific Gateway. "I think we're really prepared."

The departure or withdrawal of traditional aerospace companies in recent years, most notably Gulfstream and Boeing, has dealt a blow to the local industry and its workforce.

After Boeing's announcement that it would scale down its Long Beach

operations starting in 2005, local employment in aerospace dropped from 9,424 in 2008 to just over 4,200 in 2015, the year the last C-17 plane left Boeing's local manufacturing facility. That number would drop to a historic low of 2,828 workers in the industry three years later.

But since then, aerospace in Long Beach has undergone a significant revitalization, and the workforce gains are clear. Last year, employment in the industry once again crossed the 4,000 mark, and the numbers are trending upward. Currently, local economists predict aerospace employment to be around 6,500, a 48% increase since 2018.

In the past two years alone, several space companies large and small have

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Teletherapy is here to stay

By **ALENA MASCHKE** / Reporter

The pandemic has taken a toll on Americans' mental health—and service providers have had to scramble to keep up. Across the country, providers have seen an increased need for mental health services, and telehealth providers have seen their user numbers soar. Locally, the picture has been more varied, with some providers seeing a drop in patient contacts, while others found themselves overwhelmed by requests.

All, however, have seen symptoms of depression and anxiety increase among their patients. Providing care

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Rocket Lab keeps expanding

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

Not unlike the universe it has set out to explore, Rocket Lab has been in a constant state of expansion since its founding in 2006 by Peter Beck. And since the company's move to Long Beach at the start of 2020, that expansion has been accelerating—from new mission contracts to acquisitions to going public.

"We're always busy," Beck said in an Oct. 19 phone interview, "but it's safe to say we're slightly busier than normal."

In 2021 alone, Rocket Lab has announced more than a dozen new contracts, several of which are for multiple launches. The company has had four launches of its Electron rocket—a launch vehicle for small commercial satellites—so far in 2021, three of which successfully deployed a combined nine satellites into orbit. (The Electron rocket malfunctioned during a May 15 mission.)

Since May 2017, the company has launched 21 Electron rockets.

"Electron has solidified itself," Beck said, "as the go-to for dedicated small launch."

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Aerospace and Mental Health

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PUBLISHER  
**David Sommers**

EDITOR  
**Hayley Munguia**

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR  
**Andrea Estrada**

COLUMNIST  
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VISUALS EDITORS  
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PUBLISHER EMERITUS  
**George Economides**

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211 E. Ocean Blvd., Ste. 400  
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News tips: (562) 655-7678


Advertising: (562) 912-0161

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The future of space will be ADA accessible thanks to Mission: AstroAccess

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON** / Reporter

Twelve people with various disabilities floated weightless in simulated space environments—in the name of science and a more accessible final frontier.

Mission: AstroAccess took off from Long Beach Airport on Oct. 17, carrying the 12 ambassadors—some blind, others with prosthetic limbs and some with hearing and visual impairments. During 15 parabolic maneuvers, various demonstrations took place, some using haptic, lighting and audio cues, to identify challenges and possible solutions for when disabled people venture into space.

“Space should be accessible for all,” co-project lead George Whitesides said in a press conference the day after the mission. “We are on the verge of an incredible moment in human history when ... space opens for the benefit of humanity, and we have to take everyone

with us—that future has to be inclusive.”

During the mission, Zero Gravity Corporation’s modified Boeing 727 climbed from 24,000 feet to 32,000 feet at a 45-degree angle, allowing passengers to feel the pull of 1.8 Gs. At the apex of the parabola, pilots took the aircraft into a controlled dive, creating low- and zero-gravity environments. The maneuver was flown 15 times.

The inaugural flight focused on basic operational tasks to demonstrate the abilities of disabled crew members to work effectively in microgravity and investigate solutions for better accessibility. The ambassadors, who were scientists, consultants, veterans, students, athletes, artists and CEOs, are using their experiences to recommend solutions to challenges they faced.

“It’s important that we’re doing this at this time,” said Ambassador Dana Bolles, a Cal State Long Beach alum and science

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Mary Cooper, a below-the-knee amputee and aerospace engineering and computer science student-athlete at Stanford University, removes her prosthetic leg during Mission: AstroAccess Sunday, Oct. 17, 2021. Photo courtesy of AstroAccess.

Space Beach

*Continued from cover page*

made commitments in the area around the Long Beach airport and beyond.

In February 2020, rocket manufacturer and launch service provider Relativity Space announced that it would build out its 120,000-square-foot headquarters in Long Beach. SpaceX is moving into 6.5 acres at the Port of Long Beach. Morf3d, a parts manufacturer that specializes in 3D-printing for the aerospace industry, announced that it would gradually move its headquarters from El Segundo to Long Beach, starting in the first quarter of 2022.

For Ivan Madera, CEO of Morf3D, the concentration of space-bound companies in Long Beach, compared to more traditional aerospace conglomerates like Raytheon, Boeing and Northrup near Los Angeles International Airport, presented a significant incentive.

“It made sense for us to move more towards the new space regime,” said Madera, whose company’s customers include Relativity Space, as well as Long Beach-based Rocket Lab and Virgin Orbit.

Together, the companies that form this “new space regime” are poised to make up for what was lost over the past two decades.

“When a large aerospace operation leaves, with that also go some of the supply chain and suppliers,” local economist and chair of Cal State Long Beach’s Economics Department Seiji Steimetz said.

But with the relocation and expansion of several high-profile space companies into the city in recent years, the tide has turned. “All these technical, high-paying jobs come back too,” Steimetz noted.

Maintaining the educational infrastructure to fill those positions has been key to the city’s success in revitalizing its aerospace industry.

Over the past two years, 159 workers registered for services with the city’s workforce development agency to help them transition and market their skills through counseling, training and hiring fairs, easing their path into the new space tech industry. And 80% of those who exited the program have found full-time and fully benefited employment with average hourly earnings above \$42, according to Pacific Gateway.

And each year, more engineers are trained at local educational institutions. Counting about 1,700 students currently enrolled and 300 graduates entering the workforce each year, mechanical and aerospace engineering is the largest department within Cal State Long Beach’s College of Engineering.

With a growing local demand for highly skilled workers, department chair Jalal Torabzadeh’s students have found it easy to find work after they leave the school, he said.

“Many of our graduates had a job, even before graduation,” Torabzadeh said. “Some of them have several offers.”

The average pay is high. In total, the industry’s payroll in Long Beach comes out to \$600 million, according to Steimetz’s analysis of confidential data provided by the labor market data company Emsi, with its share of payroll in the city outpacing its share of employment—another indicator for above-average pay.

“I’m absolutely confident that this new Space Beach evolution is on the right path to replace the employment and output that was lost,” Steimetz said. But, he added, “that kind of economic growth doesn’t happen in a vacuum.”

Local experts agree that in order to keep the momentum going, the city has to remain active in creating a welcoming environment for aerospace companies, especially as it competes with other cities and states nationwide that hope to secure their share of the budding industry.

Cost—both for companies and the workers they hope to attract—is a major factor.

“It’s California—it’s the most expensive place to do business in the world,” said Peter Beck, CEO of Rocket Lab, which maintains manufacturing sites across the country and the world. To some extent, that cost difference can be made up through financial benefits, such as tax incentives, he noted. “That’s probably where Long Beach faces a lot of competition.”

Currently, the city does not offer a local tax incentive program specifically for aerospace companies, but such a program is being considered as part of the “Space Beach” initiative, according to Schultz, who also serves as the deputy director of the city’s Economic Development Department.

The state, though, already offers such incentives in a program the city currently supports as a conduit between local companies and the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz).

“Aerospace is one of the state’s main targets,” Schultz said. As for a local tax incentive, “the city is weighing the options to do that,” he added.

Keeping real estate both in the commercial and residential sector affordable will be another crucial component of sustaining the growth of Long Beach’s new space industry.

Madera, of Morf3D, said the cost and amenities of their new Douglas Park headquarters were a major selling

point compared to their current location in El Segundo, as was the relative affordability of workforce housing. “It’s going to be super important that [the city] continue their effort to support that type of environment,” Madera said.

The more companies have moved to Long Beach, the larger the pool of local experts and skilled workers has grown, which has also attracted more startups to the city.

“All these new companies—it’s drawing new people to the area,” said Ian Ballinger, CEO of Nuspace, a new iteration of Keystone, a company that has manufactured parts for the transportation sector in the Los Angeles area since 1903 and moved its headquarters to Long Beach in 2007, as it zeroed in on supplying aerospace companies.

Ballinger said he expects further growth, both in the form of newly founded companies as well as through mergers and acquisitions. “This is really the start of the next generation of the space industry.”

To facilitate collaboration among local players as the industry grows, the city has convened a group of the 26 largest companies, the Long Beach Aerospace Council, which came together for its first meeting in early 2020, just before the pandemic.

“We convene as the neutral broker to connect them to the other resources and get their needs recognized at scale,” Schultz said. “They drive the agenda.”

Looking back at the loss of Boeing’s manufacturing site and the industry’s potential to rebound over the next 10 years, Schultz and other experts express a profound sense of optimism. “I think you could easily see employment in space technology double within a decade,” he said.

“That C-17 closure wasn’t the end of the story. It was just the beginning.” ■

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Rocket Lab’s Electron rocket takes off for the firm’s 21st mission, “It’s a Little Chile Up Here,” in late July. Photo courtesy of Rocket Lab.

Rocket Lab

Continued from cover page

**In the news**  
And there’s still another launch or two in store for 2021.  
Late last month, the firm announced Launch No. 22: the deployment of two Earth-observation satellites for global monitoring company BlackSky, including a controlled ocean splashdown and recovery of the rocket’s first stage.  
Rocket Lab may squeeze in its 23rd launch before the end of the year, but that remains uncertain, according to a company spokesperson.  
The upcoming mission, which could lift off as early as Nov. 11 from the company’s New Zealand launch complex, is Rocket Lab’s third ocean recovery of an Electron stage, but the first during which a helicopter will be stationed in the recovery zone, 200 nautical miles offshore, to track and visually observe the descending stage “in preparation for future aerial capture attempts.”  
The helicopter will not attempt a

mid-air caption during this mission, the company said in the announcement.  
For 2022, at least four Rocket Lab launches are already on the books.  
The company has announced other major partnerships this year, as well. Among the most notable are the use of two of Rocket Lab’s Photon spacecraft in a NASA mission to mars, as well as launch services for NASA’s CAPSTONE mission to the moon.  
During the Mars mission, the twin Photons will complete an 11-month trip to the Red Planet before inserting themselves into orbit. The lunar mission, meanwhile, will put the 55-pound CAPSTONE satellite in a unique elliptical lunar orbit to provide information for future lunar missions, including putting the first woman on the moon.  
Other 2021 announcements have included:  
• the launch of NASA’s Advanced Composite Solar Sail System satellite, which will demonstrate lightweight booms attached to a CubeSat nanosatellite to support a solar sail;  
• the launch of the Active Debris

Removal by Astroscale-Japan, which will demonstrate technology that could be used to remove space debris from orbit in the future; and  
• a five-launch contract with the French global connectivity provider Kinéis to put 25 satellites in orbit.  
“We don’t like doing boring, dumb stuff,” Beck said, noting that several of the upcoming missions are highly complex. “We like to do really exciting, hard things. That’s where we excel.”

**No business like space business**  
The company’s success so far is clear in its growth.  
“The space system side of the business has grown really, really strongly,” Beck said, “with new production lines, new contracts [and] building satellites.”  
In August, Rocket Lab announced it was going public. In September, it announced the construction of a new 380,000-square-foot production facility in New Zealand, which will make reaction wheels (a type of flywheel used for three-axis attitude control) for spacecraft at scale, rather than the historically slow one-by-one process. And in mid-October, it acquired Colorado-based Advanced Solutions, Inc., an engineering firm that develops space software, mission simulation and test systems, and guidance, navigation and control systems.  
Rocket Lab’s revenue, of course, reflects its success: It’s up more than 200% from last year, Beck said. To keep up, the firm continues to hire. In February of this year, the company had 530 employees. As of mid-October, that number has increased to about 650 full-timers, according to Beck.  
“We need to fuel growth and man that growth,” Beck said, noting that the company has about 100 job openings at any given time. “Hiring continues to be the number one challenge.”  
Rocket Lab’s move to Long Beach

was primarily driven by the need to keep up with growth, Beck said. The talent pool and infrastructure in Long Beach, which has a long history with aerospace and aviation, is ideal for growth in the space sector, Beck said.  
“Huntington Beach was great, but there’s just not the kind of critical mass of industry around you that you can draw from,” Beck said. On top of Long Beach’s existing engineering workforce, the city also has a continuous flow of new engineering talents from Cal State Long Beach.  
In the past, Beck said the firm typically doubles in size every year. However, that milestone is becoming harder to achieve now that the company has reached its current level, he said.

**Creating a legacy**  
Rocket Lab, though, is not alone in the private space sector boom.  
Beck acknowledged efforts by other companies, including Richard Branson’s Virgin Orbit and Virgin Galactic, Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin and Elon Musk’s SpaceX.  
“Affordable access to space creates a lot of opportunities to do things in orbit and satellites have gotten a lot smaller,” Beck said. “So the cost ... has dropped significantly. We’ll look back on this time as the time the space industry really desegregated itself from being a purely government-dominated domain. We’re witnessing firsthand, in real time, the democratization of space as a domain.”  
But one of the most significant Rocket Lab announcements of 2021—both for its present and for its future—had nothing to do with going to space. On Aug. 20, Vector Acquisition Corporation shareholders approved a merger with Rocket Lab, allowing the latter to go public. Rocket Lab debuted on the Nasdaq stock exchange five days later.  
Beck said the intention was always to take the company public, but “the plan was accelerated this year to “take advantage of the market situation.” The company has never had a shortage in capital, Beck said, but as a public firm, it’s easier to access larger amounts of funding. Going public also will allow Rocket Lab to land larger deals that it has previously missed out on because it was competing with companies that have a “public currency,” he added.  
On a personal level, Beck said going public was important to him as a means to ensure the survival of what he calls his legacy.  
“If you look across space companies there are, in general, a lot of personalities involved,” Beck said, noting that the likes of Branson, Bezos and Musk are often at the forefront of coverage for their respective companies. “My time on this planet is finite. I want [Rocket Lab] to be a multigenerational space company.”  
“When you build a private company and there’s just one individual that’s all around it, there’s no succession planning there. There’s no Plan B. What’s going to happen with all those guys cash in their chips?” ■



Two office buildings near the intersection of Lakewood Boulevard and Carson Street represent some of the last vestiges of Boeing in the city of Long Beach. Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Boeing’s commitment to Long Beach continues in city’s second aerospace boom

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

New companies making a name for themselves have defined Long Beach’s recent aerospace boom, but one company here that’s gotten less attention could arguably claim credit for paving the way for them all: Boeing.  
The global behemoth, which now occupies about half a million square feet of office space in Long Beach, is the last vestige of the city’s first aerospace boom, which began in 1940 when Donald Douglas, president of the fast-growing Douglas Aircraft Company, and

his vice president, Carl Cover, bought a 200-acre site near Daugherty Field (now Long Beach Airport) for \$1,000 per acre.  
As aviation and local history buffs already know, Douglas Aircraft would soon—at its World War II peak—employ more than 160,000 workers at the Long Beach site, an economic boon that helped spur the development of much of Long Beach as we know it today. The company would evolve and change hands over the following decades, merging first with the St. Louis-based McDonnell Aircraft Company in 1967, forming

the McDonnell Douglas Corporation, and then being purchased by Boeing in 1997.  
Tiffany Pitts, a spokesperson for Boeing, could not provide historical data on how much property and how many employees the company has owned and employed in Long Beach over the years. But she confirmed the company currently uses roughly 500,000 square feet of space and said that as of Jan. 1, Boeing had 12,005 employees in California.  
The company’s current Long Beach presence is clearly diminished from that of its predecessors, thanks in part to the closure and sale of most of its properties in the city, including, most recently, its former C-17 manufacturing site and a 78-acre property north of Long Beach Airport.  
It’s been part of an industrywide shift, Pitts said, from manufacturing planes to supporting ones that have already been built.  
“Those aircraft—they’re still flying strong,” she said. “Sometimes, when you create something that’s so good, it has a long life span.  
“When we ended production of the C-17,” Pitts added, “the saying at the time was, ‘Fleet complete, but the mission continues.’”  
But despite this shift, Boeing is nevertheless committed to Long Beach, according to Lynette McKinnon, the director of engineering for Boeing’s Southern California Global Design Center in Long Beach.

“At the Boeing campus in Long Beach, we really do connect with just about every part of the Boeing enterprise business,” McKinnon said in a recent phone interview. “So a lot of what we do in Long Beach is engineering design, but we also do various kinds of support, whether that be supply chain, finance, human resources—there’s really a little bit of everything at Boeing Long Beach.”  
McKinnon acknowledged how the role Long Beach plays in the operations of Boeing and its predecessors has changed.  
“As Boeing began, I’ll say, its life as part of the aerospace infrastructure in Long Beach, it started certainly around the World War II time frame, really in manufacturing,” she said. “It was an aircraft manufacturing focus for wartime production military aircraft.”  
Then, McKinnon said, in the 1950s, business in Long Beach shifted to manufacturing both military and commercial aircraft. And it largely remained that way through the early 2000s.  
“That was really the focus, a lot more of that manufacturing of aircraft,” she said of most of Boeing’s history in Long Beach.  
Since then, “we’ve continued to have a really vital part of the Boeing business, but today, instead of doing all that manufacturing, we do a lot of innovation and design now out of Long Beach.”  
Some of that work includes supporting the aircraft that was built here and remains active. And some of that work is more forward-looking.  
“We’re talking about sustainability,” McKinnon said. “How do we operate in a more sustainable world that’s more friendly to our environment? There’s so many things to consider as we’re designing products.  
“How do we think about sustainable fuels?” she added. “How do we think about what the structure, for example, of an aircraft needs to be in order to operate on a different kind of fuel?”  
McKinnon said she’s hopeful both about the local talent pool—the ideas and innovations that will come from the students currently in Long Beach area schools and colleges—and about the recent interest other aerospace companies have shown in the city.  
While Long Beach’s first aerospace boom was driven by a single company, she said it’s better for everyone that there are multiple players this time around.  
“The energy of it—the aerospace innovation that’s happening in Long Beach with additional companies coming in and considering Long Beach as their home, with Boeing having called Long Beach home for a long time,” McKinnon said, “I think that partnership we can gain in the other companies that come into Long Beach—learning from each other, working together ... is really valuable.  
“I personally believe we are all better, collectively together, than any of us all by ourselves,” she added, “and I think the same thing applies in our aerospace community.” ■



A view of Earth from space during a Rocket Lab test mission. Photo courtesy of Rocket Lab.



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## Future of Space

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communications expert with NASA, “because we want to be involved in the beginning so we can help shape it.”

“When you think about making places accessible here on Earth,” Bolles added, “it’s a no brainer: It’s a lot cheaper and makes more sense to do it at the beginning rather than retrofit. That is what we want to do in space.”

Bolles, who has no limbs, said she spent most of the parabolas trying to control her movements and stay upright. However, spending her life relegated to a wheelchair on Earth, she said she felt empowered floating weightless through the cabin, despite slight nausea and misgivings.

Apurva Varia, a mission operation director for three spacecraft who is deaf, said signing in zero-gravity made it difficult to control your movements. Through an interpreter, Varia explained how he would have to stop signing to push off the wall, which was disorienting. He did note, however, that he and his interpreter were able to understand each other’s signs while upside down for short periods of time, but he was unsure if it could be sustained for longer periods.

“We did have a lighting system that would help us with our situational awareness,” Varia said. “There are some improvements we need to make for future flights, but this was a great first step.”

AstroAccess investigated challenges related to physical environment accessibility communication as well as safety procedures. A quarter of the United States population has disability, but people with disabilities make up only 8.4% of the country’s employed scientists and engineers, according to the National Science Foundation.

The goal of AstroAccess’ accessibility improvements is to entice more people with disabilities into STEM fields, according to the mission website. When women entered the space program, it sparked a steady increase of women in



Twelve people with disabilities flew aboard Mission: AstroAccess out of Long Beach Airport to demonstrate their ability to function in low- and zero-gravity environments Sunday, Oct. 17, 2021. Photo courtesy of AstroAccess.

STEM—AstroAccess leaders are hoping for a similar trend for disabled people.

“I really wanted to demonstrate that I am able to maneuver and take care of my disability the same way I do on Earth,” Mary Cooper, a below-the-knee amputee and aerospace engineering and computer science student-athlete at Stanford University, said during the press conference.

“I took off my prosthetic leg ... and I even let it float around a bit, which is a surreal, euphoric experience, to say the least,” Cooper said. “From there, I was able to put it back on. But I think all of us discovered zero-G is very hard to maneuver in. For me, something that would be really helpful is a foot rail.”

Sina Bahram, a computer scientist and founder of Prime Access Consulting, said he is used to feeling disoriented

within a space due to his blindness. While visual cues could be used to assist people with auditory impairments in space, Bahram said audio and vibrational cues as well as textures on surfaces could be used to help the visually impaired.

These solutions could also be helpful for people who are disabled temporarily due to an accident, Bahram added.

Coping mechanisms Bahram and others with disabilities have developed on Earth need to be reimaged for zero-gravity environments, he said. Not only for future suborbital, orbital and trans-planetary missions, but also for space travel tourism.

Space travel for leisure is drawing nearer after successful trips by Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic and Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin earlier this year. On Oct. 25, Blue Origin

unveiled plans for a space station that could house up to 10 people. The joint venture with Sierra Space would serve as a mixed use business park in space, according to the announcement.

With such fantastical ideas being proposed within the next decade, the work of AstroAccess is more crucial than ever to ensure an inclusive future in space. Disabled U.S. Army veteran Centra “Ce-Ce” Mazyck, a former jumpmaster with the 82nd Airborne Division and single mother, said she applied for the mission for her son, who is now a sophomore in college.

“I do what I do to let him know that just because you have a disability, life does not end,” Mazyck said. “Life truly begins at the end of your comfort zone. We have a long way to go, but we’re making history here.” ■



Disabled U.S. Army veteran Centra “Ce-Ce” Mazyck, a former jumpmaster with the 82nd Airborne Division and single mother, weightlessly floats in a modified airplane cabin during Mission: AstroAccess Sunday, Oct. 17, 2021. Photo courtesy of AstroAccess.

## Port of Long Beach adds new aerospace tenant with ABL Space Systems

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners unanimously voted late last month to approve a five-year lease with El Segundo-based ABL Space Systems for more than 9 acres on Pier T.

The lease includes 8 acres of land and 1.3 acres of water on a space previously part of the Long Beach Naval Station. ABL will build a spacecraft processing facility on land and use the waterfront area for the delivery and shipping of its cargo, according to the announcement.

“This site is highly strategic for our growth,” ABL CEO Harry O’Hanley said in a statement. “Maritime operations are key to scaling our launch capabilities globally. We’ll also re-activate the old Sea Launch payload processing facility to handle spacecraft of almost any size.”

The company began using the facility immediately upon the lease’s Oct. 28 approval and will scale up activity over time, CFO Dan Piemont said in an email. The facilities already onsite are in “great shape for the most part” and will only require limited construction over

the next few months, he added.

The firm has 250 employees, and Piemont said they will not differentiate between Long Beach and El Segundo staff.

“We expect a lot of people to be swinging back and forth between the two facilities as duty calls,” Piemont said.

ABL manufactures the RS1, a rocket used for the delivery of small satellites into orbit. Still in the test phase, the rocket’s first launch is expected by the end of the year in Kodiak, Alaska. The rocket is designed to be easily transported within standard shipping containers aboard ships and trucks. The rocket can be launched from any location provided it is flat and accessible by truck.

The mission control used for launches also is housed within a shipping container and can be operated by a small team.

Having its operations packaged in easy-to-move shipping containers means a presence at a nearby port is crucial for ABL success. With a waterfront location within the nation’s busiest port complex, ABL will be able to rapidly transport its rockets and mission control pods anywhere in the world.



ABL Space Systems manufactures rockets and mission control systems that can be transported in standard shipping containers. Photo courtesy of ABL.

The lease approval came five months after the commission agreed to a similar lease with Hawthorne-based SpaceX for 6.5 acres adjacent to the future ABL site. SpaceX uses its Pier T facility for its West Coast rocket recovery operations. Included in ABL’s lease is a 25,000-square-foot integration and payload facility, a 20,000-square-foot warehouse and a 13,000-square-foot

office. The area was previously occupied by Sea Launch, which left the port complex in early 2020.

“It’s exciting to add yet another tenant in the rapidly growing spacecraft technology industry,” commission President Steven Neal said in a statement.

“We look forward to what we know will be a mutually beneficial relationship with our newest tenant.” ■

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Wearing clear face masks, AstroAccess co-project lead George Whitesides, left, and Virgin Orbit Vice President of Special Projects Will Pomerantz, right, assist news producer Sawyer Rosenstein during Mission: AstroAccess Sunday, Oct. 17, 2021. Photo courtesy of AstroAccess.



# FROM THE EDITOR: How have businesses supported employees' mental health during the pandemic?



Dr. Graham Tse, chief medical officer at Long Beach Memorial, sits in the hospital's Reflection Garden Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

BY HAYLEY MUNGUJA / Editor

Whether you want to call it “the Great Resignation,” “Striketober” or simply a resurgence of worker power, the statistics don’t lie: A record-breaking number of workers are simply walking away from jobs that demand too much and offer too little in the way of pay or benefits.

And it’s no wonder: While the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic may be—hopefully—behind us, its impact still lingers—in lives lost, in a slowing economic recovery and in our own physical and mental well-being.

Employers, for their part, are taking notice. A majority (54%) of full-time employees reported in a recent nationwide study that they believed their company prioritized mental health, up from 41% in 2019.

Of course, it’s one thing for research to reveal a trend and another thing to see what that trend looks like in practice. So I reached out to some of Long Beach’s biggest employers to get a sense of whether they implemented new programs or benefits to address employees’ mental health during the pandemic, and if so, how successful they were.

Not every company I reached out to got back to me, but the ones that did shared similar approaches to supporting their employees during these uncertain times. Specifically, they emphasized their attempts to be more flexible with schedules and time off; new programs to foster a sense of community and more open culture around mental health; and efforts to better inform workers about employee assistance programs and other benefits that predated the pandemic.

For the City of Long Beach, that last

point has been key.

“The City has been offering a suite of behavioral health services to employees for a number of years now,” said Michelle Hamilton, the City’s Human Resources Officer of Benefits & Return to Work, “but certainly during the pandemic, the communication of these resources became more focused and frequent as we navigated employees through the pandemic.”

Hamilton pointed to behavioral health services, “lunch and learn” sessions on different health and fitness topics, live and virtual fitness classes and access to resources like the Calm meditation app as some of the ways the city supports its employees’ mental health.

The Aquarium of the Pacific’s Vice President of Human Resources Kathie Nirschl, meanwhile, told me that the way the aquarium has approached its employees’ mental health has evolved with the pandemic. Early on, she said, the facility offered what it called “closure camp” for the children of employees—similar to its more traditional summer camp offerings—to help with child care.

“That was just sort of acknowledging the pressures, really, on the working parents,” Nirschl said, “so we tried from the beginning to offer them what we could.”

The aquarium has also offered Zoom sessions for workers on topics like navigating homeschooling, nutrition, exercise and mindfulness. And workers on site have occasionally been welcomed by comfort dogs, massages and programs like the monthly “Morning Mic,” in which staff members or their children serenade the team as the workday begins.

“It’s not like we’re saying, ‘This is going to address your mental health,’”

Nirschl said of those efforts, “but it sort of helps bring that spark back.”

Nirschl acknowledged that much of her team’s focus since COVID-19 hit has been on compliance with mandated health protocols and preventing a workplace coronavirus outbreak, with less of a laser focus on employees’ mental well-being. But even efforts to address workers’ basic needs—like a food and supply pantry the aquarium opened for its furloughed workers while the facility was shuttered—clearly had an effect on their mental health.

“Staff who were furloughed could drive up on the appointed hours to get a clipboard and check off the things they needed, and staff would go and collect those in a bag and hand them off curbside,” Nirschl said. “One person told me, ‘People rely on me to bring food in the house, to put the food on the table. This was absolutely helpful for helping me feed my family.’”

But the measure that Nirschl said had perhaps the most impact was simply being flexible with scheduling and understanding of whatever sudden emergencies came up for employees.

“Our goal as an employer,” she said, “has been to not add to anyone’s burden during these times.”

But not every industry has the luxury of being so flexible with employees’ time.

During the worst surges of COVID-19, the need for frontline health care workers only became more urgent. So Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital had to find other avenues to support its employees.

Dr. Graham Tse, the hospital’s chief medical officer, told me that one of the first changes the hospital made to help support workers during the pandemic was simply making it easier to access mental health resources.

“We talked to our staff and our physicians and said, ‘Hey, what do you need?’” Tse said. “What we heard was that they needed more resources and that they needed it now, and that ... many didn’t have the time to go and access resources that were available online or to call this or call that number. So [Miller’s operator] MemorialCare formed groups to really research and figure out what was the best way to push resources to the employees.”

What resulted was a plan to literally meet employees where they were at.

“We’d actually go to where the staff were, so actually go up to the units and hold small groups,” Tse said, “right there when they’re working in a room, so that they didn’t have to travel anywhere.”

The hospital also recognized

that “one size didn’t fit all,” Tse said, so MemorialCare offered both spiritual advisors and mental health professionals. One-on-one counseling was also available for those who weren’t comfortable speaking in a group setting.

Employees received paid time to take advantage of those programs, Tse said.

My next question for both Tse and Nirschl, though, was about the future: Are these new programs short-term measures, or will Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital and the Aquarium of the Pacific continue to offer them, even after the pandemic subsides?

Both representatives said their approach to supporting employees is a two-way conversation. As long as employees say they’re benefitting from these programs and services, the companies will continue to provide them.

For Tse, the urgency of offering services in person, at a unit-by-unit level, has waned.

“Most [workers] have said, ‘We don’t quite need that pushed out to us anymore,’” he said. “We still have, really, all the same resources that we had previously, but it’s more—not in the background, but it’s more—not so much right at their place of work.”

But the hospital’s commitment to its workers’ well-being continues.

“We’re absolutely looking at this as a long-term initiative,” Tse said, “As long as our staff is indicating they need the resources, we’ll continue to support them.”

At the Aquarium of the Pacific, Nirschl has a similar perspective. The flexibility for employees in particular, she said, will remain in place.

“We sort of had a mechanism in place for people to work from home, and people can access their data and things like that, but that has increased a lot,” she said. “We will continue that, where, even when it’s all clear, people might not have to come in five days a week.”

Nirschl, though, had her own question about what the future may bring.

“We’re still in it,” she said. Once COVID-19 is fully behind us, Nirschl predicted, “we’ll be dealing with, almost like a PTSD.”

It’s been one thing to react to the day-by-day needs of staff. But at some point, she said, this moment will require closure—and for now, Nirschl, like everyone else, is unsure of what that will look like.

“Everybody’s just trying to get through the day, and once you exhale, that wave of, ‘Oh my gosh, what did we just go through?’ comes,” she said. “I think we’re really going to have to be addressing the aftermath, once the crisis is over.” ■

# The best therapist in town guides from experience

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

When Jay Jensen first came to see Long Beach therapist Ethel Daniels more than 15 years ago, he was struggling to express his feelings and needs. Hoping to work through a conflicted relationship with his mother and difficult relationships with women that followed, Jensen came into therapy with one overarching goal: to find his voice.

Today, the 55-year-old, who’s still a patient of Daniels’, said the results were life-changing. “It’s changed everything about me,” he said. “She actually gave me a voice.”

Jensen’s is one of many ringing endorsements of Daniels’, who runs Long Beach Therapy on Ocean Boulevard in Downtown Long Beach. Recently, the therapist, who has been working in Long Beach for nearly three decades, was voted best mental health provider in the city by readers of the Long Beach Post in the annual Best of

Long Beach contest.

So how does Daniels achieve her widely heralded results?

“She holds you accountable,” said Shannon Brizendine, another patient, who first came to Daniels after a highly public and difficult separation. Like other patients who have seen success working with Daniels, she points to the therapist’s ability to straddle warmth and professionalism in her approach. Plus, Brizendine said, “there’s always a great hug at the end.”

Ask Daniels her own thoughts on her success and recent acclaim as the city’s best mental health provider, and you’re likely to get a response that’s slightly evasive, even bashful.

“Every therapist is different. If somebody survives and benefits from therapy, and grows from it and heals, then that’s unique for that specific person,” Daniels said, in her signature tone of voice—warm and low, but firm nonetheless. “Somebody else could go see that same therapist and not at all



Therapist Ethel Daniels is reflected off a mirror in her therapy room in Downtown Long Beach Friday, October 22, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova

have the same experience.”

In her work with patients, Daniels has often been able to draw from her own lived experience.

Her career as a therapist in private practice started at the office of Dr. Kent McGuire, who became known for his focus on the working with gay and

lesbian patients, a unique demographic to serve as a therapist when he opened his Long Beach practice in 1992.

“Nobody was working with that community,” Daniels said. “He took a big risk to be cutting edge in his field.”

Working with this community in the

*Continued on page 10*



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A truck passes hundreds of containers on a dock at the Port of Long Beach in Long Beach Monday, October 11, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

## City, port officials take steps to address supply chain crisis



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BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Shipping container dwell times—the number of days the metal boxes sit at a port—continue to increase in the San Pedro Bay, reaching a new high in September. But a temporary suspension of Long Beach’s container-stacking limits, along with a new surcharge at the twin ports, aim to get containers moving through the facilities.

Long Beach officials announced late last month the temporary suspension of a section of the municipal code that restricts shipping container stacking. The suspension went into effect Oct. 22 and lasts for 90 days.

Section 21.45.168 of the city’s municipal code states that no more than two containers may be stacked atop one another. However, during the 90-day period, the city is allowing up to four containers to be stacked without the yard operator being cited for a code violation. Property owners may contact Fire Prevention for approval to stack up to five containers, the city’s statement added.

Days after officials made the short-term municipal code change, the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles made an announcement of their own: Ocean carriers will soon be charged for every container that lingers within the port complex—for nine days or more if being moved by truck, and three days or more if being moved by rail. Carriers will be charged \$100 per container, with the fee increasing \$100 per container per day. The penalties go into effect Nov. 15.

“We must expedite the movement of

cargo through the ports to work down the number of ships at anchor,” Port of Los Angeles Executive Director Gene Seroka said when the charges were announced. “Approximately 40% of the containers on our terminals today fall into the two categories.”

“If we can clear this idling cargo,” Seroka added, “we’ll have much more space on our terminals to accept empties, handle exports, and improve fluidity for the wide range of cargo owners who utilize our ports.”

Collected fees will be reinvested by the two ports in programs to increase efficiency and address congestion, according to the announcement.

The ports, which together handle 40% of the country’s imports, have been experiencing a backlog of container ships idling off the coast, waiting for their turn within the complex, for months. According to the Marine Exchange of Southern California, the backlog set a record on Oct. 21 when 79 vessels were at anchor or adrift off the coast.

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

Container dwell time for rail improved significantly in September compared to August, down to 5.5 days from 8.2.

*Continued on page 20*



Store Manager Emily Lou helps customer Jhoanna Belfer select soap at Bring Your Own Long Beach in the East Village area of Downtown on Friday, October 22, 2021. Photo by Alena Maschke.

## Business in Downtown Long Beach is slowly rebounding

BY ALENA MASCHKE / Reporter

Strolling through Downtown Long Beach on a weekday evening, one is likely to encounter patios humming, if not quite buzzing, with guests returning to watch a football game, have an after-work drink with colleagues, or both.

Despite some residual hesitation to gather in large crowds—and businesses’ troubles finding workers to serve drinks, bus tables or ring up sales—business in Downtown Long Beach is slowly rebounding after the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Downtown Long

Beach Alliance’s newly released annual retail snapshot. The report focuses on businesses like retail stores but also includes bars and restaurants.

By all measures—rents, occupancy, parking and pedestrians—the analysis found Downtown Long Beach is on the upswing.

“Downtown Long Beach has experienced a level of retail resiliency not observed in most high-density urban cores,” said DLBA Chief Operating Officer Broc Coward. “A combination of factors, including providing access to grants and expanded outdoor capacity, have made a difference, as well as support

from local residents and willing landlords. Going forward, DLBA is developing a longer-term retail-sector plan as a priority in our new strategic plan.”

Rental rates, for their part, have slowly begun to rebound after a significant drop from the coronavirus-induced mandates that forced many retail businesses to shutter or reduce operations. Average rent hit its lowest levels at the end of 2020 and in early 2021, but it has since come back up, currently standing at \$2.61 per square foot, according to the real estate analysis service CoStar.

*Continued on page 22*

## Long Beach to adopt statewide organic recycling mandate, still unsure how it will comply

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach officials will create an ordinance to require residents and businesses to separate out food and yard waste from other trash to align with a state law that goes into effect Jan. 1. But there’s a snag: The infrastructure actually needed to comply with the new state law is unlikely to be in place by the start of the year.

Senate Bill 1383, signed into law in September 2016, gave local governments until January 2022 to set in place rules that require residential and commercial customers to separate yard clippings and food scraps into different containers to be recycled as the state tries to cut back

on methane emissions from landfills.

The City Council voted late last month to move forward with writing the ordinance. But a study session in August revealed that the city, like others across the region, will likely miss the compliance date.

The city may need to add to its fleet of trash trucks and issue a new bin—or bins—to residential customers to allow them to sort out their trash for pickup. After that, it would have to find a facility to handle the new organic recycling. It will also have to hire additional employees to drive the trucks and enforce the law.

Erin Rowland, a waste diversion officer with the city’s Public Works

Department, said earlier this year that there is a shortage of organic recycling facilities in Southern California, and most can only process yard waste or food scraps, not both.

Once the city is able to fully comply with the law, residential refuse and recycling rates could double “at minimum,” Rowland said during the August study session. A typical monthly bill for residential accounts is currently \$28.99.

Residents and commercial account holders can be fined for not complying with the law, and the city is required to enforce the program, according to state law. The fines can range between \$50 and \$500, according to the legislation. The city itself can also be fined.

CalRecycle, the agency overseeing the program, can fine cities for non-compliance starting in 2024—but the fines can be backdated to January 2022,

the original implementation date.

A more recently adopted law, SB-619, could provide some breathing room for the city.

It waives a year’s worth of fines for cities that have an “intent to comply” submission approved by CalRecycle by March 2022. Fines accrued the following year can also be waived if a city becomes fully compliant during that year.

Adopting an ordinance is one element of complying with the law, but it’s unclear how fast the city can secure enough trucks and additional bins to issue to account holders. The city currently has no estimate for how much the program will cost the city or customers once it’s up and running.

The ordinance is expected to return to the City Council before the end of the year so it can take effect before the start of 2022. ■

## Downtown Long Beach Alliance president under investigation for allegedly mistreating workers

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

Downtown Long Beach Alliance President and CEO Kraig Kojian is under investigation for alleged mistreatment of employees, according to officials with the organization and the city.

The investigation was spurred by a letter a former DLBA employee sent to City Councilwomen Mary Zendejas and Cindy Allen in August, according to the city. The letter does not include any allegations of criminal conduct or sexual harassment, but it accuses Kojian of “workplace bullying and a toxic work environment, largely inflicted upon women workers.”

Kojian did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The DLBA is a nonprofit that supports Downtown Long Beach businesses and manages two business improvement districts in the neighborhood. Kojian has served the organization for 25 years.

The Long Beach Business Journal obtained a copy of the letter from the city through a Public Records Act request. While the letter-writer signed the six-page document and included information about their position at the DLBA, city officials redacted all identifying details before releasing it publicly.

“I strongly believe Mr. Kojian’s pattern of workplace bullying of female employees constitutes gender discrimination,” the letter said, “and is cause for investigation and correction.”

Kojian is still employed by the DLBA, according to Executive Committee Chair Loara Cadavona, but she declined to say

*Continued on page 14*



## City faces substantial oil abandonment costs in next decade

BY ANTHONY PIGNATARO / Reporter

The City of Long Beach could spend nearly \$150 million to end oil production in the next couple of decades, according to a memo City Manager Tom Modica wrote late last month.

Though the city has already put aside \$43 million to pay the costs associated with closing down oil wells, it would still have to raise another \$38 million to meet the lowest estimate for abandonment costs in 2035, the year city officials have long planned to end oil production.

Modica's memo states that at the current rate of savings, the city will be able to fund \$81 million in abandonment costs by 2035. But if the abandonment costs swell to \$146 million—the high end of estimates—then there will have to be “substantially higher contributions to the abandonment fund” or a decision to keep oil production running beyond 2035, states the memo.

Failure to set aside the required funds now could leave the city with a “potential major unfunded liability” that would possibly require the city to spend additional public funds to close down oil production.

In 2015, the most recent year highlighted in Modica's memo, wells in Long Beach produced 13.3 million barrels of crude oil and 5.1 million Mcf (thousand cubic feet) of natural gas, which in turn generated 8.3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. According to the memo, this represents “significant” greenhouse gas emissions.

Mayor Robert Garcia hailed Modica's memo on Twitter, saying that it “provides a pathway to end production in our city by 2035—10 years ahead of the state.

“Oil revenue has provided significant investments in our city and state for decades,” Garcia added. “And many of these jobs provide good paying union work. As we transition away from fossil fuels, these workers and their families deserve our support, respect, and equitable work.”

Though Gov. Gavin Newsom wants to phase out oil extraction in California by 2045, a separate city memo from May shows the state faces a far larger liability in terms of shutting down oil production. So far, the state has set aside \$300 million to fund oil abandonment, but must still raise another \$609 million, according to that memo from Bob Dowell, the city's director of energy resources.

As for why the city is projecting ending oil production in 2035, “it really is dependent on the price of oil,” said Kevin Tougas, manager of the city's Oil Operations Bureau. If oil prices remain in the \$50-\$70 per barrel range, then city officials project they'll be able to fully fund abandonment by 2035, he said.

*Continued on page 19*



The new Alamitos Beach concession stand and playground remains fenced off and unfinished after more than two years of construction Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

## City Council approves takeover agreement, will allow new contractor to finish Alamitos Beach concession stand

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach is officially looking for a new contractor to complete the Alamitos Beach concession stand. The City Council approved the search for a new contractor late last month after the previous one failed to complete the project.

The project was initially scheduled to be completed by April 2020, but multiple extensions were given to the previous contractor, Klassic Engineering and Construction Inc., before the city ultimately found it in

default of the contract on Aug. 17. The council approved a takeover agreement that will allow a search for a new contractor to begin.

Construction on the \$9 million project started in August 2019, but it is well behind the other new beach concession stands at Granada and Junipero, both of which have completed construction and where food vendors have already begun operating.

The city is now leaning on the Klassic's bonding agency to find a new contractor to finish the job. Joshua Hickman, a manager in the Public

Works Business Operations Bureau, said that a number of things were incomplete with the concession stand, including the electrical system and an elevator that has yet to pass required inspections.

Hickman said the concession is expected to open by next summer, after the new tenant, Gaucho Grill, makes its personalized improvements to the space.

Councilwoman Cindy Allen, who represents the area where the concession stand is being built, said she looks forward to fast completion of the project. ■

### DLBA

*Continued from page 13*

whether he is currently on leave.

“Since it is a personnel matter, I won't be able to comment on it other than to say we take these matters very seriously,” Cadavona said by phone late last month, “and we're really committed to conducting a thorough investigation.”

Cadavona declined to share further details about the probe, including who is investigating and how long it may last.

The Executive Committee held a closed session meeting Oct. 17 to conduct a performance evaluation of Kojian, but the committee did not take any action at that meeting.

Zendejas, for her part, acknowledged receiving the letter and said she and Allen sent it to City Attorney Charles

Parkin and to the DLBA board. Zendejas said she could not comment further because the investigation is ongoing.

Allen, meanwhile, declined to comment on the letter other than to say by text, “I received the letter on a Friday and I forwarded the letter to the City Attorney and the DLBA Executive Team.”

A statement from the city of Long Beach said the City Attorney reviewed the letter upon receipt and forwarded it to the DLBA's Executive Committee “as the appropriate body for investigation.”

“The DLBA Board of Directors took immediate action and hired an outside investigator to interview potential witnesses and establish the facts,” the statement said. “The City is confident that the DLBA Board of Directors is taking the investigation very seriously.” ■



Downtown Long Beach Alliance President and CEO Kraig Kojian. File photo.

## IKEA to open new ‘planning studio’ concept at Long Beach Towne Center

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

A new, small-format IKEA concept is taking over an 8,000-square-foot storefront at Long Beach Towne Center in the former location of Red Ball Fun Zone on the eastern edge of the shopping center.

The company announced plans late last month to open two locations of the scaled-down store in the Los Angeles area. IKEA did not announce the second location but said it will be “finalized soon.”

“We had identified geographic areas in the market that are beyond a 30-minute drive from existing stores, and where affinity to IKEA is extremely high,” company spokeswoman Ginna Royalty said in an email. “Based on this, we looked at expanding the IKEA touchpoints in the LA market, where Long Beach became a great fit.”

Two full-size IKEA stores are within driving distance for Long Beach residents, both a straight shot on the 405 Freeway, in Carson and Costa Mesa. Both stores opened in 1992.

The two new stores, called planning studios, are slated to open in spring



A customer works with an IKEA employee at one of the company's planning studios. Photo courtesy of IKEA.

2022, according to the announcement. The Long Beach location is expected to employ 13 to 20 people, Royalty said.

Customers will not leave planning studios with products. Instead, they will book appointments to meet with design specialists who will assist

them with planning and ordering furniture and decor. Orders are made during the appointment, and products are then delivered to the customer's home or another delivery point of their choosing.

The new concept is based on

“extensive market research to understand consumers, what logistical barriers they face, how they like to shop, how they live at home, and more,” the company said in the announcement.

“By opening the two planning studios in the LA market, we are taking the first steps to create customer meeting points that are more accessible, ... while continuing to offer smart and affordable home solutions,” IKEA U.S. Area Vice President Janet McGowan said in a statement, adding that LA-area residents are “often frustrated being stuck in traffic.”

The planning studios will be the company's first on the West Coast and second and third in the country. The concept has one location in New York City, two in London, and one in both Stockholm and Warsaw.

“We've seen that customers are still eager for in-person experiences,” Javier Quinones, CEO and chief sustainability officer for IKEA U.S., said in a statement. “That's why we're investing heavily in brick and mortar locations, and newer, more accessible store formats like the two L.A. planning studios – in addition to e-commerce.” ■



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# ‘Unheard of’: Food Finders rescued 17 million pounds of food last year

BY TESS KAZENOFF / Reporter

Combating food insecurity and food waste across Long Beach is not an easy feat, but Los Alamitos-based nonprofit Food Finders is taking on the challenge with its latest initiatives.

The organization, founded in 1989, coordinates the daily pickup of excess food from grocers, restaurants, hospitals, schools, manufacturers and more, distributing directly to other nonprofits such as pantries, shelters or senior centers.

Food Finders serves multiple areas within Southern California, rescuing enough food for 30,000 meals per day, but in the past year, the organization has ramped up its efforts.

During the pandemic—which heightened food insecurity and contributed to the closures of two Long Beach grocery stores last year—Food Finders reached two milestones, rescuing over 17 million pounds of food with the help of over 400 brand new

volunteers, “which is unheard of,” said executive director Diana Lara.

Much of Food Finders’ latest success is due to the development of its app, making it easier than ever for volunteers to participate.

The app allows volunteers to easily find a route to pick up and deliver donated food items, generally taking less than an hour, said Lara.

“The app really was instrumental in keeping our doors open and being able to recover as much food as we did last year,” said Lara.

One of Food Finders’ most notable projects has been developing food hubs across the city, particularly in North, Central and West Long Beach, which are designated food deserts, meaning there is limited access to fresh foods in these areas. The hubs are meant to serve as community marketplaces providing residents with a bag of donated food.

Lara plans to expand the project to more easily provide perishable foods, but there have been challenges in gaining the

necessary approvals, she said. Despite this, Lara hopes the hubs will be fully up and running by December or early next year.

“It’s a great concept, because you’re getting food directly into the hands of the people that need it most,” said Lara, explaining that limited food access largely impacts communities of color.

In addition to developing the food hubs, Lara is looking forward to the expansion of programs within Long Beach Unified schools.

With schools now back in person, Lara looks forward to the return of the Food4Kids program in 2022, a program aiming to tackle the hunger gap many children experience over the weekends when school meals are unavailable. The program provides a bag of four-to-six meals per family at 15 schools across Long Beach, but in the coming year, this will double to 30 schools, Lara said.

Food Finders also plans to partner with each school within Long Beach Unified School District to develop

a fresh food rescue program, where uneaten food from cafeteria lunches can be donated to Food Finders. Prior to the pandemic, around 22 schools were already on board, said Lara, but she is aiming for the program to extend across the district.

In the meantime, Food Finders has its annual holiday food drive in full swing, running through Dec. 31. Monetary donations as well as perishable and nonperishable food items are all encouraged, particularly traditional Thanksgiving food items such as cranberry sauce, stuffing, and gravy. For those looking to volunteer, Food Finders is also looking for assistance particularly on Nov. 20 and 21, when Thanksgiving boxes will be packed and distributed across the community.

Looking ahead, Lara said she hopes for Food Finders to purchase its own building, allowing for proper refrigeration and freezer space.

“Investing in us,” she said, “that’s the big goal over the next few years.” ■

## Who qualifies for a COVID-19 vaccine exemption? Experts say they are rare

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Vaccine mandates are quickly becoming commonplace in both the public and private sectors. But who qualifies for a medical or religious exemption from such mandates?

Here’s what the experts say.

**What religions are against vaccinations?**

No mainstream religious sects have said they are against vaccinations. The Catholic Church, Jehovah’s Witness Christian Scientists and others have all put out public statements saying it’s OK for their followers to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Some smaller denominations like the Dutch Reform congregations and Faith Assembly, however, are opposed to vaccines.

Federal and state fair employment laws do not put a size requirement on the religion for it to qualify for an exemption, and may also take into account informal beliefs.

Employers must evaluate whether the religious beliefs are “sincerely held,” and whether accommodating this belief would pose an undue hardship on the employer, or would present a direct threat to the health and safety of others.

David Lewin, professor emeritus at UCLA’s Anderson School of Management, said it will be difficult to get a religious exemption.

*Continued on page 21*



A rendering of Solita Tacos & Margaritas, set to replace Rock Bottom Brewery in Downtown Long Beach in the spring. Rendering courtesy of Xperience Restaurant Group.

## Solita Mexican restaurant to take over former location of Rock Bottom Brewery

BY TIM GROBATY / Columnist

For 13 years, Rock Bottom Brewery held down one of the Long Beach’s hottest locations—the northwest corner of Ocean Boulevard and Pine Avenue, the foot of the city’s mercantile main street and perched to grab the attention of conventioners and tourists as well as the faithful clientele of local business people.

When Rock Bottom closed in May 2020 because of COVID-19, it was the first major restaurant to shutter because of the coronavirus, and it was a clear signal that the pandemic was going to have a significant impact on the physical and financial health of the city.

The restaurant’s vacancy ever since its closure has been a dark spot at Pine and Ocean, serving as a reminder of the darkest days of the virus.

Now, signaling perhaps a brighter future for the abandoned space, comes the announcement that the Mexican restaurant chain Xperience Restaurant Group will reactivate the 9,500-square-foot space with the opening of the adventurous, Baja-themed Solita Tacos & Margaritas in the spring of next year.

Xperience owns many of the Mexican restaurants you’ve heard of, outside of the beloved so-called holes-in-the-wall that serve faithfully traditional Mexican fare to devotees of the real thing.

Among the Cypress-based company’s

holdings are El Torito, Acapulco, Laguna Beach’s stunning Las Brisas and a half-dozen others.

Xperience CEO and president Randy Sharpe is enthusiastic about snaring the Rock Bottom site. “We couldn’t be more lucky to be able to pick up that corner,” he said. “The ownership (at the Landmark Square building) interviewed us. They didn’t want a ho-hum restaurant moving in. They wanted something unique and exciting, which Solita definitely is. We showed them that Solita would appeal not only to locals, but also tourists and conventions.”

Sharpe wanted a location in Long Beach, he said, because “Long Beach is exploding right now with great restaurants. It’s exciting to see how much the city has changed with the high-rises going up and the conventions coming back.”

If Solita’s offerings aren’t hole-in-the-wall offerings, they are certainly adventurous and unique.

Its Baja-style menu is inspired by the charro cooking of Northern Mexico, with a Santa Maria-style grill and smoker. Some highlights from the menu include:

- Pork Belly Dorado Taco: pork belly smoked in-house for six hours, served with amarillo hot sauce, onions, cilantro and slaw.
- Vampiro Taco: double tortilla with carne asada or grilled chicken, with cheese, serrano peppers, green onions, guacamole, chipotle sauce, cotija cheese and salsa fresca.
- Cadillac: wood-grilled carne asada, melted cheese, chipotle-garlic shrimp, avocado and salsa fresca.
- Grilled Corn Elote: roasted and wood-grilled sweet corn carved tableside with butter, chipotle sauce,

*Continued on page 20*



Long Beach Memorial Nurse Brandon Gatling receives a COVID vaccine on Friday, Dec. 18, 2020. Photo courtesy of the city of Long Beach.

## LBCC adopts vaccine mandate for students, employees for spring semester

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Employees and students at Long Beach City College will need to be vaccinated before the start of the spring semester in order to be on campus, after its Board of Trustees voted unanimously late last month to adopt a vaccine mandate.

All district employees, regardless of their current work assignment, will need to provide proof of vaccination by Jan. 3, and students will need to show proof by Jan. 22 to be allowed on campus. Unvaccinated students will be allowed to attend online classes and access online services without having to get a shot.

The Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees voted unanimously Oct. 21 to adopt the vaccine requirement with board members saying they were making a decision based on science and the greater good of the campus community.

“This is not about picking on anyone or retaliation or dispossessing anyone of their job, we don’t want anyone to lose their job,” Board President Uduak Joe-Ntuk said. “We want people to get vaccinated so we can get back to some semblance of normalcy.”

According to campus data, about 68% of all students attending on-campus classes have already

provided proof of vaccination, and over 72% of employees have submitted proof.

Employees who do not provide proof of vaccination or obtain an exemption will be considered absent without leave. Potential disciplinary measures for employees were not spelled out in the resolution and are likely to be negotiated with individual unions.

For 40 minutes the night of the meeting, voicemails were played and emailed comments were read aloud to the board from members of the community and employees who shared their thoughts on the mandate. Nearly all employees who commented supported the mandate and said it was a necessary move to get students and teachers back on campus safely, and to increase student success.

David Morse, an English professor at the college, said that the ongoing public discourse about the vaccine being a matter of personal liberty was false, calling it a matter of public safety. Comparing COVID-19 vaccine requirements to abortion rights is a false equivalent, Morse said.

“These situations are not the same,” Morse said. “A woman’s choice to get an abortion does not put other people at risk.”

Robyn Arias, an assistant professor

of life sciences, said that it is not possible for students and teachers to remain in a hybrid or online setting because some do not want to get vaccinated. There are labs associated with her classes that require students to be on campus, she said.

“I am pro any scientifically effective method to get us all back on campus next semester in a safe manner,” she said.

Some opposed to the mandate likened it to abortion rights, slavery, racism and called the mandate an equity issue that could disproportionately affect students of color. The Black and Latino populations in Long Beach have lower vaccination rates than the city’s White and Asian populations, according to city data.

A speaker identified as John Paul said that there shouldn’t be external pressure on people to get vaccinated, noting that there is a lack of long-term studies available for people to make an informed choice.

“The resolution as written coerces individuals to vaccinate without free or informed consent,” Paul said, adding that a compassionate approach would be to continue to allow testing to serve as an alternative.

Weekly testing of students is on pace to cost the college about \$500,000, according to Marlene

### St. Mary

*Continued from page 11*

as a direct result of the mandate, Dowling said.

At Long Beach Memorial and Miller Children’s & Women’s, over 98% of the roughly 6,000 active employees and medical staff are vaccinated, spokeswoman Richele Steele said in an email. A “small percentage” of the hospital’s workforce requested and qualified for exemptions, Steele said, but she did not provide specific numbers.

Those with an exemption are working remotely or assigned to positions outside of patient care settings, Steele said. Vaccination-exempt staff that are onsite must be tested frequently and wear an N95 mask at all times, she added.

A small number of staff chose to terminate their employment with the hospital, Steele said, again declining to give specific figures. The hospital continues to support its former employees through the city’s Pacific Gateway workforce development and other resources, Steele added.

“We also remain open to considering them for rehire should they change their mind and become vaccinated,” Steele said. “The number of separated employees is so small it has not had a meaningful impact on staffing or operations.” ■



# Little homes on Eliot Lane are commanding big-home prices

By **TIM GROBATY** / Columnist

Eliot Lane is a tiny and intimate historic district in the heart of Belmont Heights. It’s a one-lane, one-way street running south from Colorado Street to Third Street, with 30 homes in the block-long district, all built in 1923 by the short-lived Long Beach firm of Boland & Smith. The company went on a frenzied construction spree that year that included about 30 other homes in the surrounding area to accommodate workers during an employment explosion prompted by the discovery of oil in nearby Signal Hill and the continuing and accelerating development in Long Beach and the port.

The new homes on Eliot Court, as it was first called, sold for about \$2,100—adjusted for inflation, that would be about \$34,000 in today’s dollars, but real estate, of course, has way outpaced inflation, and today those little homes on Eliot Lane can fetch upward of \$800,000, packing a lot of asking price into a little square footage.

The homes on Eliot typically hover between 600 and 800 square feet, and they generally have one or two bedrooms, unless owners have added on additional rooms—always in the back because, per historic district rules, they can’t be added on to the front or the top.

A home at 304 Eliot Lane has just gone into escrow (but you’re free to make a back-up offer) with a list price of \$839,000. The home is diminutive—perhaps “charming” is the word we’re looking for—with just one bedroom and one bathroom in 650 square feet. Pound-for-pound, that passes the median Belmont Heights price-per-square-foot median price of \$867 by almost \$300 per square foot.

The neighborhood is, indeed, charming, with all of the original 1923 homes remaining in place, as if time hasn’t marched on as it has elsewhere in the Heights. There is a marked uniformity, with the majority of the houses being Mission Revival in terms of architecture, with a few mini-Craftsman houses mixed in. And that uniformity was a key point that contributed to the tract earning historic designation in 2003. The houses all have detached garages in the back, and all have 10-foot setbacks with narrow parkways. Street parking, because of the narrowness of the road, is only on one side of the street. And as is always the case in historic districts, there are stern guidelines regarding monkeying around with

anything visible from the street.

The interior of the home at 304 Eliot Lane feels a bit larger than its stats would indicate, although, face it, at 650 square feet you wouldn’t feel like you’re in a sprawling ranch-style home.

It has an open floor plan, with the well appointed kitchen flowing into the living room with an oversized window that brings a strong sense of added dimension to the room, dragging outdoors into the house.

Also adding to the sunny vibe is the fact that the whole interior is white, discounting the bathroom with one black wall and the shower/bath enclosure, which is papered in a gray monochromatic soleil design.

Wrestling with the expansive living room window for the title of the home’s high point is its private backyard, with a new fence and grass dotted with square pavers that lead to a cozy corner with a fire pit and a concrete planter/bench, providing a perfect spot for a small get-together.

The home, listed by Realtor Tara Riggi of Think Boutiq Realty, is ideally located near Colorado Lagoon and a short stroll to cool Heights offerings like Ma N’ Pa Grocery as well as a manageable walk to Second Street.

## Naples news

Turning to the upscale Naples neighborhood, we have a few items of note: The large waterfront vacant lot on the premier corner at the intersections of the Rivo Alto Canal, the Colonnade Canal and Naples Canal, and just steps from the Colonnade itself, has been yanked off the market after more than three years with a steadfast \$4 million price tag, according to Realtor Keith Muirhead. The lot, the sole remaining undeveloped waterfront parcel on the island, has its own boat dock that runs the entire 68 feet of the lot’s frontage.

The lot’s owner (as well as Muirhead) had more success with the adjacent house, at 220 Rivo Alto Canal, which sold for \$3.9 million, off a \$4.2 million list.

A bit farther inland, off the water at 93 Giralda Walk, a perhaps overly opulent mansion that hit the market running, with a listing of \$8,995,500, is getting closer to what I can afford. After going on sale in March, the price was dropped on July 1 by a cool million bucks. Then, another half-million was knocked off on July 27. Now, it’s listed at \$6,895,000. Come on! What will it take to get you into this house? ■



This 650-square-foot home in the Eliot Lane Historic District is in escrow, listed at \$839,000. Listing photo.



The backyard at 304 Eliot Lane makes for a cozy spot for a small get-together. Listing photo.



The living room with its oversized window. Listing photo.



This home on Giralda Walk is getting more affordable. Buy it today for \$6.895 million. Listing photo.

## Port Order

*Continued from page 11*

Roundtable President Rob Lapsley said in an email. “The Long Beach Chamber is officially helping to lead this goods movement coalition effort in addition to the participation of other coalition members.”

In a phone call, Long Beach Chamber President and CEO Jeremy Harris said he fully supports the coalition and that the chamber will be included in future letters on the issue.

The coalition also includes: the California Business Roundtable; California Retailers Association; California Business Properties Association; California Asian Pacific Chamber of Commerce; Agricultural Council of California; California Grocers Association; California Trucking Association; California Manufacturers & Technology Association; National Federation of Independent Businesses, California; Southern California Leadership Council; Los Angeles Business Federation; Inland Empire Economic Partnership and the Orange County Business Council.

Combined, the ports of Long Beach and LA bring in 40% of the United States’ imports. Congestion at the ports is likely



Numerous cargo ships sit outside of the breakwater as they wait for their turn to enter the ports from Signal Hill Friday, October 15, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

to have a noticeable impact on holiday shopping as items are stuck in transit along various points of the supply chain.

But the impact of the crisis goes well beyond holiday shopping—a point the coalition made in its letter.

“Medical supplies, component parts for manufacturing, diapers and basic household necessities are sitting off the coast or in containers at the ports, while California-grown agricultural products are waiting to be exported

around the world,” the coalition said. “Bureaucratic red tape and regulatory hurdles created this current crisis and must be addressed in both the short and long term in order to allow the goods movement sector to move commerce in and out of our ports and drive our economy and job recovery forward.”

But Newsom’s approach has at least one local advocate.

“California always leads the way in innovation and discovering

solutions to problems,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in an email following the announcement. “The ideas laid out today by Gov. Gavin Newsom will go a long way toward delivering immediate and long-term solutions to address the unprecedented disruptions we are experiencing within the national supply chain and furthers President Biden’s call for 24/7 operations within the San Pedro Bay ports complex.” ■

## Oil Abandonment

*Continued from page 14*

In late October, the price of oil hovered around \$85 per barrel, according to Reuters.

Still, many unknowns remain, such as what to do with the artificial THUMS islands just off the coast. City officials anticipate that the city will keep the islands and repurpose them, according to Dowell’s May memo.


Modica’s memo also outlined how much more work the city must do to wean itself off oil revenue. One of the “next steps” city staff will be taking said simply, “Continue to look for alternatives to oil revenue.”

The city received \$18.9 million in oil revenue in fiscal year 2020, according to the memo. Of that, \$10.3 million went to the general fund while the remaining \$8.6 million went to the Tidelands Operating Fund.

The Tidelands Operating Fund pays for a wide range of projects and programs in the city, including aquarium and convention center maintenance and improvements, lifeguards and tree trimming.


One key recommendation from Modica to the mayor and City Council was to avoid issuing “any new Tidelands debt as it is inherently supported by oil revenue” and would therefore increase the city’s dependence on oil revenue at precisely the time when the city is trying to decrease it.

In any case, oil production in the city already declines at about 6% each year, according to the memo. ■




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Solita

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ground California chile, cotija cheese and green onions.

• Steak Carne Asada: wood-grilled Angus steak, avocado, jalapeno toreados, scallions and chimichurri; served with two sides.

There are Solita restaurants open now in Huntington Beach and Valencia, and a new one will open in Anaheim in February, said Sharpe. The Long Beach Solita will be the biggest incarnation of the chain, moving into the cavernous Rock Bottom site of more than 9,000 square feet, with seating for more than 300 customers, including room for 45 on the 1,360-square-foot patio, which will include access to an indoor-outdoor bar offering craft cocktails, making use of an array of tequilas and mezcals.

“Solitas were originally designed to fit in smaller boxes, but it’s really shown it can handle bigger places,” he said. “It’s a very relaxed and comfortable atmosphere and we have a great weekend brunch and a great happy hour and unique cocktails that will appeal to a broad spectrum of people, from locals to convention attendees. It’s very casual, not uptight.”

Sharpe said he hopes to open Solitas in Long Beach in April. ■

Residents sue warehousing and beauty supply companies over foul smell in Dominguez Channel

BY CRYSTAL NIEBLA AND SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY / Reporters

Eight Carson residents filed a lawsuit late last month alleging negligence from warehousing and beauty supply companies that they say helped bring about the intense foul odor that’s been coming from the Dominguez Channel for weeks.

The lawsuit, filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court Friday on Oct. 22, alleges that Gardena-based Art Naturals stored hand sanitizers, which the Federal Drug Administration deemed carried “unacceptable levels of known carcinogens,” at a warehouse in Carson and that these hand sanitizers got into the channel following a fire at the warehouse on Sept. 30.

LA County officials confirmed that they are investigating the presence of various chemicals in the channel but wouldn’t comment on whether that investigation might lead to criminal charges or other penalties.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Director Mark

Pestrella has said during past Carson City Council meetings that the county has been investigating a discharge of materials into the channel—including pallet pieces, cardboard and ethanol—that may or may not have been put into the water intentionally.

The lawsuit adds more detailed accusations. It alleges the defendants maintained “unsafe conditions” at the warehouse, which burned for more than eight hours and injured four firefighters. Los Angeles County fire officials are still investigating the cause of the fire.

Warehouse owner Liberty Property and its parent company Prologis were also named defendants in the suit. The suit alleges the warehouse company and the beauty supply company did not make any effort to remove the debris from the fire, including “uncombusted ethanol-based hand sanitizer” that remained piled around the warehouse.

That debris then flowed into the Dominguez Channel, where it sat in shallow stagnant water, contributing to the kill-off of vegetation in the channel, which prompted the production of

foul-smelling hydrogen sulfide gas, the lawsuit alleged.

The stench is most concentrated in Carson near the South Avalon Boulevard exit of the 405 Freeway. Communities in Wilmington, Gardena, Torrance, Redondo Beach and parts of Long Beach have also been impacted by the odor.

The plaintiffs want an injunction directing the companies to pay for relocation and future medical monitoring expenses as a result of the nauseating gas, as well as unspecified damages.

After weeks of the stench, residents’ feelings of anger and neglect grew.

Exposure to hydrogen sulfide has caused symptoms including headaches, eye, nose and throat irritation, sneezing, dizziness, insomnia, nausea and even vomiting.

“We needed reinforcement,” said Ana Meni, 42, one of eight residents who enlisted the law firm to sue. “We needed help because everywhere we turned, they’re not necessarily helping

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Dana Tanner, right, owner of now-defunct Restauration, looks on as the Long Beach Gas Department employees examine an illegal gas connection to the restaurant after a reported leak Sunday, Jan. 24, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

It cost \$28,000 to investigate restaurant owner who defied COVID rules, city says

BY JEREMIAH DOBRUCK / Reporter

Long Beach says it spent nearly \$30,000 building a criminal case against a restaurant owner who refused to close during one of the worst parts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a judge is now considering whether she should be required to reimburse that money in order to avoid misdemeanor charges now pending against her.

The question stems from an epic feud between Long Beach officials and

Dana Tanner, the owner of now-closed Restauration on Fourth Street.

Her case began roiling the city last year when Tanner’s plans for a New Year’s Eve party at Restauration went public. At that point, on-site dining was banned while health officials tried to fight the winter surge of COVID-19 that pushed hospitals to the brink as thousands of Long Beach residents tested positive for the virus each week.

Over the next several months, officials repeatedly tried to shut down

Restauration, even cutting off gas to Tanner’s kitchen, but she refused to comply. Tanner encouraged other businesses to violate coronavirus rules and, at one point, officials allege she ran a pirated gas line that caused a leak in the neighborhood. (Tanner denies any involvement in the pirated gas line.)

The Long Beach City Prosecutor’s Office eventually filed 20 misdemeanor charges against Tanner, but that investigation came at no small cost. In court documents released late last

month, City Prosecutor Doug Haubert said it took hundreds of hours of work performed by two dozen employees in the police, code enforcement, gas and health departments. That totaled \$28,471.30 of staff time, he said.

That’s on top of more than \$50,000 it cost the city to levy administrative penalties and then process Tanner’s appeals for actions like revoking her health permit and removing her gas meter, Deputy City Attorney Art Sanchez said.

Long Beach Superior Court Judge Christopher J. Frisco, who is handling the criminal case, has said he’ll consider dismissing the charges if Tanner pays the city back for its “investigative costs,” according to court documents. But he signaled he wants to focus only on the costs of the criminal case—not the over \$50,000 in administrative costs. (The city isn’t trying any other avenue to recoup that money, Sanchez said: “All the city wanted to do was gain compliance.”)

The situation is in Frisco’s hands because Tanner has asked for judicial diversion, essentially asking him to intervene pretrial and do away with the case as long as Tanner complies with specific terms he imposes. In the meantime, she’s pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Tanner previously said the situation has already taken a toll on her, including sparking abuse and harassment online. And when she shut down Restauration in April, she donated its \$50,000 worth of kitchen equipment to a Long Beach nonprofit, according to her attorney, Bryan Schroeder.

In court, Schroeder didn’t dispute how much the city spent on Tanner’s case, but he told the judge he doesn’t believe Long Beach is entitled to reimbursement on the costs of a criminal investigation.

Frisco is set to consider Tanner’s request for diversion at a Jan. 11 court hearing. ■

Supply Chain

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“With the escalating backlog of ships off the coast, we must take immediate action to prompt the rapid removal of containers from our marine terminals,” Port of Long Beach Executive

Director Mario Cordero said in the announcement. “The terminals are running out of space, and this will make room for the containers sitting on those ships at anchor.”

Congestion at U.S. ports has been a major talking point on the national stage, with President Joe Biden

making several public comments on the issue. The dwell time fee policy was developed in coordination with the Biden administration’s Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force, the U.S. Department of Transportation and numerous supply chain stakeholders.

“I support the actions taken by

the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach today to charge ocean carriers for lingering containers on marine terminals,” John Porcari, Port Envoy to the task force, said in the announcement. “We need more players throughout the supply chain to keep stepping up.” ■



Hundreds of containers sit on chassis in West Long Beach Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Vaccine Exemption

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“It turns out there really are no religious exemptions, that’s just a crock,” Lewin said. “But if you feel strongly about it, you’re going to have to look for a position somewhere else.”

What is a medical exemption?

Medical exemptions are granted to people who have, or could have, a dangerous reaction to a vaccine due to an allergy or other existing medical condition. The Centers for Disease Control has made obtaining a medical exemption harder by removing the emergency use tag from the Pfizer vaccine and approving it for full use in those 12 and older, including women who are pregnant, in late August.

Experts say that a very small number of people qualify for medical exemptions from vaccines, but it is ultimately up to the employer to decide who is granted

one, whether they qualify or not.

How are they evaluated?

State and federal law allow employers to evaluate exemption requests for a variety of reasons not limited to the timing of the request—if it was submitted at an opportune time to get the employee out of the vaccine for secular reasons—and if their behavior is consistent with the religious teachings for which they’re seeking the exemption.

Established case law could allow for a vegan to oppose being vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine because the vaccine was tested on animals. A person who is opposed to abortion and challenged the mandate on the grounds the vaccine was developed using fetal cells, which were grown in a lab from samples collected decades ago, could be asked questions about what other types of medications they use.

Other common medications including Tylenol and Motrin have used fetal cells

in their development.

Employers also have to determine if providing a reasonable accommodation is feasible from a business operations standpoint. This could include concerns over whether accommodating employees by reassigning them to a different position or remote work would create a hardship—financial or otherwise—and whether having an unvaccinated worker would pose a danger to other employees’ health and safety.

Where is Long Beach in the process?

The city of Long Beach announced its own vaccine mandate in September and is negotiating with individual employee unions to reach a resolution, which could include an effective date and any penalties that could come from non-compliance, including termination.

Lewin said that when it comes to city employees, many of whom are unionized, it can become trickier. Lewin said there is a precedent set through previous labor negotiations,

which likely didn’t address vaccinations. But the previous contracts did put in place other rules that have established the city’s ability to impose new ones, Lewin said.

“Any professional staff in a company has issues like this,” Lewin said. “If you’re the head of IT in Long Beach and you institute a new security check on your system and some people say ‘I don’t like that, it’s against my beliefs,’ and you start to permit the exemptions, you descend into chaos.”

He added that there could be a unique situation like the one that’s played out in the NBA in which the referees’ union agreed to a full mandate for its members while the players’ union has not.

The latter has left Brooklyn Nets star, Kyrie Irving, in jeopardy of having to sit out the season after the team said it would not let him participate until he could participate fully. Irving cannot practice or play in Brooklyn because of New York City COVID-19 restrictions for unvaccinated persons. ■



## Dominguez Channel

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out the community.”

Officials with Prologis issued a brief statement in response to the lawsuit, saying that media outlets have previously reported that the odor from the channel is related to decaying plants and marine life because of the drought. “The unfortunate fire that broke out in late September is unrelated, which we will make clear when we respond to these allegations,” Prologis officials said.

Officials with Art Naturals didn’t respond to a request for comment.

During a media briefing, Pestrella said chemicals that were located within the channel “raise curiosity for us about how they got into the system.” He said the county is investigating.

“I am unable to speak about the details of that investigation,” Pestrella said during the briefing, because it may be both criminal and civil. When asked about the lawsuit and the possibility that hand sanitizer chemicals contributed to the odor, Pestrella said he was not aware of the lawsuit and could not speculate about the chemicals under investigation.

Previously, Pestrella has said that the introduction of the materials could have become food to organisms, which might have led to boosting the naturally occurring decay of organic matter, such as vegetation and marine life. The decay and decomposition of the organic matter then produced a byproduct of hydrogen sulfide, which is the source of the pungent,



The Dominguez Channel near the 405 Freeway exit on South Avalon Boulevard and East Dominguez Street on Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

rotten-egg smell nearby residents have been inhaling. A low tide drying off vegetation in the channel also led to more decay, he said.

Pestrella has also said that the source of the discharge of foreign material might have come from a nearby pallet

fire, but the county has not confirmed that theory.

County crews began spraying a deodorizer, Epoleon, into the channel on Oct. 15, but the odor has remained.

The lawsuit was filed by Cotchett, Pitre and McCarthy, which has one of

its four offices in the Los Angeles/Santa Monica area. The firm has engaged in public health-related lawsuits in the past, having settled a \$1.8 billion lawsuit surrounding a massive release of natural gas into the Porter Ranch neighborhood in Los Angeles. ■

## Rebounding

Continued from page 13

But growth remains slow: By the end of September, rents had gone up just under 1% over the course of 12 months.

Retail occupancy, meanwhile, has increased to nearly 95%—comparable to pre-pandemic times—after dropping to 93% in the winter, its lowest level since 2016.

And new retail space will become available soon. There is currently more than 50,000 square feet of new retail space under construction in Downtown, including 11,000 square feet of space at the renovated Ocean Center Building and 25,000 square feet of new retail as part of the Broadway Block multi-family development.

On-street parking transactions and pedestrian counts also show a return to Downtown, albeit timid.

The number of daily parking transactions within the boundaries of the DLBA’s business improvement district has fluctuated over the past year, suffering a deep drop in the midst of the winter COVID surge, before recovering in the summer to a peak of over 500 transactions per day—inching closer to the pre-pandemic number of

roughly 750 transactions per month in the fall of 2019.

Pedestrian counts in Downtown have also been increasing since their sharp drop at the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, with the exception of a dip in pedestrian traffic between October and February, when Los Angeles County faced one of the deadliest periods of the public health crisis.

Over 4 million people visited the Downtown area in August, according to aggregated mobile location data collected by software company Placer.ai, a contractor to the DLBA, marking an increase from an early-pandemic low of just over 2.5 million visitors.

Businesses, too, have been feeling the uptick, although optimism remains reserved.

“People don’t go out like they used to—I don’t,” said Brian Smith, a manager at Shannon’s Irish Pub and Sports Bar on Pine Avenue. “It’s an extravagance.”


But patrons like Sean Callaghan, a manager at a logistics firm with headquarters in Downtown Long Beach, are a glimpse of hope. Colleagues and business associates have once again started to visit the company’s downtown offices, bringing with them client lunches and post-work drinks.

“That sort of stuff is coming back again,” Callaghan said. Personally, he said he also feels more comfortable going to bars and restaurants again. “I’m vaccinated, so I’m not as worried as I used to be.”

Over in the East Village, customers are returning as well. Bring Your Own Long Beach, a refill station for hygiene and home products, was

highly impacted by the pandemic due to its high-touch concept—patrons refill their own bottles and jars with products from large refill containers—manager Emily Lou said.

“It’s definitely taken a toll on us,” Lou said. But now, things are looking up. “Folks are really excited to be out—I’ve had customers who I hadn’t seen since the start of the pandemic.” ■



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