‘We’re not there yet’: Carnival Cruise Lines has long recovery ahead after pandemic hurdles

By Brandon Richardson

After being forced to anchor for well over a year, the recovery for the cruise industry is going to take time. Carnival Cruise Lines jump-started operations in July after a 16-month hiatus and, while loyal customers were ready to board, the company is still trailing behind pre-pandemic levels, according to Chief Communications Officer Chris Chiames.

“We’re not there yet—2019 was a great year for Carnival,” Chiames said. “So we still have work to do to get back to those levels.”

Carnival’s Long Beach operations

Proposed regulation update could sink Catalina Express

By Christian May-Suzuki

For more than four decades, Catalina Express vessels have ferried millions of people between its namesake island and the mainland. The company weathered the coronavirus pandemic, only to come out the other side staring down a squall in the form of state regulations that could capsize the company.

Prior to the pandemic, Catalina Express averaged about 500,000 roundtrip passengers for a total of one million crossings each year, President Greg Bombard said. Residents of Catalina Island account for about 14% of passenger traffic, he added, with the remainder being leisure travel.

In 2020, passenger volumes dropped 43%, according to Catalina Express data. But in 2021, the company saw almost a full recovery.

“People wanted to get out. They had been cooped up for a long time,” Bombard said. “We came back pretty strong—we weren’t quite at 2019 numbers but we were approaching them.”

Catalina Island was an attractive destination during the pandemic because of its various outdoor offerings, including hiking, kayaking and more, Bombard said. After initial shutdowns, the island was desperate for visitors, as tourism is its main economic driver.

Founded in 1981, Catalina Express now has an eight-ship fleet that is the primary mode of transportation between the island and the mainland—both for visitors and island residents who cross regularly for work. With ports in Long Beach, Dana Point and San Pedro, the company has transported over 33 million in its 41-year history.

As air regulations have become

Long Beach hotel tax revenue fell 48% amid pandemic, but it’s on the rise again

By Brandon Richardson

Long Beach’s hotels were hit hard by COVID-19, but the city’s Transient Occupancy Tax, known more commonly as the hotel bed tax, has remained an important source of revenue.

Until 2020, the rate of the tax in Long Beach was 12%, with half of the funds going to the city’s general fund and the other half being injected into a “Special Advertising and Promotions Fund” (SAP) that...
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Long Beach Business Journal
211 E. Ocean Blvd, Ste. 400
Long Beach, CA 90802

Editorial Deadline: Two weeks prior to publication. Email press releases to editor@lbbj.com

Advertising Deadline: Wednesday prior to publication.

See editorial calendar at lbbusinessjournal.com/advertise.

LongBeachBusinessJournal
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Hello, Rust Belt
Goodbye, Golden State;
Looking for inexpensive homes?

Downtown Long Beach is slowly coming back to life as COVID-19 restrictions continue to lift, but foot traffic in the area is still far below its pre-pandemic level.

It’s a problem that has kept small businesses from fully mapping the benefits of the ongoing economic recovery—and only one civic officials are hoping to tackle.

Business owners spoke about the issue with Mayor Robert Garcia in earlier this month during the first of nine “recovery roundtables,” that Garcia is hosting in each City Council district to hear from business leaders about their concerns and challenges as Long Beach seeks to bounce back from the pandemic.

The first edition, in the 1st District that includes Downtown, focused both on the difficulties of how business has shifted during COVID-19 and on issues like homelessness and public safety.

“All my workers are girls in their 20s, and they’ve had some bad incidents in the parking garage,” the Pie Bar owner Laurie Gray told Garcia. “Some of them have been scared and have to be escorted to their car at night. So that’s not my biggest concern right now— that people don’t feel safe walking and visiting Downtown as they can support small businesses.”

And Garcia and city staff present at the meeting, including Deputy Police Chief Gerardo Prieto, spoke about initiatives to better protect the businesses and ensure safety.

“We want to get the city and the Downtown Long Beach Alliance and the CVB and the Chamber—all of our partners together on something to put out specific encouragement for folks to come back, to shop, to dine,” Garcia said. “So the goal, at the end of these three conversations, is we want to get a little bit of a FOMO [fear of missing out] campaign, kind of this ‘welcome back’ kind of plan. We don’t know what that looks like yet. Obviously that’s part of why we’re talking to folks. We need to hear what the needs are.”

The biz conferences, once popular tourism events, have been canceled due to the pandemic.

“Hello, Rust Belt” is a column by editorial assistant Hayley Mungui. Please submit your news tips and story ideas to editor@LBBJ.com.

FROM THE EDITOR: HAYLEY MUNGUI

Tourism rebound could help Downtown Long Beach bounce back

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FROM THE EDITOR: HAYLEY MUNGUI

Tourism rebound could help Downtown Long Beach bounce back
Rancho Los Cerritos turns pandemic obstacles into opportunity to grow

Prior to COVID-19, Rancho Los Cerritos had a meager online presence. Now, the historic site has embraced the medium in addition to its in-person offerings.

By Christian Hay-Suzuki

What happens when a museum whose very existence is based on an internet is forced to shift its operations virtually? The Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site was forced to answer that over the past two years, and Executive Director Alice Bruesehoff and her staff of 13 have turned the obstacles presented by the pandemic into a new opportunity to grow.

The Rancho—located directly west of the Buca di Beppo building and its adjacent outdoor space—and the city of Long Beach have had a long relationship. The site was acquired by the city in 1945. Hundreds of thousands of visitors have enjoyed the house and its grounds in the 67 years since, until March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic put on-site services on hold. Staff at the Rancho knew early on that a lockdown was coming, so the transition to a new way of life was not as jarring as it was for many other businesses and organizations reliant on public interaction.

“I was very impressed with our staff,” Bruesehoff told the Business Journal. “They started transitioning our programming very quickly to a virtual format.”

Prior to the pandemic, the virtual options to experience and learn about Rancho Los Cerritos were limited, as was its audience. Bruesehoff said.

The recent push online started with its after-hours program—Long Ago Long Beach—after in-person registration was halted.

The educational outreach initiatives in 2020 and 2021, and provides lessons taught through various mediums, giving the community access to events that were canceled in-person due to the pandemic.

Among the site’s educational outreach initiatives is the virtual “History at Home” program, which launched in February 2021. The program consists of 20-minute sessions on how to find and explore local history. As of April 30, 2021, the program had超过 4,000 participants, with an average attendance of 22 people per session. The program was extended to a series of classes for kids and parents, and includes a variety of topics such as the history of Long Beach, local landmarks, and the city’s role in the Civil Rights Movement.

The site’s virtual programming has also expanded to include social science workshops delivered in after-school daycare settings around Long Beach, according to the Rancho’s website. With no venue to deliver the program, staff quickly put together several videos and published them online.

“They were a little bit rough,” Bruesehoff said of the first videos. “But [staff] recorded a couple at the Rancho and included the activities that kids could do at home. And that was really our first foray into video programming.”

While it was a forced transition, Rancho Los Cerritos decided to embrace the new opportunity to reach visitors virtually. The Rancho took the obstacles presented by the pandemic and turned them into an opportunity to expand its audience.

Another symptom of the success that came with virtual programming is the change in the audience the site received. In person, visitors would include tour groups, families, and school groups, while virtual visitors were primarily individual users.

“The lessons learned by the site’s programming have been a game-changer,” Bruesehoff said. “We started having an international audience that deserves attention.”

The site’s virtual programming has been so successful that it has attracted visitors from around the world, including visitors from countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Rancho Los Cerritos staff also put together several videos and put them on the site’s website. With no venue to reserve space for homeowners or their guests, the site decided to embrace virtual programming.

“I’m trying to bring people together. So what better way to bring people together than through food?” Bruesehoff said.

In 2020, we saw 8,000 people come through the site, which owned by hosting a Filipino Restaurant Week, a program that included banners, posters, tents and festivals around the site. The event was a huge success, with up to double their usual number of visitors.

“On weekends in January, we had an international audience that came to the site,” Bruesehoff said. “We have a lot of visitors from the LA County and Orange County region that come through, and we also have a lot of visitors from the Long Beach area. We’re trying to bring people together.”

The success of the event led to the creation of a few years ago in an effort to support local businesses and organizations. The registration fee is $50, and people the option to decide what will be most beneficial for them.

“The long-term impact of this has been tremendous,” Bruesehoff said. “It has really given us a chance to reach out to people who may not have been able to come to the site before.”

The lessons learned by the site’s programming have been a game-changer, and the site has continued to improve the overall experience.

Visitors to the Rancho Los Cerritos Historical Site explore the inner courtyard, a popular venue for weddings and other events.

LONG BEACH

City Council approves regulations to protect legal short-term rentals in coastal zone

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Long Beach hopes to have Queen Mary considered for national monument status

By Kelly Puente

Long Beach officials are hoping the federal government has a sentimental spot for the historic ocean liner that has been parked off the city’s coast for 55 years.

In the first of five critical projects that kicked off this year, Long Beach removed 20 of the Queen Mary’s locally owned operators. The 36-foot-long boats are sitting in the ship’s harbor parking lots, preparing to accept them to qualified nonprofits that would focus on preservation. The deadline for bidders is March 15.

In the next step, the city is planning to install an emergency power generator, new fire pumps and a flooding alarm system. The city will shortesten to remove the abandoned “Scorpion” Soviet submarine, which has been moored next to the Queen Mary as a tourist attraction for nearly two decades. It was closed to the public in 2019 after it fell into disrepair.

The city’s lawyers are attempting to have the submarine’s alleged owner, Palm Springs resident Ed Skowron, remove the vessel, but he hasn’t responded to multiple requests and the city is now moving a lawsuit, officials said.

“The City Attorney has issued several written demands to the submarine owner to remove it from its submarine, but the owner has failed to respond and attorneys representing the owner have not responded to several attempts to discuss the matter,” the memo stated.

The city is now looking into possible options including shipping the submarine onto land for future use or finding it a more permanent location for recycling. The land removal would not be cost-effective, but could be costly, city staff noted.

Long Beach owns the Queen Mary but for decades leased it to a string of failed operators. Last year, former operator Urban Commons gave up on the submarine, but the owner has failed to respond and attorneys representing the owner have not responded to several attempts to discuss the matter.

The city estimates that urgent work will take at least 90 to 120 days to complete and that the ship can be reopened by the end of this fiscal year for special events and hospitality services.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Short-Term Rentals

Commission.

In order to do the enforcement that’s needed today, we need something on the books,” Koontz said. “At the request of the Coastal Commission, the city also made it harder for communities in the coastal zone to seek a ban on short-term rentals in their neighborhoods. Part of the original ordinance approved in 2020 allowed for census blocks to organize and petition to bar short-term rentals within those census blocks. At its March 8 meeting, the council approved a requested change that will require the petition process to be followed by the acquisition of a local coastal development permit, a process governed by the Coastal Commission, which would hold a hearing to determine if the desired ban is proper and doesn’t inhibit affordable access to the coast, would not result in both unhosted and hosted units in the coastal zone to less than 425, and would be necessary to protect the neighborhood from nuisance properties that endanger public health or affect the character of the area.

An amended version of the city’s coastal zone regulations moves to the Coastal Commission for consideration at a future meeting.

The city is also looking to remove the Queen Mary as a tourist attraction for nearly two decades. It was closed to the public in 2019 after it fell into disrepair.

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Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau wins California Poppy Award for Innovation in Marketing

The organization was honored at the California Poppy Awards, which are held biannually to recognize tourism organizations representing both destinations and businesses.

By Christian May-Suzuki

When Samantha Mehlinger joined the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) as its vice president of communications, she knew she would have to find a new approach to be successful.

Communications plays a vital role in the CVB’s mission, but branching out required hard work and innovation, especially with the state of the pandemic scoring over the tourism industry. Some of that work was recognized last month when the bureau won the “Best Content Marketing” at the California Poppy Awards, which recognizes tourism promotion organizations from cities and businesses.

The CVB was selected out of a pool of all entries, according to the awards.

The CVB submitted its “Long Beach Days & Getaways” campaign, which launched in May, 2021, for consideration. Mehlinger’s team created original itineraries for visitors that highlighted the uniqueness of Long Beach neighborhoods and businesses.

The itineraries used original photos and video footage alongside “Listicles” to highlight the unique cultural scenes throughout the city, while inviting viewers to “imagine themselves making the same trip to Long Beach.”

“I wanted to authentically represent the destinations because I feel that all of those unique lanes are the reasons people come to Long Beach,” Mehlinger told the Business Journal.

Using its recently updated website, the CVB was able to present these listicles in an aesthetically pleasing way, Mehlinger said. With both text and typography as well as an eye-catching design, the campaign reimagined how a listicle should be presented to the public—both residents and visitors alike.

“Tourism conventions such as the bureau hired local freelance writers and Long Beach-based film crew 360. The focus on local talent is a unique way for the CVB to make its content marketable according to algorithms used by Google and other search engines, Mehlinger said.

“I think having all local creators creating for itself, from local writers to photographers to local photographers, causes those algorithms to realize what we are producing: real expert and local content,” Mehlinger said.

Finding new and creative ways to spread the message also something the bureau has been able to do, Mehlinger said. The summer campaign, in particular, focused on leveraging social media platforms, which continues to rise, according to Mehlinger. The CVB platform, which continues to rise, according to Mehlinger. The CVB
delivered its message to the target audience.

A new relationship with the state’s tourism board—Visit California—materialized as a result of the campaign, which was created alongside the website and Instagram, but many other options emerged that helped the CVB reach a broader audience.

Storytelling remained the perfect platform to expand the reach of the CVB, according to Mehlinger. Some of that work was presented to the public—both residents and visitors alike.

The campaign reimagined how a listicle should be presented to the public—both residents and visitors alike. Samantha Mehlinger, vice president of communications for the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, shows off the organization’s Poppy Award, won for its innovative marketing amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Catalina Express

More stringent through the years, Catalina Express has upgraded its engine to reduce emissions accordingly, Bombard said. Marine diesel engines are categorized by tier: Tier 1 being the oldest and dirtiest, and Tier 4 being the newest and cleanest.

In 2009, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) approved a regulation that required Catalina Express to update its fleet again to cleaner Tier 3 engines, a process the company began five years ago. Upgrading an engine to Tier 4 requires modifying the existing engine with more modern parts and costs about $4 million per vessel, Bombard said.

Four of the company’s ships had already been upgraded to Tier 3 and a fifth is currently in San Diego undergoing the same transition, expected to be completed in late April or early May. Bomard said Tier 4 vessels are slated to be upgraded by the company’s engine supplier Bombard.

“This is a complex process that would require Catalina Express to head a new engineering and design team,” said Bombard. “And that takes money.”

The results also increased the passenger complement because it would add so much weight to the vessel,” Bombard said. “It has resulted in design limits, if you want to add weight to a vessel, you’ve got to take it off some other way.”

For about $5 million each, Bombard said Catalina Express vessels could be upgraded to Tier 4 engines but the reduced capacity would effectively increase the company’s carbon footprint per passenger. The other option, he said, is building an entirely new fleet to the tune of $100 million per ship, which is not possible without financial assistance from the state and federal governments.

Despite the fact that the proposed regulation has not been approved, the company already is actively engaging CARB and seeking grant funding, Bombard said. The company has started a change.org petition urging the betterment of the vessel for the sake of the island and its economy.

Unfortunately, most state and federal funding is for the transition to zero-emission technology, Bombard said. The company is willing to transition to electric or hydrogen-fueled fleet, but the technology simply does not exist for ships with similar capacity and range required for Catalina Express. Zero-emission ferries are being tested in San Francisco. Bombard said, but they travel at half the speed and with seating for only 70 passengers compared to his vessels’ capacity of just under 500.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” Bombard said. “But it’s not close enough.”
restored in late August when the Panorama, the newest and largest ship based in the city, departed for a seven-day excursion along the Mexican Riviera. The first new cruise ship to West Coast in almost two years, Panorama can accommodate over 4,000 passengers and was operating at about 75% capacity for the safety of all aboard.

The company’s other Long Beach-based ships—Miracle and Radiance, the latter of which recently underwent a $210 million makeover—began running their routes not long after. In May, when the Splendor begins service out of Seattle, all 14 Carnival Cruise Line ships will be back in service, Chiames said. “We’re really excited about that,” Chiames said. “We’ve always had tremendous loyalty from our guests and they... clearly expressed a desire to get back to cruising.”

That desire resulted in guests willingly complying with increased safety protocols, Chiames said, which included being vaccinated, providing proof of a negative test before embarkation. “Quite frankly, while I think there was concern across the industry for [mandates], it really hasn’t been a must of an issue so one might have thought,” Chiames said. “People were just so anxious and happy to get back to cruising that they complied.”

Carnival is doing the cruise industry as it recovers from the devastating impacts of the pandemic, which halted operations for almost a year and a half, Chiames said. Combined, the Carnival Corporation—parent company of Carnival Cruise Lines and Princess Cruises, among others—reported nearly $9.8 billion in net losses in 2020 and 2021, according to financial records, compared to over $6.6 billion of total net income in 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, 710,000 passengers embarked on a voyage out of Long Beach, according to an economic impact study by the Port of Long Beach. That level of passenger traffic makes the Long Beach the busiest cruise terminal in the state and the fifth in the nation behind PortMiami, Port Canaveral, Port Everglades and the Port of Galveston. Carnival Trinidad-based Carnival ship operator Anne Madison said.

Prior to the pandemic, Long Beach cruise passengers generated more than $215 million annually in direct spending on goods, services, meals and hotels in the city, in addition to $31 million in indirect spending in goods and services for the ships’ crews while they were in port, Madison said. The Long Beach operation generates $25 million in federal taxes and $3 million in state and local taxes.

“Carnival Cruise Lines provides a tremendous economic impact for the City of Long Beach in terms of the direct and indirect visitor spending,” Madison said. Long Beach-based John Kelsier said in an email, adding that “over $3 million in passenger, parking and other fees help pay for important city services that benefit our residents.”

Statewide, the cruise industry served 845,000 passengers out of four ports in 2019. Madison said. Those passengers generated $2.6 billion in direct spending, supporting more than 30,000 jobs and $3.9 billion in wages. After decades of sailing out of San Diego, Carnival moved into its current Long Beach home in 2019. Carnival has spent nearly two decades strengthening its Long Beach operation, Chiames said, including the expansion of the cruise terminal next to the Queen Mary and the increased capacity of the three ships that now call the city home.

As a partner and seeing the carnival funnel," said a statement. Meanwhile, we are proceeding with measures we will need in the long term, such as development of our Supply

City to look at new elevated rail system for port cargo transportation—but it won’t be cheap

By Brandon Richardson

The number of empty containers moving through port increased 5.2% to 288,200 TEUs. “We are moving record amounts of cargo and catching up with the ongoing surge of imports,” Executive Director Marie Cordero said in a statement. “But just like everyone else, opening a location or business during the pandemic—I have some concerns or anxieties, but I also have optimism.”

If there were ever a time to open a center dedicated to supporting entrepreneurship, though, the post-pandemic era of a pandemic, when restrictions are finally easing, may be as good as any.

Carnival Recovery

LOCAL NEWS

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In 2019, 710,000 passengers embarked on a voyage out of Long Beach, according to an economic impact study by the Port of Long Beach. That level of passenger traffic makes the Long Beach the busiest cruise terminal in the state and the fifth in the nation behind PortMiami, Port Canaveral, Port Everglades and the Port of Galveston. Carnival Trinidad-based Carnival ship operator Anne Madison said.

Prior to the pandemic, Long Beach cruise passengers generated more than $215 million annually in direct spending on goods, services, meals and hotels in the city, in addition to $31 million in indirect spending in goods and services for the ships’ crews while they were in port, Madison said. The Long Beach operation generates $25 million in federal taxes and $3 million in state and local taxes.

“Carnival Cruise Lines provides a tremendous economic impact for the City of Long Beach in terms of the direct and indirect visitor spending,” Madison said. Long Beach-based John Kelsier said in an email, adding that “over $3 million in passenger, parking and other fees help pay for important city services that benefit our residents.”

Statewide, the cruise industry served 845,000 passengers out of four ports in 2019. Madison said. Those passengers generated $2.6 billion in direct spending, supporting more than 30,000 jobs and $3.9 billion in wages. After decades of sailing out of San Diego, Carnival moved into its current Long Beach home in 2019. Carnival has spent nearly two decades strengthening its Long Beach operation, Chiames said, including the expansion of the cruise terminal next to the Queen Mary and the increased capacity of the three ships that now call the city home.

As a partner and seeing the carnival funnel," said a statement. Meanwhile, we are proceeding with measures we will need in the long term, such as development of our Supply

City to look at new elevated rail system for port cargo transportation—but it won’t be cheap

By Brandon Richardson

The number of empty containers moving through port increased 5.2% to 288,200 TEUs. “We are moving record amounts of cargo and catching up with the ongoing surge of imports,” Executive Director Marie Cordero said in a statement. “But just like everyone else, opening a location or business during the pandemic—I have some concerns or anxieties, but I also have optimism.”

If there were ever a time to open a center dedicated to supporting entrepreneurship, though, the post-pandemic era of a pandemic, when restrictions are finally easing, may be as good as any.
Rocket Lab completes first launch of 2022

By Brandon Richardson

Another satellite is orbiting Earth following a successful mission by the Long Beach-based rocket manufacturer and launch service provider Rocket Lab, the firm announced late last month.

Dubbed “The Owl’s Night Continues,” the mission blasted off at 12:37 p.m. local time. Rocket Lab’s Electron rocket carried and successfully delivered a synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellite for Japanese Earth imaging company Synspective.

The satellite is one piece of Synspective’s plan for a 30-satellite constellation designed to detect millimeter-level changes to the Earth’s surface from space, regardless of weather conditions and time of day.

“We are proud to continue our partnership with Synspective and to have provided flexibility around launch timing,” Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck said in the announcement, referring to the fact that the launch was originally scheduled for a later date but was moved up on the manifest to accommodate Synspective’s needs.

“We look forward to our upcoming mission with Synspective as they grow their SAR constellation,” Beck added.

A second launch is slated for this year, with the third planned for 2023. “With the successful insertion of our second SAR satellite, we’re able to improve our technology for operating multiple satellites and strengthen our data services,” Synspective founder and CEO Mr. Maurice Arai said in the announcement. “With our ongoing growth and achievement, we will accelerate the expansion of SAR constellations and enhance our data analysis technology to become the leading world for sustainable future.”

“The Owl’s Night Continues” was Rocket Lab’s 25th Electron launch—the first of 2022—and its payload marked the 19th satellite the firm has put into orbit.

The mission departed from the Rocket Lab’s Launch Complex 1, Pad 8, facility on New Zealand’s Mahia Peninsula. This is the first time the first launch pad is used again.

Moving forward, the ability to use two pads at New Zealand complements will eliminate cycle time between missions, giving Rocket Lab the ability to increase launch frequency and responsiveness, the firm stated.

Rocket Lab has six launches last year, one of which failed. Details for the firm’s next mission are expected to be announced soon.

Long Beach unemployment continues to fall, but remains above most of LA County

By Brandon Richardson

Unemployment in Long Beach continued its slow but steady decline in January but remains higher than nearly 75% of other Los Angeles County cities, according to data released by the California Employment Development Department.

In January, Long Beach’s seasonally adjusted unemployment dropped to 7.5%, tying for the nation’s 15th lowest rate. The previous rate was 7.6% the month before.

At the county level, meanwhile, unemployment only decreased from 6.2% in December to 6.1% in February. For the year, unemployment dipped from 6.7% down to 6.5%.

“People are gravitating toward self-employment and independent contractor jobs and the rising number of business license applications,” Schultz said. “People are betting on themselves rather than making themselves available to a pay-as-you-go payroll employer,” Schultz said.

Countywide, the labor force number of employed residents aged 16 and older increased by 21,500 and 26,600 people, respectively. Across the state, the unemployment rate held steady at 5.8%, according to the EDD, compared to 4.9% nationwide.

The state began 2022 with an unemployment rate of 8.6%. “California’s labor market performed more impressively in the year of 2021 than original estimates had suggested,” Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the Center for Economic Forecasting, said in a statement. “The state added jobs at a rate that was more than 50% greater than the national growth rate, and with abundant job openings in 2022, we expect to see California’s labor market continue to outperform the national economy in 2022.”

Hawaiian opens maintenance facility at Long Beach Airport, bringing more jobs

By Brandon Richardson

Almost four years after making its debut at Long Beach Airport, Hawaiian Airlines opened a new line maintenance base at the small municipal facility, the company announced today.

The 3,000-square-foot facility, which is Hawaiian’s fourth maintenance and supply base in the state, will include one of the airline’s largest stocking locations.

The hangar and office is located on Donald Douglas Drive, northeast of the historic terminal.

“This facility will allow us greater operational flexibility, which in turn provides our guests with a seamless and enjoyable travel experience,” Bea Tatisiana, vice president of maintenance and engineering for Hawaiian, said.

JetBlue previously occupied the space before pulling out of Long Beach entirely in October 2020, taking jobs with it.

Hawaiian’s new facility creates 16 new positions, the company stated, including mechanics who will perform scheduled and unscheduled maintenance on the airline’s Airbus A321.

Virgin Orbit sets focus on commercial launches

By Brandon Richardson

Virgin Orbit staff inspect the LauncherOne system prior to launch.

In a historic moment for the UK space industry, a satellite developed in Wales will be launched into space for the first time ever, carried aboard Long Beach-based Virgin Orbit’s LauncherOne. The firm announced this week. A few weeks later, a second launch will carry European-space manufacturer and startup Space Forge’s new small-class vehicle, the ForgeStar. The platform is the first step in the development of a world-class service for the manufacturing of next-generation spacecraft.

The launch is part of a broader U.K.-U.S. partnership to alleviate the region’s domestic space port. The mission will be the first out of Spaceport Cornwall, Cornwall, England.

Virgin Orbit staff inspect the LauncherOne system prior to launch.

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City budget deficit shrinks to $12M, but officials still face funding issues

By John Ruiz

The one-on-one battle Long Beach officials anticipated in next year’s budget has shrunk by almost $24 million, according to new projections presented to the City Council earlier this month.

The direct projections for the fiscal year starting in October had previously put the shortfall as high as $43 million, according to John Ruiz

Long Beach will be able to avoid any cuts to services this year because prior budgeting performed better than expected during the pandemic. That meant the city didn’t have to use all of the $23 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding it had put into reserves or previously earmarked for maintenance services.

Using the leftover funds to prop up reserves, the city didn’t cut into any of the other programs — like renter relief and small business recovery — the federal programs were also covering, according to Ruiz.

Lungo said that the council that the budget deficit was likely in the $12 million to $14 million range. Ruiz said that any additional funds from oil will be put into reserves instead of used to cover the deficit.

“Developing it with commercial/ retail condominiums (will) provide office space for businesses, bringing high-paying jobs to the City and complement the light-industrial, research and development, manufacturing, and hotel uses that are currently at Douglas Park,” Leblanc said in a staff report read.

The city budget will take up the $149,000 shortfall, which will be the first of eight consecutive years with a budget deficit, according to Ruiz.

Commission approves 2 office buildings with 14-for-sale units at Douglas Park

By Christy May-Sukey

Douglas Park’s expansion is set to continue with the addition of a new commercial/retail space.

Long Beach’s Planning Commission voted at its March 16 meeting to approve plans for the “Airway at Douglas Park” project at 3810 Stineman Court, which will consist of two buildings housing a total of 160,621 square feet of commercial space.

The plan for the design, according to the city of Long Beach, involves the following:

“Developing it with commercial/retail condominiums (will) provide office space for businesses, bringing high-paying jobs to the City and complement the light-industrial, research and development, manufacturing, and hotel uses that are currently at Douglas Park,” Leblanc said in a staff report read.

The buildings will take up the $149,000 shortfall, which will be the first of eight consecutive years with a budget deficit, according to Ruiz.

One of the smallest budget issues facing the city is the outsourcing of the project was looking to attract “high-end retail and other uses.”

The remainder of the 136,638-square-foot lot is dedicated to 12 parking stalls for city staff, including 58 spaces for electric vehicles and 14 for bicycles.

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The city’s cultural plan was born in 2016 after the city received a $50,000 grant from the federal government to develop a creative economy strategy, which included gathering community input.

The plan includes a variety of recommendations, including the creation of a cultural equity committee, which was established in 2019, and the development of a cultural district in the downtown area.

The plan also calls for the creation of a cultural budget, which would be used to support cultural organizations and events, and the development of a cultural tourism strategy.

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Employees at Starbucks coffee shops in Long Beach, Lakewood seek to unionize

By Crystal Nekias

As the move to unionize Starbucks stores nationwide gains momentum, a union organizer announced earlier this month that local stores in Long Beach and Lakewood have submitted a petition to seek unionization.

Starbucks Workers United, the worker group behind the nationwide unionization effort, identified the Starbucks location at 3390 E. Seventh St. near Redondo Avenue and 4819 Candlewood Street near Lakewood Boulevard as two locations seeking to organize.

In two separate petitions signed by 14 and 19 employees at the Long Beach and Lakewood locations, respectively, employees wrote they are overworked, understaffed and underpaid with "sagas that keep us constantly struggling" with inflation. Other top complaints included unfair scheduling and inadequate COVID-19 policies.

A Starbucks spokesperson said that after the pandemic, the corporation "met and exceeded the direction of the CDC and the federal government" with COVID-19 protocols, limiting store to takeout and adjusting hours of operation for certain stores.

Nationwide, Starbucks employees say that the corporation has slashed hours "almost very suddenly," according to Josie Serrano, a barista at the Seventh Street coffee shop who signed a petition, echoing the sentiments of Starbucks Workers United.

Serrano, whose pronouns are they/them, works part-time and said that they have personally seen a 25% reduction in work hours.

"It seems very coincidental that all this is happening from coast to coast as we’re having about 330 stores that have begun or succeeded in the unionization process," said Serrano, a four-year veteran for the company.

When faced to address allegations of retaliation of cutting hours, the spokesperson said the company remains focused on creating a positive environment for their "partners" and maintaining open, transparent and direct conversations.

The Starbucks spokesperson was not immediately available to confirm if there has been a trend of work-hour reductions.

On top of the recent hour reductions, Serrano said when they first started working for the company, multiple partners performed one task, such as preparing a latte. But now, Serrano said responsibilities have converged.

One person now performs the work of three to five people, for example.

One worker, they recalled, was so overwhelmed that they needed a moment to cry in the backroom.

"It’s hard because you see this is not only our store but lots of stores," Serrano said. "We kind of just feel like it’s a good time to hop on that momentum... and really try to get ourselves heard with collective bargaining."

Starbucks, the multi-billion dollar global corporation, has remained against the idea of unions for their workers, who they call "partners."

"Our position since the beginning is that... we want every single one of our partners' rights to be respected," said the company currently operating as a cohesive unit and we want to preserve that working relationship," a Starbucks spokesperson said.

Tyler Keeling, a barista trainer at the Lakewood location and a six-year veteran for the company, said that the Starbucks corporation has "structural" issues with its workers.

Keeling, who serves as a committee member within the Starbucks Workers United and also signed the petition, said the group's petition with the public intent to unionize is one of the first steps in the unionization process. He anticipates the process might take a few months.

The timeline is up to the discretion of the National Labor Relations Board, he said. What follows is a hearing with the Board, scheduling a voting date and, finally, a vote, he said.

Starbucks corporation wants to have a more direct relationship with workers and is encouraging partners to vote no.

A young woman looks at her drink as she exits Starbucks at Seventh Street and Redondo Avenue.

More affordable housing project breaks ground

By Christian May-Suzuki

More affordable housing is on its way to Long Beach, as officials celebrated the groundbreaking of a forthcoming 80-unit complex earlier this month.

Mercy Housing’s four-story Long Beach Senior affordable housing development, at 901-941 E. Pacific Coast Highway, will provide housing for seniors ages 55 and up who either have limited incomes or are veterans who have struggled with homelessness.

“As a veteran, I am happy this project will help my fellow veterans,” Long Beach Senior Citizen Advisory Commissioner Robert Finney said.

Of the 80 units that will be made available, 35 will be reserved for those whose income is $19,725 or less, which is 25% of the area median income, according to the developer.

Another 48 units will be for people with incomes at or below $33,975 annually, 35 will be reserved for people earning $33,700 or below, and 7 is the area median income, according to the developer.

One unit will be reserved for an on-site manager.

“This is a population that absolutely needs this project,” Los Angeles County Development Authority Executive Director Emilio Salas said at the March 9 groundbreaking.

The ground floor of the property will serve as an amenity hub that will include a lounge, bike workshop and storage space and a tenant-driven "community benefit space."

Its second floor features an outdoor courtyard alongside units to provide tenants with outdoor space. There will also be multiple parking spaces for residents, visitors and staff.

Many of the features of the property seek to accomplish a daunting task: serving the development’s residents while placating concerns from residents in the single-family neighborhood to the north of the site.

A list of these features—solicited from community feedback from a Sept. 30, 2019, to April 30, 2020—includes a 5-foot widening plus improvements to the small alleyway separating the project from the homes, placement of the courtyard on the north side of the project and a building facade design “inspired by local Long Beach architecture.”

“We deserve the kind of housing that people need and feel proud to live in,” Councilwoman Sachi Sarno, whose 6th District includes the development, said. “This area is going to get transformed.”

The architecture/design firm Serrano Elek has a history of successful affordable housing developments in Long Beach, including The Annex, The Court, and the Senior Arts Colony.

In particular, the Senior Colony was recognized by the Los Angeles Business Journal as the “Multi-Family Project of the Year” in 2014. The leasing process is anticipated to begin next spring, with the first residents moving in during fall 2022. For more information on the project, visit longbeachsenior.org.

Virgin Orbit

In Newquay, Cornwall.

“We’ve checked in to our long U.K. history with our first launch,” Space Forge CEO Joshua Wentworth said in an announcement. “We’re excited to take the space for good through our in-space manufacturing in our reusable return and it’s brilliant that both Virgin Orbit and Spacport Cornwall share our ambitions.”

Earth is not ideal for manufacturing certain materials, Western told The Guardian in December, due to gravity, the dense atmosphere and impacts on the environment. In space, however, gravity would not interfere with the mining of materials and the vacuum of space would eliminate contamination during the manufacturing process.

Optical fiber manufacturing experiments conducted by NASA almost 25 years ago, for example, demonstrated that an earth-orbiting environment produced ZBLAN (zirconium, barium, lanthanum, aluminum, and sodium) fibers with fewer defects and impurities.

During the experiment, the fiber manufactured on Earth showed surface defects that would scatter and degrade optical signals.

Ultimately, the goal is that the Forge’s automated robotic system will direct the manufacturing and testing of alloys, pharmaceuticals and electronic components while the satellite orbits Earth for six months. At the end of the production cycle, the satellite would then return to Earth where the materials and products could be retrieved.

Additionally, research shows that manufacturing certain materials in space could reduce carbon emissions by 75%, according to the announcement, which is the equivalent of removing all gas-powered cars from the U.K.

“Space Forge is pioneering the growing community of space innovators advancing space technologies for the betterment of our world,” Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart said in the announcement. “That commitment to sustainability builds a future that is more inclusive and has more future growth in the industry that we at Virgin Orbit are proud to be part of.”
Prolonged oil-price spike could boost Belmont Pool project

By Brandon Richardson

The soaring cost of oil is causing financial strain for consumers, but it could prove to be a bonanza for some Long Beach infrastructure projects like the Belmont Pool and Aquariums Center.

High-profile projects along the coast in Long Beach are often funded by revenue from oil and gas, a volatile pot of money because of the large price swings from oil revenue.

The current barrel’s oil production was projected to generate over $80 million in a conservative annual price of $55 per barrel, but earlier this month Long Beach oil was selling for between $101 and $125 per barrel.

Though any excess revenue due to a higher price could be used for one-time expenses, Robert Dowell, the city’s director of energy resources, said it’s too early to determine how much that might be.

Just because oil is currently selling for over twice what the city is budgeting doesn’t necessarily mean the extra revenue will translate to as much oil revenue, Dowell said. The costs of drilling new wells and new labor and property taxes, which factors in the value of the oil in the ground, have to be accounted for before profits are realized, he said.

The price of a barrel of oil has been hovering around $100 per barrel this week and could approach the all-time high peak of $145.50 last

was in 2010, depending on how long sanctions are in place against Russia and how long Russia’s incursion of Ukraine continues to affect global markets.

Dowell, along with City Manager Tom Modica, said that oil prices are one of the hardest things to project. Prices are reliant on a number of factors, including multiple countries setting prices and production levels, outside of the city’s control.

“Whatever they’re doing in the Far East or the Middle East or Russia or China, that’s going to have a direct impact on what we’re going to see,” Dowell said.

The price of oil has also been rising for months, with the price of oil on the New York Mercantile Exchange oil futures contract rising from about $55 per barrel at the beginning of the year to over $100 per barrel at the end of the year, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The imbalance grew almost every month, trade with Russia is “negligible,” making up less than 1% of all trade, according to Dowell and Assistant City Manager Ralph Campbell.

“While a relatively small share of the Port’s trade is with Russia, the Port of Long Beach and the City of Long Beach,” Dowell said in an email.

The imbalance is likely to continue as the city sees a $36.5 billion in 2021, its second

The city has resubmitted its project last projected to cost $85 million, to replace it with a larger, safer, more modern pool or replacing the Belmont Pool.

“Realistically, it’s probably wrong,” Dowell said of the city’s plan.

“I think what we’re going to see is that the cost of building a new pool or replacing the Belmont Pool from the standpoint of the cost of the labor pool’s construction, leaving a potential deficit,” Dowell said earlier this month.

The project will also include the the number of container ships backed up or stuck in the Port of Long Beach, with about 20,000 workers at 29 ports up and down the coast thanks to efforts by several agencies to reduce environmental impacts on residents of the area.

As of March 9, the backlog was down to 50 vessels, versus more than 400 ships within 40 miles of the coast, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California.

The move is, however, not expected to recapture supply chain chains due to the large number of businesses and agencies who are refusing to do business with the warning nation.

Port officials said economic activity is expected to rebound after inflation reduced consumer spending during the winter months.

Inflation, now at 8%, is expected to peak at 8.5% this month, according to a new report from the Economic. By the end of the year, the Federal Reserve expects inflation will decline to 6.5%.

West Coast dockworkers, including at LA and Long Beach ports, refuse to move Russian cargo

By Jason Ruse

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Boys & Girls Club provides well-rounded support for increased number of youth

Tessa Ruzicoff

The Boys & Girls Club of Long Beach is meeting the increased needs of students across Long Beach by engaging them in academic support and recreation.

Students ages 6 to 18 attend the Long Beach center, which is one of 4,700 locations across the country. Every club, however, is able to create its own unique plan by drawing each to evaluate the needs of its own community. At Boys & Girls Clubs, 90% of participants are low-income, and the organization provides workshops and education focused on breaking the cycle of poverty.

While afternoons at the center are devoted to academic support and homework help, recreation and exposure to new activities is also emphasized to its members.

Providing well-rounded support is central to the club’s mission, and key to Parrish’s approach every day, varying from sports- linked activities to more advanced career training.

“Sometimes you need a spark to get inside of you to show interest in something,” said events and program associate Erika Parroz. “If you’re not exposed to it, you’re never going to know, so we like to just introduce them and guide them into everything that they’re doing.”

This month the club’s basketball league is back up and running after a hiatus, and Parrish hopes the season will soon follow.

“The more kids can find something positive to be engaged in, that’s where we’re going to focus all the time,” Parrish said. “And when you give them something they can be captivated by.”

Whether their futures lead to a college career, a trade school, a four-year institution, or something else, kids at Boys & Girls Club are shown all the possibilities that are available to them, she said.

Students are able to speak with and seek mentorship from people in all types of fields, varying from medicine and law to medical and law, who all demonstrate a clear path towards a career.

“When you feel like you’re stuck in a rut, you can go anywhere to go where the trouble sets in,” said Parrish. “They just need a helping hand to show them what’s possible.”

While admitting to the club is only $15 for the entire school year (with a highly discounted summer program available as well), funds can be a challenge for some families, said Parrish, especially considering the rising costs of living.

“If the city loses the case, or the case is overturned, the city in December, and now the city is seeing the California Supreme Court decide whether to move forward on the case. A community activist criticized the survey during the March 9 City Council meeting for not being representative of the city as a whole. While just 28% of the city is White, according to the most recent head count in California, the survey respondents identified as White and 17% of survey respondents identified as Latinx.

Feedback from the survey could help officials identify areas where to focus funding in the next budget. An initial report should release data on how the city will happen in the next six months followed by meetings held by the city’s Budget Oversight Committee and its Budget Oversight Committee, where residents can weigh in on the proposed spending plan.
Kids are still having a harder time just kind of coping with it all," said Parrish.

The club has also worked to combat the academic gap due to the pandemic, mostly impacting students’ math and reading skills, said Parrish. "We’re always putting our kids first and foremost, and every generation has different needs and different wants, and we try to always be on the cutting edge of that so we can help support them," said Parrish.

Tutors try to make learning fun at the center, incorporating movement and other active components to illustrate math concepts, always with the goal of keeping kids engaged.

The club generally connects to students through Long Beach Unified schools, although calls from social workers are also relatively common, as is word of mouth. "Our kids have so much fun that they try to bring their friends over," said Parrish.

Students are allowed to attend as often as they want and for as long as they want, although the goal is to keep them at the center from 2 to 6 p.m., said Parrish, as that is most likely to keep them out of trouble.

"We have a location over by Cabrillo that has experienced some gang violence recently that’s escalating," said Parrish. "Keeping these kids in the club is the safest place for them to be, so we have to make it super fun.

On April 6, community members are invited to celebrate the club’s most accomplished high schoolers at the annual Youth of the Year event, which awards each finalist with scholarships. The winning candidate moves on to regional, state, and national events, with the opportunity to continue winning more scholarships.

“We’ve had candidates who have risen up from homelessness, abuse, poor foster care system, abuse... and through our programming and just because of the wonderful people that they are, are coming into our own,” said Parrish. “We would love to share that with the community and have them there to see the wonderful work that we do but we see these amazing people who benefit from the help that they’ve been given.”

The Youth of the Year event is on April 6, at 6 p.m. at Hotel Maya. View more information at bgclublb.org/YOY.

The shopping center formerly known as City Place is most likely to keep them engaged, according to Dean, including the logo, brand guidelines, on-site window signage, the social and digital media pages, marketing brochures, story books and more.

While there have been no structural changes to the buildings within the center, which spans from Third Street to Sixth Street and Pine Avenue to Long Beach Boulevard, windows throughout the area have been covered by signs showing off the new design.

The rebrand comes as the property owners move to implement plans to demolish and then redevelop the entire shopping complex as part of the shopping center for a mixed-use development. The nearly 50-year old Found Theater, which had been in the space since 2005, recently held its farewell party with a March 30 move-out date looming.

"Mosaic’s rebrand brings a bold, new vision of historic Downtown," said Dean, "while also celebrating Long Beach’s eclectic culture.”

Catalina Express, the essential ferry service that transports passengers to and from the Island, is facing new regulations from the California Air Resources Board (CARB). Under CARB’s current proposed rules, which would take effect in 2023, Catalina Express ferries will again be required to modify the engines on all their vessels. The cost to repower an existing vessel is $7 million but will displace approximately 50% of the passenger capacity. The cost to build a new vessel is approximately $20 million, costing a combined total of upwards of $120 million.

State funding is needed to make this transition feasible. Without financial assistance from the State, these proposed rules will significantly disrupt the transport of residents, visitors, and workers, while also negatively impacting transportation safety, efficiency, reliability, and affordability.

Your voice makes a difference! As CARB plans to act on this important proposal in early Spring, express your support now for Catalina Express and share your concerns about CARB’s current proposed regulations that could harm Catalina Island tourism without new funding.

HELP US PROTECT CATALINA ISLAND’S ECONOMY AND TOURISM

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