

LONG BEACH  
BUSINESS JOURNAL

An edition of the Long Beach Post



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Artist Jason “JP” Pereira leads an art walk of an exhibition at the Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum that’s composed of a collection of pieces inspired by those who died from COVID-19.

Museum shows COVID’s harsh impacts on Pacific Islanders

By Christian May-Suzuki

One of the first things you see inside the Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum is the frame of a wooden house set up in the middle of the museum’s small gallery. The house’s interior is adorned with stones, traditional cloths and other distinctive pieces of furniture that come from islands you probably didn’t even know existed.

But possibly the most unique thing about it is the set of words carved onto the ground of the museum floor, just in front of the house’s entrance: “ask permission.”

Those words aren’t directing visitors to the curator or the staff,

but to the ancestors who made the objects on display.

No, museum-goers don’t literally have to ask permission. But the message asks visitors to take a moment to show respect and appreciation not just for the piece itself, but for the work put into it long ago and the life of the materials that went into its creation.

This approach and appreciation for the museum’s artifacts—which the facility calls its “ancestor pieces” as a sign of respect—is what defines the small museum at 695 Alamitos Ave., directly across the street from the Museum of Latin American Art.

The PIEAM is small and can be easy to miss if you aren’t looking for it. But that is fitting, in a way,

considering the areas the artwork represents. Pacific Islanders generally trace their families back to Polynesia, Micronesia, or Melanesia, as well as a few major islands outside of those chains. Many of those islands are small enough for your eyes to skip right past on a map or a globe.

There are some well-known and larger places, like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, that are considered Pacific islands, but most of the 1,778 islands are small, like the Crown Islands and Guam, where current museum director and curator Fran Lujan was born. The average size of the Pacific islands, according to the Asia Oceania Geosciences Society, is 171 square kilometers, smaller than Catalina Island.

This has led to many islands being overlooked or entirely forgotten, Lujan says, and the PIEAM’s mission is to ensure that these islands are represented and their traditions are not forgotten.

“No one is too small to count,” she said.

The PIEAM was founded by Dr. Robert Gumbiner, the namesake for Gumbiner Park that is directly

Southwest aims to bring more business travel to Long Beach amid new demand

By Brandon Richardson

Compared to leisure, business travel has taken longer to recover after COVID-19 essentially shut down airports to everything except essential travel in early 2020. The first quarter of this year, however, has seen a significant uptick in a return to business travel, according to Southwest Airlines executives.

Leisure travel out of Long Beach has made a strong comeback over the past two years, according to city data. In March of this year, about 136,600 people traveled through the small municipal airport, down only about 6% from the roughly 145,200

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Shuttle pilot program coming to business districts near Downtown, Belmont Shore

By Christian May-Suzuki

Tourists and residents alike will soon have an easier way to navigate some of Long Beach’s busiest areas.

A micro-transit shuttle pilot program is on track to kick off this summer in the Belmont Shore/Alamitos Bay and Downtown/Alamitos Beach neighborhoods.

The program will provide two separate services: a fixed route and another that is essentially on-demand. The number of stops and their locations have yet to be determined, but those decisions will be made with input from the public and the local business associations.

The program aims to reduce the number of car trips that are under 3 miles long. For those that still need to drive, the program will help connect less used parking lots to areas with more activity.

Another goal of the program is to assist businesses in the area recovering from the economic impacts of the

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May 31, 2022

BUSINESS JOURNAL

Travel & Tourism

3

# Casino Point Dive Park holds trove of life and mysteries for Catalina visitors

*The park was first  
established in 1962 and  
spans over 2.5 acres off  
the coast of Catalina.*

By Christian May-Suzuki

By the time Lisa Beach first  
explored the world below the ocean's  
surface, she wasn't sure a career in  
diving was even possible for her.

While Beach's grandparents  
purchased homes on Catalina Island  
that she often visited as a child, she  
never envisioned herself spending  
much of her time underwater. It  
wasn't until well into her adulthood,  
after years on the mainland working  
as an IT technician, that she got  
in the water to explore the secrets  
under its surface.

"I was 50 when I started and I was  
in terrible shape," Beach said over  
the phone. "I was a total desk jockey  
and had no muscles, and the whole  
idea of exercise [sounded terrible]."

She did not start her life in love  
with the ocean, but her son was a  
different story. He decided to pursue  
a career as a dive professional, which  
led Beach to move to Catalina, where  
her son could have as much exposure  
to the water as possible.

Still, it took a decade of her son  
trying to convince her before Beach  
finally agreed to go on her first dive  
in November 2019. It was a moment  
that would drastically change the  
trajectory of her career and her life.

She now works for Diving  
Catalina, where she takes people on  
guided scuba and snorkeling dives.

Diving Catalina is one of several  
shops that make up the overall  
diving scene on the island, and the  
biggest place to dive is also



Two tourists snorkel at Casino Point Dive Park at Catalina Island.

its most unique, thanks not only  
to its history, but also because of  
its status. The Casino Point Dive  
Park is the country's first nonprofit  
underwater dive park, established in  
1962. It spans over 2.5 acres just off  
the harbor that the Catalina Casino  
building overlooks in Avalon.

The idea for a park was first  
discussed in the '50s, when the area's  
lack of safe accessibility for divers  
started becoming clear. People had  
come to the area to dive, but it wasn't  
the easiest task to actually get into  
the water.

"Early on, divers just had to walk  
down the rocks and jump in the  
water," Jon Council, who is the head  
of the Avalon Diving History Exhibit  
and President of the Historical Diving  
Society, said. "It was a little bit risky."

As a nonprofit sponsored by the  
City of Avalon, the park doesn't  
charge to allow people to dive. The  
lack of cost is one of several reasons  
the park is considered one of the best  
places for new divers to get started.  
There are other places to dive at the  
island, but they require a dive boat  
taking people offshore.

Divers will find life of all kinds,  
including macrocystis pyrifera—the  
fastest growing kelp species in the  
world. Council says that in ideal  
conditions, which generally occur  
when the water is cooler in winter, the  
kelp can grow up to two feet a day.

Of course, fish and other types of  
sea life can also be present, depending  
on the season you are diving in.  
Yellowtail jacks, barracuda, small  
tuna, and giant sea bass are just some  
of the species seen in the abundant  
ecosystem within the park during the  
summer and spring seasons.

For greater visibility, divers who  
come in the winter can see up to  
100 feet in the water, when the  
cooler temperatures prevent kelp  
from shedding organic particulates.  
That time of year also offers wildlife  
sightings that include the two-

spotted octopus, moray eels and  
even sea lions.

"It's just really gorgeous down  
there," Beach said.

Shipwrecks are also present at  
the park to be explored, each with  
its own history. One of those is the  
Suejac wreck, considered one of the  
most accessible wrecks in the world  
by diving communities.

"The problem we often run into  
is that these hulks are often difficult  
to reach, either through horizontal  
distance from shore or vertically  
in terms of depth," an article on  
California Diving News said of  
shipwrecks. "But there are exceptions.  
Perhaps the best is the easily accessible  
wreck of the sailboat Suejac."

It sank on Nov. 4, 1980, after  
a strong offshore wind blew the  
sailboat hard enough for its anchor  
to slip, sending it crashing into the  
rocks and settling on the ocean floor  
on the southeastern tip of the park.  
At depths ranging from 60 to 90 feet  
just offshore of a harbor, the Suejac  
provides ideal conditions for an  
exploratory dive.

As a whole, the park has been  
held in reverence for years by locals  
and visitors alike. While it was not  
considered a marine protected area  
until January 2012, there was a general  
understanding of respect at the park.

"It would have been super, super  
frowned upon if you went in there

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Two island visitors gear up to snorkel at Casino Point Dive Park on Catalina.



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# City sells \$130M in bonds for airport upgrades



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A family walks toward the new ticketing lobby at Long Beach Airport, which opened to the public May 4.

By Brandon Richardson

Long Beach Airport is one of the few city departments that is, for the most part, self-sustaining, financing projects and staffing primarily through passenger fees as well as state and federal grants.

On rare occasions, however, bonds have been sold to expedite high-ticket items. And during its May 17 meeting, the Long Beach City Council unanimously approved issuing another \$130 million in bonds to pay off existing debt and finance the remaining work in the Phase II Terminal Area Improvements project.

“The pandemic resulted in a decline in passengers and revenue,” Claudia Lewis, the airport’s finance and administration bureau manager, said during a phone interview. “And then you combine that with skyrocketing construction costs, and the airport was forced to take a hard

look at what our options were.”

In 2009 and 2010, the city sold a combined \$135 million through two bond series. Those bonds financed a new parking structure and projects such as the first phase of the terminal area improvements, including updating the twin concourses and outdoor area between them. Since then, the airport has used passenger fees collected through ticket sales to pay the principal and interest on those bonds.

While the older bonds were issued with a 30-year maturity, airport spokeswoman Marlene Arrona said two of the three new bond series will mature in 18 years (2039 and 2040). This will save the airport upward of \$15 million in debt service savings through lower interest costs, Financial Management Director Kevin Riper said during the meeting.

The third series of bonds would mature in 2047.

The total debt service of the bonds

is about \$194.5 million over the life of the bonds, according to a staff report. Combined, the bonds will have an average annual debt service payment of \$8.9 million through 2039 before falling to \$5.4 million through final maturity.

Airport debt service is typically paid for through passenger fees but throughout the pandemic, airport revenue plummeted. Most flights were grounded and passenger volumes fell upward of 90%, slashing revenues to practically nothing. The airport was able to continue paying its debt service in large part thanks to the 2020 CARES Act and 2021 American Rescue Plan Act.

The new bonds will pay off the remaining debt service for the 2009 and 2010 bonds as well as provide \$30.1 million in funding toward the airport’s second phase of improvements.

“Originally, Phase II was to be paid for with airport cash alone,” Lewis said, adding that the struggles throughout the pandemic

made that impossible.

The first two projects from the second phase—a new ticketing lobby and checked baggage screening facility—opened to the public earlier this month. Construction on a new baggage claim area is underway and expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The remaining projects, including improvements to the historic terminal building and a meet-and-greet plaza, have been delayed due to reduced revenue over the past two years. The new bond funding is crucial to completing the already-delayed projects in a timely manner, Lewis said.

When first approved by the City Council in 2018, staff estimated full project completion by the end of 2022. With the additional funding through the bonds, the full project could be completed by the end of next year, Lewis said.

While it is not uncommon for public development projects to fall behind schedule, skyrocketing construction costs amid the pandemic mean the delays will cost the city. When initially approved, the budget for the second phase was \$65 million, according to airport spokeswoman Kate Kuykendall. A city document now shows that construction costs have ballooned to \$120 million.

Despite the challenges of the past two years, the airport recently received an A- credit rating from Fitch Ratings, one of the largest American credit rating agencies. According to the agency, the rating is based on the relatively small traffic base of the airport and its single-carrier concentration that sees Southwest flying most of its limited daily flights.

“The [outlook] reflects steady passenger recovery trends as well as prudent financial and debt management through the pandemic,” according to Fitch. “While exposures remain with regard to traffic and revenue improvement, the progress in activity volumes led by Southwest Airlines service support suggests lessened fiscal strains, with the airport better positioned to restore metrics to levels consistent with current rating levels.” ■

## Long Beach Airport still recovering from COVID-19 decline in passengers

By Brandon Richardson

Long Beach Airport passenger numbers plummeted in April 2020, with a meager 6,300 travelers passing through the facility due to the

emergence of COVID-19. After two years, the facility still has not reached its pre-pandemic level of customers.

Last month, 274,381 people traveled through Long Beach Airport, a 70.5% increase from the same month last year. The 2022 figure, however, is

7.6% behind April 2019, when 296,941 travelers used the airfield.

“Our commercial passenger numbers continue to reach closer and closer to pre-pandemic levels,” airport Director Cynthia Guidry said in an email to the Business Journal. “We saw strong demand during spring break and hope to see an even more robust summer travel season.”

Year-to-date, a total of 930,741 passengers have traveled through the small, municipal airport, 15.6% below the same period in 2019, which saw over 1.1 million passengers.

Nationwide, air travel in April

2022 was 9.5% below the same month in 2019, according to data from the Transportation Security Administration. Last month, over 63.4 million passengers traveled through U.S. airports compared to over 70 million three years ago.

In April 2019, 27 out of 30 days saw more than 2 million passengers. Last month, only 19 days saw over 2 million passengers.

Back in Long Beach, total air cargo grew 8.7% year-over-year to 1,187 tons. The figure remains over 28% below April 2019, when 1,655 tons of cargo were handled. ■

## Museum

Continued from cover

adjacent to the museum. Gumbiner was an avid traveler who made his way to the Pacific islands in the 1960s and became more involved with the island of Guam through business in the ‘70s, where his appreciation for the culture of the islands grew.

He established a precursor to the PIEAM—the Ethnic Art Institute of Micronesia (EAIM)—on the island of Yap in Micronesia in 1994. The museum had a similar mission to its Long Beach successor: to highlight and revive the traditional art and dance of the Pacific islands. Gumbiner was truly passionate about the subject; he also had a private collection of works occasionally put on display in Long Beach.

That laid the foundation for the PIEAM. Gumbiner oversaw the initial designs of the Long Beach museum until he died in 2009. The museum opened in October 2010, and Lujan became its curator in 2019.

The PIEAM highlights communities in the Pacific islands through the promotion of their art and traditions. As the only museum in the continental U.S. to be entirely dedicated to the preservation and amplification of Pacific island art, Lujan feels a unique duty to share her heritage in the most genuine and appreciative way possible.

“When I die, I know my ancestors will ask me, ‘Did you share us?,”’ Lujan said.

While she initially came to the United States for graduate school, she ended up staying longer than expected when her parents got sick. Though she has enjoyed her time in Long Beach, her heart has stayed with her homeland.

“I probably would be back on the island if it weren’t for my grandchildren,” Lujan said. “I am always a guest here.”

The museum offers both ancestor pieces and more contemporary



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Natalia Rodriguez, 3, walks through “Lalai: Lullaby,” an art installation by Roldy Aguero Ablao, at the Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum. The installation includes dozens of paper gaosali flowers, which Ablao says are coastal flowers given by a person to someone they care about.

pieces, many of which are made by resident artist Jason Pereira. One of the most striking ancestor pieces is a large sail made by the women of Polowat Atoll—an atoll that is part of the Chuuk state in the Federated States of Micronesia and is about 27 times smaller than Catalina Island.

But other pieces of art, like recreations of traditional pieces such as the tivaevae—traditional quilts made in the Cook Islands—and works inspired by the islands done by Periera, who is Samoan, also do an admirable job paying tribute to the islands and their traditions.

For a small museum like the PIEAM, COVID has been a difficult

obstacle to navigate. Even today, as most places have foregone pandemic regulations, the intimate nature of the museum makes strict precautions necessary. Groups of 10 or more are still required to wear masks, no matter what a person’s vaccination status is.

And during the height of the pandemic, the museum had to adapt its material to an online platform.

“We really learned how to use QR codes,” Lujan said.

The result was “Pasifika Transmissions,” an exhibit featuring nine artists indigenous to one of the many Pacific islands. These artists each used a different ancestor piece, ranging from a sling stone from the Mariana Islands to a pahu—a drum-like instrument originating from several Polynesian islands—to inspire their own work.

Treated as a distance-learning program, the artists each recorded a video where they discussed their experiences working with and being inspired by each of these pieces, which was shared on YouTube.

COVID-19 itself is also an especially pertinent topic in the Pacific Island community, so its impact has also been a common theme in recent museum programming. Data from the National Institutes of Health shows Pacific Islanders were the most likely population to contract COVID-19 in 15 states, with the numbers being highest in California. The museum’s response to this has been pushing programming to encourage people to get vaccinated and to promote healing and wellness overall.

“People have been working

hard to tell everyone to get the vaccines, but there is just something empowering about looking at a piece of art,” Lujan says.

Part of this effort comes in the form of their currently running exhibit: “Toe Fo’i,” which means “The Return” in Samoan. The exhibit is centered around the traditional idea of artists as healers, which plays into an overall story about COVID.

One of the pieces, an exterior installation from Pereira, tapped into the world of microbiology. Pereira added his own Pacific island inspiration to create a series of art pieces adorning the outside courtyard that is “a visual story of holistic wellness and resilience,” according to the exhibit’s description, in response to the pandemic. He named the collection “Ho’okahi,” which is the Hawaiian word meaning “to make one.”

Inside the museum, a memorial wall has been set up for visitors to pay tribute to those who have died from COVID-19. Names are written on a piece of paper that is folded into a butterfly and placed on the wall as a way to remember those who have been lost.

While it has been an arduous path through the pandemic for the PIEAM, Lujan and the museum are already planning for the future. They are still working on the details for upcoming exhibitions, but the mission stays the same: to honor and represent not only her ancestors, but the history of people of all the Pacific island nations.

“I live my legacy and honor my ancestors every day,” Lujan said.

“It’s everything to me.” ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A young girl holds her mom’s hand as artist Jason “JP” Pereira speaks about a section of a coronavirus-inspired art installation at the Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum.



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## Long Beach's waterfront hotels find their own paths to stand out



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A couple walks to their room aboard a boat at Dockside Boat & Bed at Dock 5 in Rainbow Harbor in Downtown Long Beach.

By Christian May-Suzuki

One of the biggest perks that comes with Long Beach is in the name: being on the beach. For tourists who are looking for the full waterfront experience, there are several hotel options in the city, each providing its own vibe for guests.

Whether you want a comfortable luxury hotel or something unique and adventurous, there are several choices around Long Beach's coast. Here's a look at three different hotels on the water and how their owners try to stand out from the crowd.

**Dockside Boat and Bed, Dock 5, Rainbow Harbor, \$260-\$495 per night**

Dockside Boat and Bed has been a resident of the city's Rainbow Harbor for over 20 years, giving people the opportunity to spend their nights sleeping on a yacht floating in the harbor.

The business was initially brought to Long Beach by Kimberly Harris-Ryskamp, whose father Rob Harris found success with a similar model in Northern California. She made her way down to Southern California to go to school at Cal State Long Beach, and she eventually decided to start her father's business in Long Beach in March 1999.

Since then, the business has had its boats docked at Pier 5 on Rainbow Harbor. The team currently has four boats as part of its fleet, but the company does not actually own most of them. Three of them are owned by private individuals, who allow Harris-Ryskamp to use their boats in exchange for continued monitoring of the boats and a portion of the bed and breakfast proceeds from stays.

"Boats are like toys, people use them fanatically at first, and then they kind of sort of put them up on

a shelf," Harris-Ryskamp said. "The boat's biggest enemy is neglect...so we're there 365 days of the year."

Dockside Boat and Bed provides a similar level of service to what one would expect from a traditional hotel, from having a check-in service to greet people at the start of their stay to the fluffy white towels with the showers and daily housekeeping to keep the boats clean and fresh.

While there is no room service, the business is able to provide a continental breakfast for its guests thanks to a kitchen on its houseboat, where Harris-Ryskamp and her staff control the operation of the hotel.

"It's about giving them the authentic boat experience, but also making sure it's very similar to a hotel experience," Harris-Ryskamp said.

Comfort is an important part of supplementing the overall experience at Dockside Boat and Bed, but it's capturing the feeling of being on the water that attracts people to the hotel. Once people stay for the first time, Harris-Ryskamp says 70% return within three years.

"They can smell the sea air, they can hear the seagulls," Harris-Ryskamp said. "They love that experience."

**Belmont Shore Inn, 3946 E. Ocean Blvd., \$179-\$409 per night**

One of Belmont Shore Inn's defining characteristics is its proximity to the beach, even compared to other hotels in a city with "beach" in its name. General manager Karan Patel says that they are not able to technically call it a "beachfront property," but being within spitting distance of the sand is enough for such a technicality to not matter.

"It's literally a one-minute walk," Patel said of the inn's distance to the beachfront.

Patel and his parents began

managing the property at 3946 E. Ocean Blvd. when it opened in March 2019, helping to convert the former motel building into a boutique hotel that could leverage its location

to create a pathway to success.

With the control to turn the building into a place that fits their image of what a hotel could be, planners opted for a design that takes advantage of their location and provides the type of experience one would expect so close to the beach.

"This is an outdoor property, so it really opens up with exterior lighting during the daytime," Patel said.

It is not "outdoor" in the traditional sense, but it has a very modern feel with a bright color scheme that Patel says focuses on taking advantage of the natural light in a unique way. Drawing on the beach, the rooms feature white walls and large glass windows to utilize sunlight to create the Belmont Shore Inn environment. Potted plants and beach-inspired decor in the room are also placed in rooms to supplement that feeling.

"It's a little bit different and unusual, kind of a unique experience for the customers and for travelers," he said. "It has a 'beachy vibes' feeling to it."

Creating a modern design that utilizes the sun to capture a beachside boutique feel is a key part of the identity that Patel and his family hope to project. He said

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Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A guest exits The Belmont Shore Inn after checking out.





Cambodian flags and confetti fill the air during the 14th Annual Cambodia Town Parade and Culture Festival.

Crystal Niebla / Business Journal

## FROM THE EDITOR: HAYLEY MUNGUIA

# Cultural events can help boost Long Beach’s recovery—so the city will help pay for them

Cultural events like parades and food festivals were among the many economy-boosting and community-building activities that had to take a pause during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic—and Long Beach officials are hoping their return can help bolster the city’s recovery.

To that end, officials have announced that some funding from the Long Beach Recovery Act—the city’s law guiding how to spend the more than \$200 million in state and federal aid it has received since the start of the public health crisis—can be used to pay for those events.

The idea of using that money for special events started with the City Council earlier this year, when the panel approved an item from Councilmember Al Austin that asked city staff to look into whether it would be a permissible use of the funds.

“I think it’s only right to look at opportunities to support some of these cultural events that really define our city,” Austin said at the time.

And now, it appears, Long Beach has a plan to do just that. Meredith Reynolds, the special deputy city manager for recovery, wrote in a memo earlier this month that the city will reconfigure the Property Activation Grant Program within the LBRA to offer:

- Eight grants of up to \$25,000 to nonprofits for large citywide cultural events, with funding available to offset special event permits and fees;
- Seven grants of up to \$15,000 to nonprofits for city-supported cultural events, with funding available to offset special event permits and fees; and
- 10 seed grants of up to \$3,000 to community-based organizations and nonprofits for free community cultural events.

Reynolds also laid out several other programs that were already poised to support cultural events, such as the Economic Empowerment Zone (EEZ)/Economic Innovation District (EID) Program, which dedicates \$3.4 million toward creating culturally focused districts that would be home to all kinds of events. That program, according to Reynolds, is slated to launch in the fall.

I wanted to get a better sense, though, of what these plans mean on a practical level. Will the city be using its recovery funds to pay for long-standing events like the Martin Luther King Jr. parade or Hispanic Heritage Month, which have been supported in the past, in part, by individual City Council office funds? Or is the city imagining that these programs will help pay for the creation of new cultural events?

Reynolds told me that the way the city has structured the programs can allow for both.

“We have a combination of grants that are going to be available that are for large, citywide special events that the city in the past has not funded,” she said, “and there’s also a component of the program that will provide direct relief grants for existing citywide special events that the city does provide some funding for, so those are things like the Veterans Day parade and festival, the Martin Luther King Jr. parade and celebration, Día de los Muertos, the Jazz Festival and some others. So it will be something that can offset the city’s special events permits and fees because that is usually one of the larger components of cost for these events.”

But the creation of new events to celebrate the city’s many cultures, Reynolds said, would also be welcome.

“We’re trying to remove as many barriers to participation as possible and to allow community groups to use their knowledge and their perspective,” she said, “to tell us what they think the funding can be used for.”

But by its nature, the funding is limited. The Long Beach Recovery Act runs through the end of 2024—so while the money could, in theory, fund a few iterations of an annual event, it’s not a long-term solution.

Reynolds said she expects many groups will be interested in using the funds for one-off celebrations, but there aren’t any restrictions that would prevent anyone from using a grant to pay for multiple events over a few years.

Still, this type of city support is effectively a change in longstanding policy. I asked Reynolds if she thought using the money this way could pave the way for more city support for these events further into the future.

“It is really too early to tell at this point,” she said. “I think what we’re able to do with the funding is be transparent about how it’s used and collect good data to demonstrate the impact, and that is something we’re then able to use to make future decisions.”

“All of these programs we’re rolling out have a component of collecting data, so we have the knowledge of how effective or useful or impactful the programs are,” Reynolds added. “How are they improving quality of life? What kind of impact did they have? Because we’re really focusing on outcomes that are related to equity and collective impact, so we want to be able to look at the data evaluating those things and be able to tell that story.” ■

## Waterfront Hotels

Continued from page 7

that one of the inn’s most important goals is to provide a comforting and welcoming feel to their guest rooms.

“We can say that this is a home away from home,” he said, “and everyone has a home here in Long Beach.”

**Hotel Maya, 700 Queensway Dr., \$224-\$423 per night**

As a Hilton resort with more space and resources, Hotel Maya can go to greater lengths to promote its image. Unlike many boutique hotel experiences like Dockside Boat and Bed and the Belmont Shore Inn, Hotel Maya can take measures beyond the amenities it provides to show its identity to the world.

“We strive to celebrate the Mayan culture ... with things that we do and entertainment that honors the Mayan people,” Hotel Maya Director of Sales and Marketing Allison Lesser said by phone.

The hotel puts on an overarching campaign each year to help craft and establish this image in the public eye. This year’s campaign has a series of animals coming into the hotel for both hotel guests and local visitors to enjoy. Animals play a key role in Mayan culture, and the hotel has

worked to bring in several of the most revered species in the culture every month, including a monkey, a hawk, a parrot and a macaw.

Having the resources to put on these kinds of events is a feature generally reserved for the biggest hotels, and Hotel Maya takes full advantage of that ability. This event is hosted alongside a meal provided by one of the hotel’s other identity-defining features and the one Lesser and her team may be the most proud of: its restaurant.

Fuego is the restaurant at Hotel Maya, which serves Latin-style food and hosts a full-service bar at the hotel. Lesser says that Fuego was built not just to complement the hotel, but to serve as a place to attract people all on its own.

“For the most part, people don’t go to a hotel for food unless it’s an outsourced restaurant with a top chef,” Lesser said. “We happen to have a restaurant that is a destination itself, and it is a critical part of the hotel.”

The concept behind Fuego, Lesser said, was designed to tie into the Mayan theme of the hotel.

“It was conceptually created that way [to be] one of the largest amenities that we do have within the hotel that we’re able to market to customers and guests as well as to locals,” Lesser said.



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

The Hotel Maya’s Fuego restaurant and bar overlooks Queensway Bay near Downtown Long Beach.

Even as one of the larger hotels in the city, Lesser says she knows that there are plenty of people that still don’t even know of Hotel Maya or Fuego’s existence.

“It’s very interesting that, you know, even people that live and work in Long Beach haven’t been or don’t really know about the Maya,” Lesser said. “They may have heard about it or seen it, but even within parts of Long Beach, people have never been here.”

It’s evidence that even the largest hotel brands need to get creative to attract guests—and Hotel Maya has shown how that work can succeed.

“It creates the buzz and a reason for them to come over and check us out,” Lesser said of Hotel Maya’s various efforts to craft their identity.

“Once they’re here, and they see the beautiful views and taste the food and experience the service—that keeps them coming back.” ■

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Southwest

Continued from cover

passengers in March 2019. “This time last year, we saw robust leisure demand,” Dave Harvey, vice president of Southwest Business, told the Business Journal. “But business demand was still very stagnant. There were very strict ‘thou shalt not travel’ policies well into 2021.”

In September and October of last year, however, companies began approving travel for employees, Harvey said. But the boost was short lived because the holiday season is historically slow for business travel, he added.

Many in the industry expected January to see strong acceleration for business travel, Harvey said, but the omicron variant delayed that resurgence until late February. Despite that, throughout the first quarter, Harvey said Southwest business travel has trended up, rising from 70% below 2019 levels to only 40% below.

“We’ve just seen a really healthy build up in March, April, May and now going into June,” Harvey said, noting that summer isn’t normally as strong as the spring and fall months. “But we’re very excited about what fall is going to bring for business travel.”

In light of increased business travel, Southwest once again invited travel managers from various companies for a tour of Long Beach Airport. Representatives from tech, supply, finance, restaurant and travel firms were escorted through the facility, including the new ticketing lobby, and were given highlights about what the airport has to offer travelers now and in the future.

The opening of the ticketing lobby also included a new checked baggage screening facility. Construction crews also are working on a new baggage claim area, which is expected to open in December of this year. By mid-2023, the airport’s new meet-and-greet area and new car rental facility inside the historic terminal building are expected to be completed, Operations and Facilities Bureau Manager Ron Reeves told



A group of travel managers from various corporations listen to updates about Long Beach Airport during a tour hosted by Southwest Airlines as a means to bolster business travel.

those on the tour.

Sonja Free, director of client services for TravelStore, the largest California-based travel agency, said the firm’s clients—70% of whom are corporate travelers—are going to “love the new Long Beach Airport.” “It was always a great airport as far as convenience: quick check-in, accessibility, etc.,” she said. “Now with the upgraded facilities, it’s going to be even better now.”

June marks the sixth anniversary of Southwest operations out of Long Beach. The air carrier started at the airfield with four flights to the Bay Area but with the departure of JetBlue in 2020, the Texas-based airline quickly became the leader in the city.

Later this year, Southwest will fly a total of 37 daily flights of the airport’s 52 slots, Harvey said.

“The original facility has so much charm,” Harvey said. “But we just put a lot of capacity on an airport. The airport absolutely had to make these investments to keep up with our growth [and] they’re doing a

great job.”

Out of Long Beach, Southwest offers direct flights to Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Honolulu, Houston, Las Vegas, Maui, Oakland, Phoenix, Reno, Sacramento, San Jose and St. Louis. The company’s network planning team continuously monitors passenger flight data to determine demand for additional routes such as direct flights to New York or Florida.

“If there’s enough demand, we can take a flight or two and start flying those long-haul nonstops,” Harvey said.

Throughout the pandemic, Southwest expanded—not just in Long Beach through the continued absorption of newly vacated slots, but nationwide. That growth will continue, Harvey said, with the company purchasing hundreds of new aircraft from Boeing over the next decade, including 114 to be delivered this year alone.

The airline retires 30-40 planes due to age each year, Harvey said,

but the net gain of the new craft is still significant.

“It’s going to allow us to bring back a lot of the short- and medium-haul parts of our network,” Harvey said. “And this also ties into hiring.”

In the first quarter alone, Harvey said Southwest has hired 5,000 people—pilots, flight attendants, operations agents and customer service—with plans for another 5,000 before the end of the year.

To complement those efforts, the airline also is investing \$2 billion into its onboard product, which will benefit business travelers significantly, Harvey said. Aside from expanded food and beverage, and movie and show offerings, the carrier is upgrading onboard Wi-Fi to be 10 times faster as well as adding USB A and C ports at every seat.

“People want to be productive, they want to knock out that email,” Harvey said. “And they want to watch movies, they want to live stream their shows. We need to ... support that.” ■

Casino Point

Continued from page 3

with a spear gun,” Council said. “Everybody diving there would have given a major stink eye. It was sort of an unwritten thing.”

Improvements to the park, however, are a different story. One of the most notable additions, for example, has been the installation of stairs in 1998.

Ease of access to the water has made it an ideal choice for many diving students to complete some of their certification training, Beach said.

“Almost every Southern California ... dive shop brings their students to the park, particularly for the open water components of their certification,” she said.

Another man-made addition to the dive park is a memorial to an important figure in both diving and Catalina Island history. Jacques Cousteau was a French explorer who helped invent the Aqua-Lung, which was the first self-contained underwater breathing apparatus—or scuba for short.

“That changed diving overnight,” Council said. “It was like somebody opened the floodgates of what is now an \$11 billion industry in the United States.”

In addition to this key contribution to underwater exploration, Cousteau was an advocate of Catalina Island, receiving international recognition for his documentary on the squid of the island. About 40 feet deep in the park is a memorial to Cousteau, which was originally placed there following his death in October 1997. It was recently replaced with an updated plaque in October 2020.

Several shops on Catalina allow divers to explore the park. The biggest is Catalina Divers Supply, which recently moved into a newly built dive shop in the Catalina



Two snorkelers enter the water at Casino Point Dive Park to join their group off the Catalina Island coast.

Casino building.

Others, like Diving Catalina, are smaller operations without a brick-and-mortar location. Even though these operations are mobile and don’t have some of the resources, there is no shortage of customers for them to attend to.

Despite Beach’s recent start, she says she is closing in on having done 1,000 dives for various purposes, many of them being with customers at Casino Point.

For Beach, diving has become more than just a new way to explore. It has been a place for her to exercise and get back into shape, which she says she enjoys doing without sweating through diving. It has become a place of empowerment, where she can look to help all sorts of families experience something special.

But mostly, it has become a place for her to escape the busy world above the surface and dive into a new one that is peaceful and quiet,

yet so full of life and beauty.

“It’s the experience of just being completely without care and being able to engage in an environment that nobody else really knows is there,” Beach said. “There’s no drama, no politics...[it’s] such an immersive experience where you can just let it all go.”

“I still find joy in it everyday.” ■

Shuttle Pilot Program

Continued from cover

COVID-19 pandemic by alleviating traffic congestion in the area, which will make the neighborhoods easier to navigate and, ideally, drive more foot traffic to those businesses.

The city is still working to choose a vendor to operate the program.

A similar program, run in Downtown, served as the project’s inspiration, Department of Public Works spokesperson Joy Contreras said.

“Since the original micro-transit pilot that operated throughout Downtown Long Beach in 2018, we have been considering trying out another pilot program,” she said in an email.

With funds from the Long Beach Recovery Act coming into the city, officials decided to take some of the \$1.6 million dedicated to mobility in the act to fund this new project.

“This pilot has become a part of a larger initiative set forth by Recovery Act funding to help with the city’s economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19,” Contreras said.

While the current scope of the pilot is limited to the Belmont Shore/Alamitos Bay and Downtown/Alamitos Beach neighborhoods, Contreras said the program could be expanded in the future to other parts of the city. ■



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An instructor prepares visitors for a snorkeling experience on the steps of the Catalina Casino before leading the group to the nearby dive park.



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Newswatch 13

## Planning Commission approves 75-unit housing development near Downtown

By Christian May-Suzuki

Another large-scale housing development has been given a green light in Long Beach.

The Planning Commission unanimously approved a six-story, 75-unit residential project at its May 19 meeting. The project site, 923 and 927 Long Beach Blvd., comprises two adjacent lots on the west side of Long Beach Boulevard between Ninth and 10th streets.

At 76 feet tall, it falls far below the 150-foot maximum height required for new construction in the area. It will measure 110 feet in width and 150 feet in depth, with no setback from the street at the currently vacant 16,500-square-foot project site.

Units will be split between studio, one and two-bedroom units, with four of those units being designated for low-income housing as part of the conditions for approval. Among the 75 total units, there will be 11 studio and two-bedroom units each, with the remaining 53 designated as one-bedroom units.

Current plans show that the four affordable units will consist of three one-bedrooms and one studio, but Commissioner Jane Templin said during the May 19 meeting that the mix of affordable unit offerings should be more balanced, likely meaning a two-bedroom unit should be included. City staff said they would look into that idea.



Courtesy of the city of Long Beach

A rendering of the proposed project at 923 and 927 Long Beach Blvd.

Plans for the project include three levels of subterranean parking that will have 104 spots for the building. Bike storage and charging for electric vehicles will also be provided, as city regulations require.

The first floor will have five units alongside a lobby, meeting room, fitness room and laundry room. Floors two through six will each have 14 units each, and the second floor will have an open courtyard

at its center alongside its units. The 1,159-square-foot courtyard will include a play area for kids, and residents can also enjoy the outdoors on a 1,650-square-foot rooftop deck.

The building itself will include a modern glass facade and a design that maximizes natural light coming into the building. A stone veneer will also be built along with balconies on some units to add depth to the flat building design. ■

## Long Beach rolls out COVID relief programs

By Kelly Puente

Long Beach last year received more than \$60 million in federal COVID relief aid to address fiscal issues and urgent needs in the community, but a year later, the majority of those funds have yet to be spent as the city said it was waiting for clear federal guidelines.

Now, with federal guidance in place, Long Beach in recent months has rolled out a flurry of direct assistance programs under the Long Beach Recovery Act.

But with many of those programs still in the application period, it could be weeks or months before some residents and small businesses get help. And with no direct federal oversight of how it rolls out the programs, Long Beach officials will have to hold themselves accountable for timelines and funding.

City officials said the holdup was due in part to the city carefully planning more than 80 programs under the Long Beach Recovery Act to reach businesses and communities that need it the most.

"Our City Council asked us to be really intentional about the design of these programs so that we are meeting the equity and collective impact," said Meredith Reynolds, a deputy city manager who is leading Long Beach's recovery efforts. "We're specifically looking at how do we design programs that reduce or limit

Continued on page 21

## Downtown housing grows, but business optimism slows

By Christian May-Suzuki

Downtown Long Beach continues to expand as it bounces back from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The area saw a solid improvement to its housing stock and added a variety of new businesses—particularly restaurants, personal services, and general retail—but lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to an uncertain outlook from Downtown business owners on the overall economic future of the city, state, and country.

In its 2022 Economic Profile, released earlier this month, the Downtown Long Beach Alliance highlighted the development of 586 new housing units in the Downtown area as a major accomplishment last year. The total represents a more than 42% increase from 2020. There are also over 1,500 units currently in planning or under construction in the area.

The 271-unit Volta on Pine and the 315-unit Shoreline Gateway were the only additions to the Downtown housing market in 2021, but the DLBA anticipates the completion of several projects that will increase Downtown Long Beach's housing

Continued on page 14



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A construction worker guides a load of plywood at the future site of the 218-unit Aster apartment building on the southwest corner of East Broadway and Long Beach Boulevard.



# Downtown Long Beach Alliance could see expanded boundaries with 10-year renewal

By Brandon Richardson

The Downtown Long Beach Alliance, the long-time property business improvement district of the area, is up for renewal this year, which could bring with it an expanded boundary and additional fees for property owners, according to city documents.

The PBID has operated in Downtown since 1998 when it was approved for a term of five years. It has subsequently been renewed for two 10-year terms in 2003 and 2012. And earlier this month, the City Council approved a third 10-year renewal that includes potentially expanding the district’s boundaries to the north and south.

The northern boundary along Pacific Avenue currently ends at Sixth Street, while the boundary up Pine Avenue continues up to Eighth Street. The new boundary would continue along Pacific Avenue to Eighth Street. “It’s about continuity of service,” Austin Metoyer, economic development and policy manager for the DLBA, said in a phone interview. “[We] only service our area but there are [other] property owners who have requested those services.”

South of Ocean Boulevard, the current boundary does not encompass any of the waterfront south of Shoreline Drive. The new boundary would expand to include much of the Rainbow Harbor area—stretching from the roundabout near the Aquarium of the Pacific along the waterfront to Shoreline Village, which is not included in the update.

Restaurants along the waterfront, including Hooters, Chili’s, Outback Steakhouse, P.F. Chang’s, Gladstones, Tokyo Wako and Q Smokehouse as well as walking paths along the water, would be included in the DLBA’s service area.

“[Expanding to] the waterfront, it’s still about continuity of service, but it’s more about how [our] ambassadors interact with tourists and visitors,” Metoyer said. “Whether for convention or conference, or just here on vacation, it’s a way to provide hospitality services, engagement, and direct folks to explore more of Downtown.”

The DLBA already has circulated a petition to property owners within its existing boundaries as well as those in the prospective additions. The petition required a majority of property owners—in the case of for-sale residential buildings, each individual owner counts as a property owner.

The organization turned the completed petition into the city last month.

Now that the City Council has approved the change, all current and prospective DLBA-area property



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal  
Pedestrians navigate the streets of Downtown Long Beach.

owners will take part in an official ballot vote, which also requires a majority of the assessments to be in favor. The council will then hold a public hearing on July 19 to consider the renewal, hear all protests and tabulate ballots, each of which would be “weighted according to the proportional financial obligation of the affected property,” according to staff.

There are two zones within the district: premium and standard. The premium properties pay a higher rate than those in the standard. Property usage—retail, restaurant, residential, etc.—also plays a role in determining the rate.

*“Whether for convention or conference, or just here on vacation, it’s a way to provide hospitality services, engagement, and direct folks to explore more of Downtown.”*

-Austin Metoyer, DLBA Economic Development and Policy Manager

The outcome of the vote will be announced before the hearing ends. If passed, the organization would be approved to operate from Jan. 1, 2023, through Dec. 31, 2032. The DLBA would need to begin the renewal process again in early 2032.

The improvement district’s annual budget is funded through property assessment fees paid by owners. On average, those fees are set to increase 34.5%, according to city documents. The assessments for city-owned properties, for example, are expected to increase by almost \$180,000 per year to over \$785,000 annually, with over \$220,000 to be paid by the Pike Outlets property management contractor.

The new additions include 50 parcels of land subject to the

assessment.

With the new properties and increased assessment rate, the district’s annual budget will increase from \$2.8 million to \$3.9 million, according to Metoyer.

Since its last renewal, the DLBA has used its property assessment revenue for a litany of programs, according to city staff. The organization has hosted over 130 events, removed 51,000 stickers and instances of graffiti, updated wayfinding signage, provided regular power washing, created 27 temporary parklets, expanded support for unhoused people and provided over

\$700,000 in grant funding for small businesses.

The increased budget would pay for additional staffing and services throughout the district, according to a staff report. This would include expanded sidewalk pressure washing, hiring a homeless outreach manager to collaborate with social service agencies, local nonprofits and city departments, increasing pay for workers, and hiring a business navigator to expand support for businesses.

“We started this project back in 2021 ... to figure out where programs and services need to be directed for the next five to 10 years,” Metoyer said. “We just want to make sure that [we] align with what we’re hearing from the community.” ■

## Housing Grows

Continued from page 13

stock by over 700 units in 2022.

Specific projects the DLBA is expecting to be completed this year include the 495 Promenade project—formerly known first as The Place at The Streets and then as the 5N° development—that will add 20 more housing units, a 142-unit project at Magnolia and Broadway and 18 more units in a development at 437 E. Fifth St.

Businesses also continued to make their way to the area, as Downtown welcomed 185 new businesses since the start of 2021.

While this is down from the 222 new businesses in 2020, a third of the businesses added were restaurants, retail stores, or personal care services. This is important, according to the DLBA, because of the profound effect that the pandemic had and continues to have on these sectors in particular.

Gross retail from these areas through the first three quarters of last year totaled \$466 million, a sign of improvement compared to the \$459 million in all of 2020, but still significantly below the \$713 million in all of 2019.

“The ground floor retail market, which includes food service and personal care businesses, was perhaps the most impacted market sector as result of COVID-19-related public health restrictions,” the report reads.

Downtown Long Beach was significantly impacted by this, as 48% of businesses in the area fall under these categories. Restaurants make up at least 30% of the total ground floor tenants and are the largest business demographic in five of the six neighborhoods in the downtown area. Only North Pine does not meet either of these conditions, as just 26% of its ground floor tenants are restaurants, compared to 33% of tenants focusing on personal services.

While businesses are still slowly recovering, optimism for the future is still high—but it’s waning. According to the report, 53% of business owners surveyed by the DLBA say they have plans to expand over the next year, but uncertainty still remains for the bigger picture.

In 2020, 77% of business owners surveyed believed that Long Beach’s economy was poised to expand over the next year, but that number has dropped to 58% in this year’s survey. Similar outlooks are shared regarding the outlook for the California and U.S. economies, with the number of people believing the economy in California and the United States will grow dropping from 61% to 49% and 59% to 51% from 2020 to 2022, respectively.

“Restrictions reduced foot traffic,” the report read, “and an overall reduction in consumer spending generated a fair amount of economic uncertainty.”

Find the full report on the DLBA’s website. ■

# Port of Long Beach sees busiest April on record

By Christian May-Suzuki

The Port of Long Beach continues to move cargo at a record pace in 2022, setting another standard for activity in the month of April.

Officials reported earlier this month that the port moved 820,718 20-foot equivalent units, TEUs, of container cargo in the month of April, finishing about 10% higher than the previous record of 746,188 TEUs moved in the same month last year. The milestone continues a streak of record-breaking months of cargo movement at the port in 2022.

“Cargo continues to move at a record-setting pace and may not slow down anytime soon,” Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a release announcing the numbers. “We are preparing for a likely summertime surge as China recovers from an extended shutdown due to COVID-19.”

Import numbers eclipsed 400,000 TEUs this month, which has only happened three other times over the past 12 months. A total of 400,803 TEUs of imported cargo was still less than the 427,280 of imported TEUs last month, but the number does represent a 9.7% increase from the

367,151 TEUs imported in April 2021.

On the other hand, exports decreased by 1.8% from the previous year, with 121,876 TEUs of cargo leaving the port. Export numbers were still up from the previous month’s total of 114,185 TEUs, and is the second highest number in a month this year.

Movement of empty containers also saw a sharp increase from the previous years, with 298,039 TEUs moved in April, an almost 17% increase from the previous April. This was also the second most active month for empty container movement in 2022, only trailing the 321,691 TEUs moved in March. It is only the fourth time since last April in which the total empty containers moved eclipsed 290,000 TEUs, joining May 2021, July 2021, and March 2022 as the only months to hit this number.

These numbers contribute to what has been a significantly more active first third of the year than in 2021. The port has moved more than 3.2 million TEUs during the first four months of 2022, a 5.1% increase from the same period in 2021.

Complete Port of Long Beach cargo numbers can be found at [polb.com/statistics](http://polb.com/statistics). ■

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Title

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Professional Engineering Svcs. for 2nd Street Bridge over Marine Stadium Rehabilitation

RFP PW22-033

06/01/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

LBRA Business Navigation: Outreach & Technical Assistance

RFP ED22-073

06/01/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

LNG Station Decommissioning, Tank Removal and Site Restoration

RFP FS22-051

06/02/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Year-Round Shelter Operation and Support Services

RFP HE22-045

06/03/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Safety Switches & Breaker Equipment

ITB PW22-059

06/03/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Control & Monitoring System for Bilge Pumps

ITB PW22-058

06/03/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Public Safety Mobile Data Terminals

ITB TI22-060

06/03/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Engine Generator Set Equipment Purchase

ITB PW22-063

06/07/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

UAS120 Electrical Project

ITB PR22-065

06/07/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

External Audit Services

RFP AU22-054

06/09/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Window Replacements at Bay Shore Library

ITB PW22-075

06/10/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Prequalification of Prospective Bidders for the Belmont Beach & Aquatics Center Project

RFQ PW22-053

06/13/2022

Title

Bid Number

Due Date

Purchase and Development Opportunity at 4151 E. Fountain Street

RFP DV22-050

06/13/2022

Bidder Registration

To receive notifications of bid opportunities, register with the city, and download additional bid details, visit [www.longbeach.gov/purchasing](http://www.longbeach.gov/purchasing).

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# Relativity Space’s first-ever fully 3D-printed rocket could blast off as early as this week

By Brandon Richardson

Many rocket manufacturers use 3D-printing technology to create components for spacecraft—and have been doing so for years. But only one company has built upon the technology to create the first fully printed rocket: Long Beach-based Relativity Space.

After years of development and testing, the vision of Relativity founder Tim Ellis could be realized as early as June 1, the firm announced earlier this month.

The firm successfully completed a 60-second full-duration mission duty cycle test for stage two of its rocket, the Terran 1, at the NASA Stennis Space Center in April. The test marks the first time a 3D-printed stage has undergone acceptance testing.

“A stage two full duration MDC is a pinnacle milestone in stage development,” the company said in its announcement. It “proves that all key stage subsystems (including the engine, structures, fluid systems, avionics and software) can operate in flight-like configuration.”

Relativity also completed acceptance testing for all nine Aeon 1 engines for stage one of the rocket. The company completed its first full-duration mission duty cycle of the Aeon, which ran for 310 seconds, in January.

Both stages will now be shipped to Relativity’s launch pad, LC-16, at Cape Canaveral.

In light of its recent successes,

Relativity completed its filing with the Federal Communications Commission for its first launch with a launch window of June 1 through December. While the Terran 1 could blast off as early as June 1, the firm has not yet announced a date for the launch.

“We will be providing a more detailed timeline as we get through more testing/shipping shortly,” the company said in an email.

The first mission will not be carrying a customer payload, the company stated. The goal is to “demonstrate that an entirely 3D-printed rocket can fly, then demonstrate it can deliver payloads.”

Assuming the mission is a success, the firm said it plans to move quickly into additional launches for various customers, including NASA.

At 110 feet tall and 7.5 feet wide, the Terran 1 is the largest 3D-printed object in the world, according to the company. To achieve this, the firm created the world’s largest 3D printer, dubbed the Stargate, which currently manufactures the rocket and its components in a building at the Pacific Edge industrial park.

The firm is working on a larger headquarters at the former Boeing C-19 manufacturing hangar, and recently announced some of the work—namely the office space—had been completed.

Relativity also is in the process of developing the Terran R, which is larger than the Terran 1 and will be the world’s first fully reusable 3D-printed rocket. The first Terran R launch is expected in 2024. ■

Screenshot  
Relativity Space tests stage two of its Terran 1 rocket.





A jogger runs by during high-tide along the Peninsula In Long Beach.

COLUMNIST: TIM GROBATY

# Waterfront living in Long Beach is high-price, high-risk

There's little that's more enjoyable than living on the waterfront with its fresh sea breezes and eternally awesome views. Although that's just so long as the water behaves itself and doesn't crawl up to invade your property, potentially destroying it or otherwise making it unusable. That sort of encroachment should be of increasingly greater concern to residents in seashore communities as well as homebuyers hankering for panoramic (and expensive) views of the ocean, where worst-case scenarios forecast severe flooding due to sea-level rise caused by climate change over the next few years. And worst-case has become the most likely scenario in the near future because, frankly, little has been done to curb climate change or forestall rising sea levels.

Still, wealthy homebuyers appear to have little concern about the likelihood of sea-rise havoc. Mansions and oversize beach houses in Naples and on the Peninsula remain some of the most coveted properties in Long Beach, and Realtors are still moving them at a good clip, especially the somewhat more affordable ones in the under-\$2 million range.

When buying any property at all, buyers are urged to conduct due diligence. The extent of that can be merely cursory, especially in a sellers' market in which the owner of the property for sale can seek waivers of home inspections and other measures a potential buyer might usually expect.

But here's a bare minimum you can do if you're looking for a home on the water: Check the listing for the risk factor of the property. Risk

Factor, in fact, is the name of the organization that comes up with the likelihood of flood, based on data from scientists, peer-reviewed studies and other sources including data accumulated by First Street Foundation Flood Model, a nationwide, probabilistic flood model that shows any location's risk of flooding from rain, rivers, tides, and storm surge.

But, then, the chances of rising sea levels, even in areas with an extreme risk factor for flooding, don't seem to have much of an effect on the market, according to Realtors who specialize in properties in Naples and the Peninsula.

"There's some concern. People ask a lot of questions, but houses on the Peninsula and Naples are still selling. It's still a seller's market," said Keith Muirhead. He admitted that the price might come down a bit—he has a Naples home in escrow that was listed at \$10 million and was reduced to "well into the \$8 million mark," but price cuts aren't unusual when you get above the \$3 million point.

"And anyway," said Muirhead, "where on the California coast can you buy a house on the beach for these prices?"

Realtor Spencer Snyder is even less concerned. "I don't hear people worrying about it," he said. "I don't hear people saying they're not buying a house because of the danger of sea-level rise."

There are a couple of homes on the Peninsula's boardwalk on Seaside Walk, both with spectacular and unimpeded ocean views from Palos Verdes down past Huntington Beach. Unimpeded, that is, from second and third floors, with ground floor views being



Courtesy of Spencer Snyder

This home on Seaside Walk is new on the market and listed for sale at \$5 million.



Courtesy of Redfin

This home at 6605 Seaside Walk is on the market with a listing price of \$4.5 million.

somewhat disturbed by the sand berm the city puts up to protect the residences. And you thought you had problems.

One home that's new on the market and listed by Snyder is at 6519 E. Seaside Walk. The four-bedroom, six-bath house weighs in at 4,880 square feet with a \$5 million price tag (I exaggerate: \$4,999,000). It's literally steps from the beach and a few more to the water's edge. It has tons of windows, as you would hope and expect with its views from the living areas and, well, from everywhere except, perhaps, from the 1,600-bottle-capacity wine closet. It's got an ultra-professional kitchen, decks for entertaining or sunbathing and a flood-risk factor of 9 out of 10. Furthermore, due to placement in a high-risk FEMA flood zone, flood insurance is required to obtain a mortgage from a federally regulated or insured lender, though you can always pay cash, which isn't unusual among big-ticket buyers.

Another beautiful property is just down the boardwalk at 6605 E. Seaside Walk. This towering, three-story, 4,600-square-foot home, listed by Realtor Crystal Glenning, has six bedrooms and eight bathrooms, though some of those are taken up by a three-bed, three-bath luxury apartment on the ground floor (sorry about the berm), which you can rent out for a tidy sum, or use it to store additional relatives. The upper floors are pretty spectacular, and let's go ahead and stipulate that it has fantastic views.

Again, this one has a flood-risk factor of 9, which should perhaps be of chief concern to the lower-floor apartment dwellers. I wouldn't sign a 10-year lease. ■

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# Long Beach and Lakewood Starbucks stores become 1st to unionize in Southern California

By Laura Anaya-Morga

A Starbucks store in Long Beach and another in Lakewood have successfully voted to unionize, becoming the first stores to do so in Southern California. They have joined two stores in Santa Cruz, which voted to unionize earlier this month, to be among the first across the state.

Starbucks baristas gathered on May 13 to watch over Zoom as a member of the National Labor Relations Board tallied their votes. They had been anticipating this moment since they filed their petition on March 7.

Cheers rang out as the votes came in overwhelmingly in favor of a union. At the Long Beach location on Redondo Avenue and Seventh Street, employees voted 13 to 0. At the Lakewood store on 4833 Candlewood St. near Lakewood Boulevard, 24 voted in favor of a union; there was only 1 no vote. The two stores are joining Workers United as part of the Service Employees International Union, or SEIU.

The two stores have joined a list of 66 across the country that have successfully voted to unionize. In California, 20 stores have petitioned to unionize and across the country over 250 stores have filed petitions to



Starbucks baristas from Long Beach and Lakewood stores celebrate as they've just become the third and fourth Starbucks locations to unionize in California on May 13.

host union elections since August, according to NLRB officials.

Prior to the vote, workers at the Long Beach location voiced frustrations about being underpaid, understaffed and feeling overworked. Other top complaints included unfair scheduling and inadequate COVID-19 policies.

To Josie Serrano, one of the lead organizers, these things seemed like the bare minimum a worldwide, billion-dollar

corporation should provide.

After starting the petition process, Serrano said, employees reported the company posting flyers in break rooms designed to dissuade them from unionizing and holding required meetings, where managers would suggest that they will not qualify for specific benefits if they were to vote in favor of a union.

Starbucks did not respond to a request for comment about its tactics at the Long Beach store.

There have been accusations of unfair tactics at other stores across the country. Federal labor regulators at the NLRB filed a complaint earlier this month accusing Starbucks of unfair labor practices, union-busting efforts, retaliation, unlawful threats and surveillance at stores in Western New York.

The Starbucks corporation has outwardly expressed its opposition to unionizing and criticized organizers for causing division among Starbucks and its employees.

Last month, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz visited the Long Beach area to hold a “collaboration session” with baristas from nearby stores, and employees left saying they felt disrespected. His visit inspired a second Long Beach store in Belmont Shore to petition for unionization.

After the meeting, Schultz wrote in a letter to Starbucks partners, “I do not believe conflict, division and dissension—which has been a focus of union organizing—benefits Starbucks or our partners.”

As a union, employees say they will work to negotiate fair contracts.

“We want to make sure that we’re setting up a foundation for a better Starbucks, not just for ourselves, but for partners that are coming in,” said Serrano. ■

## COVID Relief

Continued from page 13

barriers to entry, particularly for our communities of color and the areas in our city hardest hit by COVID.”

Under the American Rescue Plan Act approved by Congress last year, Long Beach was allocated \$135.7 million, of which it received half in May 2021, while the other half was expected this month.

Cities were required to apply for funds under general categories, including public health, infrastructure and government services.

Long Beach applied for the aid under a funding strategy in which it told the U.S. Department of Treasury that it planned to use all of the \$135.7 million for government services, specifically “police department personnel costs,” including salaries, overtime and benefits.

But city officials said the police funding plan was simply listed for “administrative conveniences” on its federal application and the funding was actually distributed directly to the city’s general fund to avoid layoffs and cuts to services as a result of the pandemic.

Reynolds said this strategy allows the city to free up, or “backfill,” the general fund to pay for recovery act programs. The plan allows for more flexibility and less federal oversight from the U.S. Department of Treasury.

She said Long Beach would have had to hire extra staff just to handle the federal administrative requirements if the city had listed all of its dozens of recovery act programs on its application.

“This gives Long Beach more freedom to choose how it’s going to fund programs and the timeline to operate these programs than if it was operating under the federal guidelines,” she said. “It means that more money goes to the actual programs rather than compliance with federal regulations. And it is allowed under the rules of the U.S. Department of Treasury.”

But it also leaves Long Beach on the hook for its own accountability.

“It’s a matter of being accountable to the community, even though it’s through the general fund,” Reynolds said. “We have a very specific directive from our City Council for these programs. And if there is a dire desire to change those programs, those decisions would happen at the policy level at our City Council level. So that’s really where the accountability lies.”

Other cities, like Oakland and San Diego, have structured their federal funding in a similar way to allow more freedom as to how they spend funds.

The city of Lakewood received \$11.3 million in ARPA funds, which it used to offset revenue loss under the general government services category, said city spokesman Bill Grady. The city is using the funds for areas including homeless services, eco-friendly landscaping and water infrastructure upgrades.

The Long Beach City Council in March 2021 approved the Long Beach Recovery Act to handle more than \$250 million in federal and state

recovery funds to support more than 80 programs in three main categories: health and safe community, economic recovery and “securing our city’s future.”

It included funding from both the Trump and Biden administrations and required some portions to be spent on specific things like rent relief, vaccinations and airport relief, while \$135 million was freed up to spend on aid programs created by the city.

Long Beach has already spent tens of

city in recent weeks has launched a slew of recovery programs.

More than a year after approval, the city in March launched its direct financial assistance grants program for small businesses, including bars, restaurants and breweries.

Small business owners who spoke to the Business Journal said they could use the money, but some were unaware of the city’s program.

Ron Hodges, owner of Shannon’s on

struggles in the pandemic.

This month, Pier 76 Fish Grill, a popular Pine Avenue restaurant, closed its doors after nine years in Downtown. Owner Chris Krajacic said the city’s grant program wouldn’t have helped him to stay open in the long term.

“There’s only so much a business can do,” he said.

The city is hoping other businesses will be able to stay afloat. Other recently launched grant programs include a micro-shuttle service to support tourism, businesses and local revenue generation; a creative economy grants program to fund local artists and arts, culture and history nonprofits; and a nonprofit relief grant program.

The city is also looking to partner with community organizations to implement health programs that promote equity in underserved communities.

Other programs coming this year include a first-time homebuyer program, a motel vouchers program for homeless services, and a free mobile hotspot program for small business and low-income residents.

Long Beach last year had been projecting a budget deficit as high as \$36 million from pandemic costs, but that number is now closer to \$12 million, which could be covered by federal pandemic relief funds.

Staff writer Jason Ruiz contributed to this report. ■

“The pandemic was very hard, but this could be a help.”

- Max Viltz, Owner of Village Treasures

millions of dollars in rental assistance, vaccine rollout programs, food distribution and other pandemic aid for business and residents, but much of its direct relief funding was on hold as the city waited for specific federal guidelines for ARPA funds under the government services category, Reynolds said.

The final guidelines weren’t released until January of this year.

As of April, the city had spent just \$9 million of its \$64.4 million budget in Economic Recovery, which includes direct business support.

With clear federal guidelines, the

Pine and other local restaurants, said he hadn’t heard of the city’s direct relief program for bars and restaurants.

“It’s been difficult but we’re managing,” he said.

Max Viltz, owner of Village Treasures, an African gift shop in Downtown Long Beach, said she also was unaware of the grant programs.

“The pandemic was very hard, but this could be a help,” she said.

For others, the pandemic has proven to be too much. Last month, Liberation Brewing closed its doors four years after opening due to

# New acai business opens at SteelCraft

By Cheantay Jensen

Summertime offerings at outdoor urban eatery Steelcraft in Long Beach just got a little sweeter with the addition of Koolberry, a new locally owned acai concept that recently opened street-side next to Steelhead Coffee.

The new acai business specializes in fresh fruit acai, pitaya and coconut bowls with 15 toppings to choose from such as granola, chia pudding and mulberries you can add on at no extra cost. Koolberry also sells build-your-own milkshakes based on chocolate or vanilla you can mix with strawberry compote, Oreo, toffee or biscoff cookie which, if you’ve never tried, is a crisp cookie with a deep caramel flavor.

And for those with a more decadent palate, Koolberry offers three signature milkshake creations called “Freak Shakes” that feature more premium toppings such as a whole biscoff cheesecake slice as

featured in the “Biscoff Freak” shake.

Koolberry was created by Hangry Belly, a burgers and fries business that is also located at Steelcraft Long Beach. Owner Kat Vacharabul said that after a year of being at Steelcraft she discovered that the community was looking for an acai concept to spring up in the area and thought, why not do it herself, but with a twist.

“Instead of focusing solely on acai, I wanted to expand the concept with delicious desserts made in-house with real, quality ingredients for guests and their entire families to enjoy,” Vacharabul said in a statement. “I couldn’t pass up another opportunity to work with SteelCraft’s team and to open another locally owned business in my hometown.”

Koolberry’s business hours are from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and on Friday and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

For locals who might not mind the drive, the Steelcraft Bellflower location may also be a spot to check out with the addition of Burger



Courtesy of SteelCraft

An acai bowl from Koolberry, the latest business to open at Steelcraft in Bixby Knolls.

Monster, a classic horror movie-inspired burger concept that got its start as a food truck. The business features massive Angus burgers, eccentrically designed and named after classic horror movies such as

“Dracula” and “The Wolf Man.”

Burger Monster will be open at the Steelcraft Bellflower location from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and on Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. ■

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Long Beach Health Department Director Kelly Colopy receives a COVID-19 vaccine shot on Jan. 14, 2021.

Vaccine Mandate

Continued from page 19

an epidemiologist at UC Irvine, back in January. “Vaccinated people are less likely to spread the virus.”

Beginning Monday, June 6, all city employees must do one of the following, according to a May 23 memo from Joe Ambrosini, the city’s Director of Human Resources:

- Provide proof that they’ve received either the one-dose COVID-19 vaccine regimen or the first dose of a two-dose regimen;
- Or, submit a request for accommodation (either personal, medical or religious).

Those who opt to select the two-dose vaccination regimen must show proof of the second dose by Friday, July 8, according to

Ambrosini’s memo.

Getting either the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine or two-dose Pfizer or Moderna vaccines meets the current definition of being “fully vaccinated,” according to the state Department of Health. Should that change, and the state decide that one or more booster shots will be required to be “fully vaccinated,” the city may change the vaccination requirements outlined in their new mandate, according to Ambrosini’s memo.

Anyone granted the personal exemption option must pay for weekly COVID-19 testing (rapid antigen/PCR), which can be done during city work hours, with the cost of the testing deducted from the employee’s paycheck, according to Ambrosini’s memo. Those receiving medical or religious exemptions will still be subject to weekly COVID-19

testing, but at city expense, according to the memo.

All unvaccinated city employees must continue to wear a mask of at least medical or surgical grade while at work under this new policy, according to memo. Employees not doing so are subject to disciplinary measures, up to and including termination, according to the policy.

In June 2021, the city began asking employees to show if they were fully vaccinated against COVID-19. If they were, they no longer had to wear a face-covering at work. When this policy was discontinued two months later, 72% of city employees were fully vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus, according to Ambrosini’s memo.

Since then, the city has required all city employees who were not fully vaccinated or did not disclose proof of their vaccination status to undertake weekly COVID-19 testing, according to the memo. This has led to 86% of all city workers being fully vaccinated as of last week, according to the city.

This is up slightly from the city’s previous reporting that 84% of all employees were vaccinated, as of December 2021.

Now, 20 of the city’s 23 departments show a vaccination rate of 80% or better, according to the latest figures released by the city manager’s office. The other three are Water (79% vaccinated), the Emergency Communications and Operations Center (77%) and the Police Department (70%).

Two city departments that showed the lowest vaccination percentages also showed minor gains. The Fire Department currently has an 81% vaccination rate, up from 78% in December, while the Police

Department’s current rate is up from 68% in December.

City officials had been negotiating with a dozen labor associations representing municipal workers since late September 2021 on a vaccine mandate, according to Ambrosini’s memo.

Kevin Lee, a spokesperson for the city, said that implementing a policy like this, which is “extremely detailed and includes consequences for employees that remain noncompliant following the June 6th effective date,” required additional time to complete negotiations with various labor organizations.

“We worked through the issues together,” said Rex Pritchard, president of the Long Beach firefighter union. According to Pritchard, the contested issues mainly concerned the process of implementing the policy, like detailing how employees would go about getting an exemption and how the city would protect confidential information.

“I thought we had a good process,” said Pritchard. “I commend the city manager and his team. I’m pleased with how the city went about it.”

Rich Chambers, president of the Long Beach Police Officers Association, said his organization accepts the new mandate.

“It’s not perfect, but we are glad staffing will not be affected, particularly during a time when public safety is a top priority for our community,” he said.

The city of Los Angeles passed an employee vaccination mandate back in December 2021, and terminated a few dozen employees since then, including 12 fire employees, according to the LA Times. ■

Long Beach unemployment hits pre-pandemic level

By Brandon Richardson

Unemployment in Long Beach has reached pre-pandemic levels after its ninth consecutive month of decline, according to data released earlier this month by the California Employment Development Department.

The city’s unemployment rate dropped from 5% in March to 4.8% last month, which is the same rate as February 2020. The city’s labor force, however, consists of about 10,000 fewer people than prior to the pandemic, state data shows. Similarly, the number of employed residents is down by just over 10,000.

Long Beach’s labor force in April dipped from 234,800 to 232,700 people. The number of employed residents in the city similarly decreased from 223,100 to 221,500. In February 2020, the labor force and number of employed residents was

243,400 and 231,700, respectively.

The countywide unemployment rate also has reached pre-pandemic levels, now at 4.7%.

While unemployment in Long Beach continues to drop, the city is still trailing behind nearly 65% of the county’s other cities and census areas, according to state data. Of the 124 cities and areas, only 40 have a higher unemployment rate.

Three cities—El Segundo, Hawthorne and Pico Rivera—have the same unemployment rate as Long Beach.

Unemployment statewide is 3.8%, down from 4.2% in March.

“Labor supply remains the biggest constraint to job growth in the state,” Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the Center for Economic Forecasting, said in a statement. “And as employers seek to ramp up employment during the seasonally strong summer months,



A construction worker walks by the Long Beach Boulevard-facing side of the new Laserfiche headquarter in Bixby Knolls.

worker scarcity will continue to place upward pressure on wages in the state.”

Statewide, the largest job gains continue to occur in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic. Leisure and hospitality led payroll gains in April with the addition of 20,100 jobs, according to a Beacon report. Professional, scientific

and technical services, government, retail, transportation, warehousing and utilities, administrative support, manufacturing and information also saw strong gains.

Construction posted significant losses through April, declining payroll by 13,200, according to Beacon. ■



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