

LONG BEACH

BUSINESS JOURNAL

An edition of the Long Beach Post



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Father-son surgical team Amandeep, left, and Sarbpaul Bhalla work on a patient's spine at Long Beach Medical Center.

# A ‘surreal experience’: Father-son surgical team repair spines

By Brandon Richardson

In the operating room, trust is critical. Trust that the other surgeons and nurses will do their jobs and do them well. Trust that they have your back. For Amandeep Bhalla, there can be no greater sense of trust than when he looks across the operating table at his father, Sarbpaul.

For the past six years, the father-son surgical team has performed over 1,500 orthopedic surgeries at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center. Though Sarbpaul, 73, is

slowing down on the number of surgeries he does per week, the pair still regularly perform five or six together, which makes up the majority of Amandeep's cases. “I think it’s pretty special—a kind of almost surreal experience,” Amandeep, 39, said about working in the OR with his dad. “[We] have complete trust in one another and a lot of that is kind of unspoken and grounding.”

The Bhallas specialize in spinal surgeries and in March performed their 100th procedure using the ExcelsiusGPS assisted spinal surgery

robotic arm, which allows surgeons to virtually navigate the spine in 3D for increased precision. Long Beach Memorial was the first facility in Los Angeles County to purchase the machine almost two years ago, which makes the Bhallas the area’s leading experts in the tech. When the duo performed its first surgery using the machine, it was cutting-edge, Amandeep said. Other facilities have begun purchasing the piece of equipment but their surgeons must be trained to use it. And that is where the Bhallas come in.

Continued on page 10

## New equity center establishing role in supporting North Long Beach families

By Christian May-Suzuki

Even in its infancy, the Robert R. Arias Health Equity Center is providing critical economic and social services to North Long Beach residents.

After over a year of renovations, the center opened last month at 6335 Myrtle Ave., next door to the Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center at Houghton Park. The equity center was originally known as the Center For Family And Youth, a space mainly used for early childhood

Continued on page 5

## Cerritos couple donates \$5M to Long Beach Memorial

By Brandon Richardson

After being forced to work on a labor farm amid the Cultural Revolution, Hing Hung escaped Communist China in 1974. He made his way to the U.S. where he would graduate from college, meet his wife and co-found a successful business in Long Beach.

Hung’s road to the American dream gave him a “pay it forward” mentality—a mentality that led to a \$5 million donation toward a hybrid operating room at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center.

“The Hungs are shining examples of what can happen when courage, hard work and love are met with freedom and opportunity,” Long Beach Medical Center Foundation

Continued on page 3

LONG BEACH  
BUSINESS JOURNAL  
211 E. Ocean Blvd., Ste. 400  
Long Beach, CA 90802

PRSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Los Angeles, CA  
PERMIT NO. 447

LAST CHANCE TO GET  
HOME DELIVERY FOR ONLY  
**\$30/YEAR**  
Visit [lbbj.com/subscribe](http://lbbj.com/subscribe)  
or call 562-553-3391.



LONG BEACH  
BUSINESS JOURNAL

The voice of the business  
community for over 30 years.



In This Issue:  
**Health Care**



Four judges listen to Arthur Varin's meditation application pitch during the inaugural Sunstone CSU Startup Launch Competition at Cal State Long Beach. Varin's entry won third place in the competition, which came with a \$5,000 check.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal ..... 13

**Health Care ..... 3**

Former Community Hospital CEO to take over as head of Lakewood Regional .....3

Expectant parents in Long Beach have birth setting options beyond hospital beds ..... 4

At-home medical care gets a virtual upgrade in Long Beach ..... 5

Medical cannabis conference blazes into Long Beach for the first time .....6

**Before COVID-19, Long Beach launched a 3-year plan to address STDs. Has it worked?.....7**

City to allow 8 more cannabis dispensaries with equity focus .....9

Down syndrome research conference coming to Long Beach .....10

**Newswatch..... 11**

City OKs assisted living and memory care facility .....11

Long Beach to begin early planning for Downtown pedestrian safety improvements ..... 11

Romeo Chocolates closes its doors on Pine Avenue in anticipation of big changes coming .....12

Virgin Orbit announces next launch and fleet expansion .....12

From apps to turbine blades, entrepreneurs from CSULB pitch ideas at startup contest ..... 13

Rocket Lab successfully catches rocket booster out of mid-air ..... 14

A cafe built out of a shipping container is coming Downtown to Civic Center plaza ..... 14

Long Beach eyes ADU program to help meeting housing need ..... 15

Taking on Queen Mary could cost the Port of Long Beach \$354M over the next 5 years ..... 16

Community rallies around local restaurant with donations after vandalism and a break-in .....17

Panxa Cocina Chef Arthur Gonzalez dies at 47 .....18

Pier 76 Fish Grill closes after 9 years in Downtown .....18

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**  
**(562) 912-0161**  
**LBBJ.com/subscribe**

Editorial: (562) 655-7678  
editor@LBBJ.com

Advertising: (562) 912-0161  
info@LBBJ.com

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

LBBizJourn

LBBusinessJournal

*Editor* **Hayley Munguia** // *Advertising Director* **Andrea Estrada** // *Visuals Editor* **Brandon Richardson** // *Columnist* **Tim Grobaty** // *Reporters* **Laura Anaya-Morga, Fernando Haro, Cheantay Jensen, Christian May-Suzuki, Crystal Niebla, Anthony Pignataro, Kelly Puente, Brandon Richardson, Jason Ruiz** // *Graphic Designer* **Candice Wong** // *Publisher Emeritus* **George Economides**

The Long Beach Business Journal is a publication of Pacific Community Media. The Business Journal is published every other Tuesday. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Opinions expressed by perspective writers and guest columnists are not necessarily the views of the Long Beach Business Journal.



May 17, 2022

BUSINESS JOURNAL

Health Care

3

# Former Community Hospital CEO to take over as head of Lakewood Regional

*Virg Narbutas was COO at Lakewood Regional from 1990-1994 and served as CEO of Community Hospital from spring 2020 to July 2021.*

By Brandon Richardson

After 13 years with Tenet Health, Lakewood Regional Medical Center CEO John Grah is retiring later this month. The health care provider announced former Community Hospital CEO Virg Narbutas as his successor, effective May 19.

A graduate of UCLA with a bachelor of arts, biology and a master's degree in health service management, Narbutas was COO at Lakewood from 1990-1994. He has since served as regional CEO of three acute care hospitals and as CEO of long-term acute care hospitals throughout Southern California.

"I am very happy to be back at the hospital where I started my career," Narbutas said in an



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Then-Community Hospital CEO Virg Narbutas speaks during an event celebrating the reopening of the century-old facility. Narbutas has been named CEO of Lakewood Regional Medical Center.

email. "Serving the community where I have lived for the past 35 years continues to be my passion and I look forward to advancing the valuable health care services that Lakewood Regional Medical Center provides to our residents."

Grah assumed the role of CEO at Lakewood Regional in 2016. During his tenure, he successfully led the

charge for improved quality and safety of care as well as operational performance that enabled growth, hospital spokeswoman Jennifer Bayer said in an email.

Since Grah took over, the hospital achieved stroke service accreditation and recognition from Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services. Grah also led

the implementation of an ICU Intensivist Program and to expand cardiovascular services.

For more than two years, Grah "navigated the hospital through COVID-19, maintaining a commitment to excellence throughout the challenging time," Bayer says.

"As I transition to the next phase of my life, I am blessed in knowing that I have contributed to improving the lives of patients seeking care at my respective organizations," Grah said in an email of his 37-year health care career. "I've had the opportunity to work with wonderful teams of dedicated people and have developed so many long-standing relationships with people I now consider family."

Most recently, Narbutas, a Long Beach resident, served as CEO of the now-defunct Community Hospital. Under the acute-care facility's final operator, Molina Wu Network, Narbutas served as CEO from spring 2020 to July 2021.

The reason for Narbutas's departure from Community remains unclear.

The hospital was shuttered for over two years and reopened in January 2021 but permanently closed again 11 months later. ■

## \$5M Donation

Continued from cover

President Rob Gunsalus said in an email to the Business Journal. "Mr. Hung's story in particular is better than anything Hollywood could produce."

The hefty donation to the MemorialCare Heart & Vascular Institute helped fund a new hybrid cardiovascular operating suite that features advanced technology and combines the diagnostic capabilities of a catheterization lab with the surgical functionality of an operating room, according to the hospital.

Born in Communist China in the early 1950s, Hung was forced to work on a labor farm in his teens. At 22, he managed to sneak away with others using a boat destined for Macau.

"Patrolmen spotted us though, and we had to gut the boat and swim around the channel through the night. We knew if we got caught, we'd be sent back to the farm," Hung recalled. "I didn't have time to be scared, I just swam."

Hung made it to Macau and was eventually sponsored to receive an immigrant visa to the U.S. He met his wife, Doris, in 1978 while they were both attending Cal Poly Pomona, where he studied electrical engineering.

In 1992, Hung co-founded Mercury Security Corp., which created the technology behind badge readers at door entries. The business was sold in 2013 but remains located in Long Beach near Signal Hill. Hung remained active with the company until 2020.

The couple now lives in Cerritos but their personal connection to Long Beach Medical Center dates back almost two decades. In 2005, Doris was diagnosed with breast cancer and received care at the Long Beach hospital. Today, she is cancer free.

Hing's mother battled ovarian cancer and received care at Memorial as well.

The recent donation is not the Hung's first to the hospital. Past gifts helped build the Chereese Mari Lulhere Children's Village, which opened last year, a consultation room at the Todd Cancer Institute and renovations to the



Courtesy of Long Beach Medical Center

Hing and Doris Hung, center, donated \$5 million to Long Beach Medical Center to help fund a new hybrid operating room.

catheterization laboratory at the heart institute.

"Hing and Doris truly care about ensuring our hospital is equipped with state-of-the-art technology that will help patients for decades

to come," Marc Sakwa, medical director of adult cardiovascular surgery and the institute said in a statement. "The heart of our [institute] beats strong because of donors like them." ■



# Expectant parents in Long Beach have birth setting options beyond hospital beds

By Christian May-Suzuki

From the moment Hannah Milot found out she was expecting her first child, she knew that giving birth in the traditional way was not something she wanted.

"I have heard from friends about their experiences at hospitals, and knew I wanted something else," Milot said over email.

Milot decided to use a birth center to help her facilitate a more natural and holistic approach to pregnancy and labor. She did have to make a trip to the hospital to check on the baby when her due date came and went, but that visit only reinforced her desire to give birth in a natural setting.

"The hospital was a very stressful experience," Milot said. "At first, they wouldn't let my husband in the room and then they tried to pressure us into inducing for no reason. Both my baby and I were perfectly healthy."

Milot went into labor naturally soon after the visit and was brought into the birth center. She was allowed



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Owners Meredith Bowling and her wife Elizabeth Medina Bowling stand in one of the birthing rooms, equipped with both a bed and bathtub, at Long Beach Birth Center.

to deliver the baby mostly on her own while her midwife—a professional specifically trained and certified to guide and monitor a natural birthing process—checked on the heart rate of

the baby periodically.

"The lights were off and they had candles lit," Milot said. "It was a beautiful experience."

Most people in the United States only consider giving birth at a hospital, but some expectant parents like Milot are looking for a different way to bring their children into the world.

Traditional hospital births are undoubtedly still the most popular, with about 98% of births in the country conducted at a hospital, according to recent data from the California Department of Public Health.

Births through more natural methods, however, have been gaining popularity in recent years. Department of Public Health data shows the percentage of births happening outside of hospitals has doubled since 2007.

The main advantage of hospital birth is safety—having a plethora of resources within close reach to minimize the consequences of any of the potentially serious complications that can arise during labor. Medications can be used to help speed up a birth and mitigate intense pain, and most women opt for this safety net.

But there are some who want to avoid giving birth at a hospital for a number of reasons, including past experiences with hospital births, a disconnect with doctors as a whole or simply because they want to welcome their child into the world in a calmer environment. In Long Beach, expecting mothers have several options to experience a more natural birthing process.

The safest option for giving birth outside of a hospital, according to experts, is a freestanding birth center, a facility equipped with beds and other tools. There were just

under 400 accredited birth centers that are not directly attached to the hospital as of 2020, where mothers can experience a more holistic birthing journey.

Long Beach Birth Center, where Milot gave birth, is one such facility, located 1224 E. Wardlow Road. Meredith Bowling decided to open a birth center with her wife, Elizabeth Medina-Bowling, after having her own experience at a hospital.

"Coming away from that, I realized why we need another place for women to give birth, especially if their pregnancy is low-risk, and there's nothing wrong with them," Bowling said.

Birth centers limit their use of medication in favor of a more natural process, Bowling said, and replace nurses with midwives, who are trained to oversee the natural birthing process and handle many of the common complications one sees, including a neonatal resuscitation training program done every two years. Midwives are accredited by the American Midwifery Certification Board.

Long Beach Birth Center has four midwives and five "birth assistants," also known as doulas.

The facilities themselves are heavily monitored and accredited by the Commission for the Accreditation of Birth Centers to maximize patient safety.

The midwifery model of care is centered around the idea that labor is a natural human process that shouldn't require significant intervention from medicine. Specific knowledge and procedures are laid out to ensure the birth is carried out as safely as possible, but facilities like Long Beach Birth Center have medication on standby for emergencies.

During labor, induction and medication are replaced by more natural solutions like position changes and the use of methods like acupressure to relieve pain. Midwives are extensively trained to respond to common complications but may transfer a patient to a hospital should they need additional resources and specialized care.

Patients are examined regularly during prenatal appointments over the course of the pregnancy, similar to traditional hospital visits. Midwives are trained to look for any number of potential risk factors that may cause complications during a natural birth.

Bowling said complications are rare because of the intense evaluation required to be cleared for a natural birth outside a hospital setting. These appointments are far more personalized and detailed than

Continued on page 8

# At-home medical care gets a virtual upgrade in Long Beach

By Brandon Richardson

High-need patients—or those simply looking for convenience—in Los Angeles and Orange counties can now utilize an innovative piece of medical equipment during at-home virtual medical visits that give doctors real-time data for improved telehealth care.

In April, Long Beach Medical Center operator MemorialCare announced it was the first health provider in the region to partner with TytoCare, the developer of the industry's first all-in-one, AI-powered modular device for remote patient visits.

About the size of a baseball, patients can use the device to measure heart rate and body

temperature, which is key for treating many acute and chronic conditions, at home. The device connects to the patient's phone via Bluetooth and information is transferred directly to the patient's electronic medical chart.

The TytoCare device is also equipped with a camera that allows doctors to examine patients' skin, eyes, ears and throat. Several attachments are included or can be purchased as add-ons to assist in the examination, including a blood pressure cuff, a pulse oximeter and a component that allows doctors to listen to a patient's heartbeat and breathing.

MemorialCare already has distributed about 350 devices to select patients free of charge, said Mark Schaefer, CEO of the MemorialCare Medical Foundation. Anyone,



Courtesy of Long Beach Medical Center

Rita Goshert helps her 15-year-old daughter, Jaclyn, perform a home exam using a TytoCare device.

however, can purchase the device through the hospital or third-party vendors such as Best Buy for \$300.

For free devices, the health

provider is prioritizing certain patients based on condition and the need for increased convenience.

"We started off with expecting

Continued on page 8

**BRASCIA BUILDERS INC.**

**BRASCIABUILDERS.COM**

**HEALTHCARE. HOSPITALITY. EDUCATION. COMMERCIAL.**

**CA'S LEADING GENERAL CONTRACTOR**

**562.576.0900 CA# 860308**



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A health department employee walks along the exterior of the Ronald R. Arias Health Equity Center at Houghton Park in North Long Beach.

## Equity Center

Continued from cover

education. The center has now broadened its efforts to include more resources that families need.

Featuring an open-space concept with a large community training room, the equity center has two conference rooms as well as two outdoor patios.

The center has been open for a month but remains accessible by appointment only due to COVID-19 safety restrictions. But programs and partnerships are already active for the public to take advantage of.

The center currently serves as a hub for the Community Impact Division of the city's Department

of Health and Human Services. Launched in 2018, the division aims to improve racial equity in public health and quality of life by providing economic and social services to underserved communities.

"Programming at the [equity center] is family centered and focused on a two-generational approach to uplift families and strengthen their social and economic mobility," health department spokeswoman Jennifer Rice Epstein said via email.

One of those services is the city's Fundamentals of Fatherhood program, which launched in 2016 as part of a federal initiative. The program consists of 10 weekly sessions with a life coach meant to help fathers with child bonding, co-parenting and economic stability and mobility.

Employment assistance services

through the city's Pacific Gateway Workforce Innovation Network are also being hosted at the center. Rice Epstein said this is a particularly critical need given the economic impacts of the pandemic.

"This represents the city's commitment to equity by bringing services directly into the communities most impacted by COVID-19," Rice Epstein said.

For families in more dire circumstances, the center also hosts a Family Preservation Program for those whose children are at risk to be taken for out-of-home care. Families that are part of the program are assigned a case manager, who conducts weekly in-home visits.

The case manager will also guide family members to services provided by the program meant to help deal

with underlying issues, including parenting classes and support groups, youth groups, services for LGBTQ youth, counseling, job training and mental health services.

Medical services are also provided at the center, including family planning, and services related to HIV and TB. Having this wide range of services stays true to the city's overall philosophy not only for the center, but its approach toward assisting families in violence-stricken and impoverished areas as a whole.

"The intersection of youth development, violence prevention and strengthening families ... requires an intersectional approach," Rice Epstein said. "It requires looking at prevention and early intervention in people's lives by providing them with the necessary resources for them to achieve their potential."

The city is planning to expand programming in the coming months, including increased focus on younger people. The Futures First Program targets "opportunity youth," which are defined as being between the ages of 16 and 24 that are entirely disconnected from school and work. The program will help those interested in continuing their education or reentering the workforce.

They are also looking to expand the Long Beach Activating Safe Communities initiative into North Long Beach using the center as a base. The program strives to prevent crime by using a community-based organization to send "interventionalists," who work with police to quell community violence through outreach and other forms of intervention.

For more information on the center and its programs, call the center directly at 562-570-3300. ■





Courtesy of the Cannabis Science Conference  
Actor Montel Williams speaks during his “Let’s Be Blunt” panel at the 2017 Cannabis Science Conference in Portland, Oregon. Williams is one of the first mainstream actors to advocate for medical cannabis use.

# Medical cannabis conference blazes into Long Beach for the first time

By Christian May-Suzuki

For the first time, a conference centered around cannabis and its use in medicine is coming to Long Beach.

The Long Beach Convention Center will host the Cannabis Science Conference, one of the only forums for cannabis researchers and professionals to convene and discuss the latest findings related to the drug and its medical applications. The conference runs May 18-20.

Organizer Josh Crossney noticed that while forums for cannabis discussion were starting to sprout up as it was becoming more accepted nationwide, most of them were focused on the business aspect—the ins and outs of how to make money off the plant.

Crossney saw a need for a different kind of discussion and founded the convention in 2016 in Portland to bridge the gap between science and cannabis.

“In a federally illegal industry, the scientists and the researchers are actually what’s going to push us over the finish line,” Crossney said.

Medical applications for the plant are the primary focus of the conference. Some of the newest research on cannabis will be presented at various panels on topics such as testing and processing procedures, and implementation of a Cannabis Nurse Network to help teach medical professionals how to integrate cannabis into their treatments.

“Let’s Be Blunt” will be a featured panel at the conference lead by actor Montel Williams, who has a long track record promoting the need for the widespread legalization of medical cannabis use. Williams has

appeared at the conference previously as part of his two decades of advocacy.

“When Montel has spoken for us in the past, not only does he speak for an hour, he speaks with a handheld microphone, where he goes through the entire audience engaging with people as he’s speaking,” Crossney said.

Williams was one of the first mainstream celebrities to endorse medical cannabis use after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1999. Crossney says Williams’ success is a demonstration of the positive impact cannabis can have on a person.

“Seeing someone like Montel be a living walking testament to this plan, I think speaks volumes,” Crossney said.

Having high-profile names like Williams, former NFL offensive lineman Eben Britton, who spoke in 2017, and Grammy Award-winning artist Olivia Newton-John, who held a panel at last year’s conference, helps convince a wider range of skeptics to keep an open mind when talking about medical cannabis use.

“[I can stand] there telling all those people, ‘Hey, cannabis is great. You should look at this,’ and they respond ‘who are you?’” Crossney said. “But when it’s Olivia Newton-John, they’re like ‘look, I’m open about this.’”

Success stories of children who used cannabis as a treatment after not responding to traditional pharmaceutical methods will also be highlighted at the conference. Two of those kids who decided to turn their experiences into a platform for advocacy—Rylie Maedler of Rylie’s Sunshine and Connor Sheffield of the Connor Sheffield Foundation—will host their own panels where they will tell their stories.

At just 7 years old, Maedler was

diagnosed with Aggressive Giant Cell Granuloma bone tumors, a rare and aggressive tumor that attacks and breaks down the bones of the face. Doctors told Maedler’s parents that even surgical removal would not be a solution for long, and the only real way to attack the disease was through chemotherapy.

After struggling with epilepsy as a side effect from the treatment, Maedler’s mother turned to cannabis as a treatment and Maedler saw immediate relief. Bone regeneration and tumor shrinkage was seen after only a few months with no side effects.

Now, Rylie’s Sunshine helps provide products to families in similar circumstances while continuing to advocate for the use of medical cannabis to help children with certain illnesses.

Sheffield, meanwhile, suffers from dysmotility—which causes muscles in his digestive system to not work properly, leading to severe loss of appetite and weight loss. He had to be fed through a feeding tube, but there came a point where even that no longer worked to get food through his system. The situation became so dire that doctors considered palliative care.

With medical cannabis treatment, however, Sheffield developed an appetite and began eating without a feeding tube. But a new problem quickly arose: he was not being allowed to consume cannabis during school to induce his appetite. His foundation now advocates for schools to allow kids to use cannabis for medical purposes.

Medical cannabis use in children is a topic that hits close to home for Crossney. He said highlighting stories about how cannabis helps children

with a variety of severely crippling diseases is particularly important to him, and not just because of his work with a pediatric nonprofit.

Crossney met Tracy Ryan and her daughter Sophie at the first conference in 2016. The 8-month-old Sophie had a brain tumor, and Ryan eventually turned to cannabis for her treatment, a major shock to Crossney.

“What do you mean, your 8-month-old baby is on cannabis? You don’t mean our kids like rolling up a joint,” Crossney recalled thinking at the time. “I knew at that moment, when I had a second pause, there are a lot more people in the world that aren’t as open minded as me, so I needed to use my platform and voice to advocate for these kids.”

Ryan had initially dismissed the potential for cannabis as well, but speaking with talk show host and movie star Ricki Lake and her documentary film partner Abby Epstein convinced her to try, and the results have been groundbreaking in brain cancer research.

The use of medical cannabis for veterans with PTSD will also be featured at the conference. Veteran suicide prevention organization 22TooMany will be one of the many exhibitors at the convention, and there will be a panel focused on treating veterans.

“They are one of the biggest populations that suffers from PTSD and anxiety and other conditions associated with some of the things they may have seen or had to be a part of during their career in the military, and this plant can help them, so we absolutely should be providing a platform for them,” Crossney said.

Despite its name, the Cannabis Science Convention will actually be branching out to other types of compounds, particularly psychedelics, Crossney said. A market of exploration has emerged in recent years for psychedelics like the Psilocybin in the famous “magic mushrooms” and Sheri—a natural tobacco used in Peru for healing ceremonies—which has prompted Crossney to add a series of panels on these drugs.

Crossney said psychedelics, like cannabis, have been stigmatized for their mind altering properties, and hopes to continue working to alleviate those fears.

Cannabis and psychedelics were used for healing purposes in ancient medicine for much longer than they have been banned in the modern world, Crossney said. “We’re just trying to undo the many decades of prohibition and misinformation.”

This expansion into the wider topic of psychedelics represents a commitment to the greater goal of the conference, Crossney said: to eliminate the stigmas that obstruct people from getting the medicine they need to live happy and healthy lives.

“We don’t suggest people not listen to medical advice,” Crossney said. “What we suggest is that cannabis can be another tool in the toolbox when you’re treating people, especially sick children.” ■

## FROM THE EDITOR: HAYLEY MUNGUIA

# Before COVID-19, Long Beach launched a 3-year plan to address STDs. Has it worked?

Three years ago this month, city officials gathered at St. Mary Medical Center to announce a new strategy to combat a dramatic increase in rates of sexually transmitted diseases.

“Our STD and HIV infection rates need to be taken seriously and approached with care and support from our Long Beach community,” Mayor Robert Garcia said at the news conference that day.

To that end, he detailed the 2019-2022 Long Beach HIV/STD Strategy, a plan to bring infection rates down.

“Our goals to reduce HIV infections by 50% and STD infections by 20% are possible,” Garcia said, “and we will ensure that we have the resources in place to support these efforts.”

Among other objectives, the plan outlined efforts to better educate the community, expand access to care and identify \$2 million to strengthen the city’s HIV/STD care system.

Now that the plan’s three-year timeline has wrapped up, I was curious to hear from city health officials about how effective the strategy was—particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic diverted resources away from other pressing health issues.

First, HIV/STD Strategic Implementation Specialist Everardo Avizo told me that while plenty of people in the Health Department have had to redirect their work to addressing the pandemic over the last two years, overseeing the plan has remained his top priority.

“The strategy itself created my position within the Health Department, to help successfully steer and implement it,” he said. “So in a way, that was very fortunate—unlike parts of the Health Department, including [HIV/STD Surveillance Program Supervisor Emily Johnson] and her team, who got shifted to predominantly COVID-specific efforts, my goal remained focusing on the HIV/STD Strategy specifics.”

As for what that looked like in practice, Alvizo said the pandemic did pose challenges to achieving some of the goals laid out in the strategy, but none of them were insurmountable.

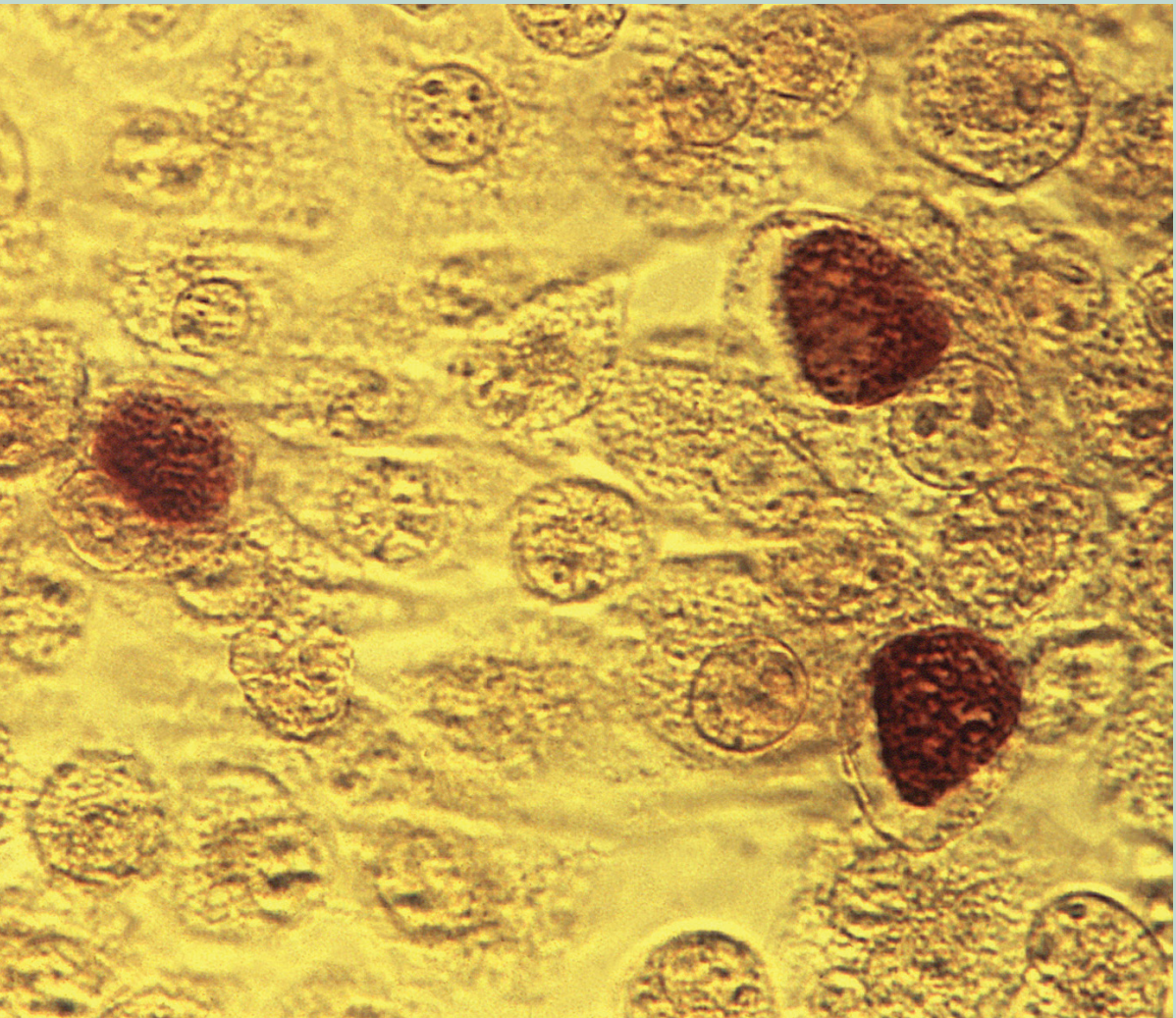
Finding funding, for example, became more competitive, he said. But the Health Department has still been able to secure \$2.8 million for the effort.

The strategy also noted that the city should conduct STD and HIV workshops to 4,000 adolescents and young adults per year, and provide HIV and STD education at 30 community events annually.

While the pandemic precluded the city’s ability to hold in-person events, Alvizo said the department nevertheless forged ahead with trying to meet these goals in a virtual setting.

Overall, 4,178 youth participated in sexual health education workshops that were held in partnership with the Long Beach Unified School District and AltaMed between January 2021 through April 2022, according to the Health Department. And the department held several other webinars from October 2020 through last month in which participation ranged from 25 people to 98 people.

“In that respect, we were still able to move forward in terms of engaging the community,” Alvizo said, “and I think, because of the expectation on everyone’s part that we had moved



Dr. E. Arum, Dr. N. Jacobs / CDC via AP  
A 1975 microscope image of Chlamydia trachomatis bacteria.

to virtual [meetings], there was very much a high level of engagement and participation.”

While it’s great that Long Beach was able to continue to implement the strategy, even in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime global health crisis, the most important question still stands: Has it worked?

Just like COVID-19 made implementing the strategy more difficult, it also seems the pandemic and its impact on our behavior makes that question particularly hard to answer.

HIV and STD data takes a while to compile, so the Health Department has not yet released complete data on their prevalence in 2020 or 2021. That means it’s still unclear how infection rates have changed over the course of the strategy’s implementation—and over the course of the pandemic.

The city released 2019 data last summer, which showed that cases of gonorrhea, syphilis and chlamydia—the most common sexually transmitted infection—dipped slightly or held steady compared to the prior year. But preliminary numbers published late last year showed that cases of syphilis and gonorrhea soared in 2020, particularly in the months that followed strict “stay at home” orders.

Johnson told me that as the department waits for official 2020 and 2021 numbers, it’s already clear that it will be harder to glean any big-picture takeaways from the data about the

strategy’s effectiveness.

“Due to COVID, it might be a little atypical in general,” she said. “We’ll take it with a grain of salt and use the 2020 numbers in a larger sense of what it was before COVID and what it looks like after.”

Johnson said she expects that different aspects of the public response to the pandemic could affect the numbers in different ways. While STD prevalence may have been lower during the initial shutdowns, the lack of easy access to health care in the following months could have reversed that trend.

“It’s really hard to say,” she said. “Just with STD numbers in general, I know a lot of points where people would normally access care were closed during COVID. But now we’re kind of seeing this increase in people accessing that care again, after we went nearly a year with people unable to.”

To learn any lessons about how the city can successfully work to lower rates of HIV and STDs, Johnson said, “we will continue to look at coming years, into 2022 this year and further into the future.”

Alvizo emphasized that point—the 2019-2022 strategy, he said, was just the beginning of a longer term focus on the issue.

“This is not so much an end-all-be-all, but more like a roadmap for us to move forward in terms of how we address our local needs when it comes to HIV and STD rates,” he said. “This is not the end. This is really just the starting point.” ■



## Expectant Parents

Continued from page 4

one might experience at a hospital.

Risk factors that could complicate a birth center experience range from the patient’s medical history—like if they’ve had a cesarean section or given birth prematurely in the past—to issues related to their current health such as having diabetes or high blood pressure. Certain circumstances related to the fetus, including position or the number of fetuses, are also signs hospital birth is needed.

But for healthy patients like Milot, giving birth at a center can be a much more peaceful and welcoming experience than the fluorescent lights and loud machinery at a hospital.

“A hospital is cold and bright and loud, with lots of people running around,” Milot said. “At the birthing center, you have the whole place to yourself—just you and your birth team.”

Milot explained the welcoming feeling was a key part of her experience with the birth center, recalling small details like the comfortable couches she waited on for her prenatal appointments.

For an even more intimate experience, midwife services can be enlisted at a patient’s own home. Popularity of home birthing saw a noticeable bump amid the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the California Department of Public health.

Midwives are able to build a deeply personal connection with their patients, allowing them to be more in tune with the health and experience of the individual. Jessie Rockwell, owner and sole midwife of Long Beach-based home birth service Gold Soul Midwifery, explained that this allows midwives to provide broader support.

“In the standard obstetrical model of care, they are usually just looking at the physical part of pregnancy ... but so much more needs to be evaluated,” Rockwell said. “We

are talking about truly the most intimate moments of someone’s life, so we need to make sure emotionally and mentally they’re in a good place, because those things matter just as much as the physical stuff.”

Intensive screening to ensure that a patient is a suitable candidate for home birth is vital, Rockwell said, as the options for emergency intervention are even further limited than at birth centers.

“A lot of people, especially those that have had previous hospital-based care, are always very shocked about how detailed the appointment is,” Rockwell said of her meetings with patients.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that while home births are a viable option, it does not believe they meet the same standards of safety that other birth settings offer.

Some studies have found that, while home births correlate to fewer interventions during labor, they are also associated with an increased risk for serious complications, including the onset of seizures and other neurological dysfunction in the baby during the

first four weeks of life.

Despite its opinion, the college has acknowledged that patients have the right to make medically informed decisions about where and how they give birth. The topic, however, is still debated by experts as, according to ACOG, there has yet to be “adequate randomized clinical trials of planned home birth.”

These factors make a hospital trip in response to complications more likely than in a birth center, but home birth providers like Rockwell ensure that patients know the risks involved.

“There are a plethora of potential complications, even with a low-risk pregnancy,” she said. “I don’t promise a home birth, I am promising to keep everyone safe.”

After safety, comfort is one of the most important aspects of birthing naturally. Water birth is a natural method offered at Long Beach Birth Center as well as by various home birth services in the city. As the name suggests, patients sit in warm water during the birthing process.

Jhoanna Galvez, who runs Malaya Midwifery out of Long Beach, said having both options—water and

bed—readily available is important because many patients in labor decide where they would prefer to give birth in the heat of the moment.

Currently, no studies have shown a direct benefit for water birth, but natural birth providers claim that many of their patients attest that the method is good for pain relief and relaxation.

“Water is a relaxing place,” Galvez said. “When you get into a warm bath or water, you’re able to relax, and that’s a huge part of being able to give birth.”

Postpartum care is another important step in the process for both birth centers and home birth providers. Long Beach Birth Center, Malaya Midwifery, and Gold Soul Midwifery each provide six weeks of support after birth for both the baby and parent to ensure they remain healthy.

The extra work these providers put in reflect the overall message of the midwifery model of care: being supportive and building a personal connection with patients to provide a natural and intimate experience.

“I really think that when you craft that relationship,” Rockwell said, “it makes such a difference in the birth.” ■



Employee Diamond Gomez showcases product from behind the counter at the Haven cannabis dispensary in Long Beach's Belmont Heights neighborhood.

## City to allow 8 more cannabis dispensaries with equity focus

By Jason Ruiz

The Long Beach City Council will allow eight new licenses for cannabis dispensaries, and it will prioritize applicants who have already applied.

City cannabis business regulators expect that the eight applicants could be selected by November. It would take one to three years for them to actually open up for business.

All eight licenses will be reserved for “equity” business owners that have lower net worths, whose family has been affected by the war on drugs or who meet other metrics outlined in the city’s cannabis equity program. The city established this program because all 32 of the city’s allowed retail storefronts have already been claimed.

The city already has 156 equity applications in the pipeline, and the council wanted to ensure that eight of those applicants will end up opening a dispensary by adding a moratorium on new people applying.

“We’re talking about 156 applications and only eight people are going to get licenses,” Councilmember Al Austin said. “Once this is announced, you’ll probably get another 50 applications. The people that have been in this process should be rewarded.”

Councilmember Cindy Allen’s proposed change would require potential business operators to propose a 10-year business plan and require equity owners to maintain majority control of the dispensary for 10 years instead of the originally proposed five-year window.

“I understand that these folks may want to sell at some point in time, but letting non-equity businesses buy them could compromise the viability of the program,” she said.

The city program has sought to introduce more people of color and

less wealthy business operators into the industry by helping them monetarily through grants and guidance through the application and permitting process.

However, it wasn’t until last year that the council began to explore the idea of adding more dispensaries for equity owners. A voter-approved ballot measure in 2016 capped the number of dispensaries at 32 citywide.

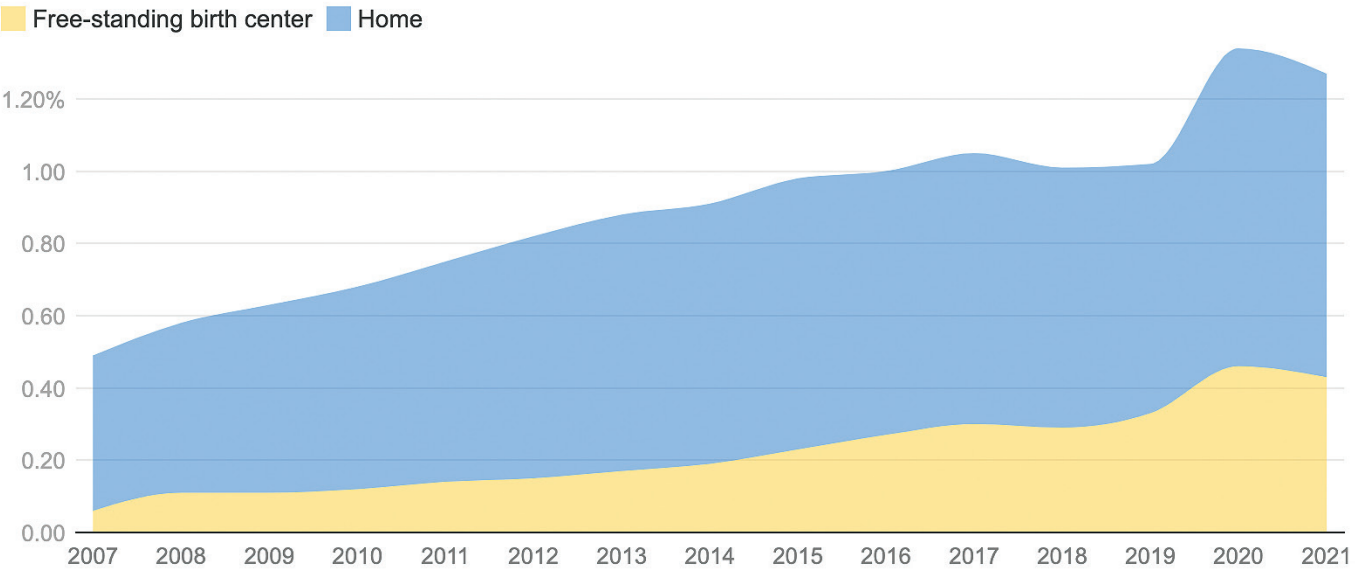
Applicants hoping to land one of the eight licenses to operate retail businesses—the most lucrative area of the industry—called for changes to the proposed ordinance that would have allowed new entrants into the candidate pool, even those who were not verified as qualifying equity candidates.

Other industry representatives said that a way to help drive business to the newly created storefronts would be to allow them special privileges, like the ability to host events where customers could consume products on-site to offset the likelihood that the premium locations have already been claimed by existing operators.

Part of the city’s expansion will reduce buffers around schools by aligning them with the lower state standard of 600 feet instead of the existing 1,000-foot buffers in place in Long Beach. It would add 600-foot buffers around city playgrounds and community centers. Buffers around beaches and parks would be eliminated entirely.

The changes could free up 3.1 square miles of potential landing sites in the “Green Zone” for the eight new dispensaries to operate.

The applicants will be vetted by a panel that will consist of industry operators not tied to existing Long Beach cannabis businesses as well as experts in economic or business development and those active in social equity issues.



This graph shows the number of out-of-hospital births in California by year using data from the California Department of Public Health and the CDC.

## At-Home Medical Care

Continued from page 5

moms and new families because it’s really useful for young children, especially at nighttime and on weekends,” Schaefer said. “We’re also using it for chronic conditions and patients that have difficulty with mobility.”

Patients who frequent emergency rooms because they do not have access to primary care are also candidates for a free device, Schaefer said.

TytoCare is not covered by insurance but Schaefer said MemorialCare is working on potential partnerships with multiple

health plans.

To assist patients of all technological abilities, MemorialCare has created a support team of “virtual health ambassadors,” Anne LaNova, director of virtual care for the foundation, explained. Anyone who is given or purchases the TytoCare device can reach out to the team for tech support via phone, text or email.

The support team is crucial to maintain equitable access to the new technology for everyone regardless of age or other barriers, LaNova said.

Telehealth is not new but saw a drastic surge in demand amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with health workers recommending it to ease the burden at crowded hospitals and patients avoiding medical facilities

for fear of catching the virus.

“It is here to stay,” Schaefer said of telehealth. “It’s really about convenience and access.”

To that end, MemorialCare continues to expand its virtual services, which includes a chat feature that connects patients and medical staff via AI for quick diagnosis and treatment recommendations, Schaefer said. The chat feature is not appropriate for an emergency situation but rather if a patient has questions or concerns.

Urgent care, an important component of a health system, is now also available digitally through MemorialCare 24/7, LaNova said. Patients can access the care via the company’s website or by phone

without an appointment. The TytoCare device is not required for virtual urgent care visits but it would further improve the quality of care, LaNova said.

But as virtual health care continues to grow in popularity, technology must also expand with demand. Instruments such as TytoCare are crucial for providing care virtually.

“It’s an important part of the future where we have different electronic tools for patients so they can access care,” Schaefer said. “Like when you do banking: you may do it from your phone, you may go to a drive-thru, maybe the ATM or you may actually walk into the bank. We want health care to be the same.” ■

The council could take the first of two procedural votes to approve the new ordinance as soon as next week.

### ‘Lower taxes, higher access’

Councilmembers also voted to reexamine the tax structure in the city when it comes to adult-use cannabis, which is taxed at a higher rate than medicinal cannabis. Business owners have complained that a combination of state, city and sales taxes are leading to customers seeking out the black market.

The council voted unanimously to ask for a feasibility study to be prepared in the coming months that would show what could happen if the city cut the current adult-use excise tax (8%) to the medicinal cannabis rate (6%). The report will also show what kind of hit the city’s general fund would take if it was dropped to 5% or 4%.

The city’s cannabis excise tax that voters adopted through Measure MA has generated millions of dollars for the city’s general fund and has helped pay for services like public health, police and fire.

Elliot Lewis, a dispensary owner and one of the more vocal critics of the high tax rate, said the charges amount to a “vice tax.” He asked for Long Beach to lead on lowering them to help snuff out the black market and let city businesses thrive. Lowering taxes could lead to “higher

access” for patients and customers seeking safe products, Lewis and others said.

“At the end of the day the government is creating the demand for the black market,” Lewis said.

Cannabis products are taxed at about a 45% rate when accounting for the various taxes and fees, including from the state and general sales tax. Long Beach reduced its cultivation tax earlier this year.

Allen proposed the study, saying she understood cannabis taxes are an important funding source for the city, but that “it’s just flat out unfair to the industry.”

The City Council also approved throwing the city’s support behind two state legislative bills that could eliminate or suspend the state’s cultivation tax of \$161 per pound and lower the excise tax.

Assembly Bill 2792 would suspend cultivation taxes until July 2025 and reduce the excise tax to 8%, and Senate Bill 1281 would eliminate the cultivation tax and reduce the excise tax to 5% if adopted by state lawmakers. Whether either of the bills is signed into law could affect what Long Beach does with its local tax rate.

The council will vote in the coming weeks to approve the new licenses, but the tax rates will likely be a part of the 2023 fiscal budget process. The annual budget is required to be adopted by October. ■

EASTERN TAX FRIENDLY STATE

EASY TO MANAGE

OPPORTUNITY ZONES

INCREASE TOTAL RETURNS BY 30-45% OVER 10 YEARS

CALL US TO LEARN HOW TO GET THESE INTO YOUR PORTFOLIO, OR SIGN UP FOR OUR WEBINAR

WEBINAR

MAY 26 4PM

CENTENNIAL ADVISERS  
TUSTIN LONG BEACH BURBANK LAS VEGAS

(562) 269-4844



# Down syndrome research conference coming to Long Beach

By Christian May-Suzuki

The Trisomy 21 (T21) Research Society—the first international nonprofit scientific organization dedicated to Down syndrome research—is hosting its 4th International Scientific Conference from June 9 to 12 at the Westin Hotel Long Beach.

Held biennially, the conference will bring together over 200 professionals from around the world to Long Beach to discuss the latest developments in Down syndrome research.

These experts will come from some of the most influential

positions in the field, including decision makers from the National Institutes of Health and several biotechnology companies.

The conference is mainly focused on scientific meetings and symposiums, where experts will discuss topics including how COVID-19 affects kids with Down syndrome, the interplay between inflammation, neurodegeneration, and aging in Down syndrome patients.

Meetings will also be held to connect experts to discuss research opportunities, and young researchers will also be given the opportunity to pitch their ideas.

Capping off the conference will be

a Gala Dinner and a pair of awards shows Saturday night and Sunday morning, where presenters will be recognized for the importance of their work.

After the first three conferences were held successfully in Paris in 2015, Chicago in 2017, and Barcelona in 2019, a virtual spinoff of the conference was held in June 2021 as part of the regular biennial schedule due to COVID-19 restrictions. Now that restrictions have been lifted, organizers are excited to hold a proper, in-person conference.

“As we exit the pandemic, we can again celebrate the ability to connect with one another and to sketch

the future of research and care for those with Down syndrome,” T21 president William Mobley wrote in a letter announcing the conference’s arrival in Long Beach.

T21 chose Long Beach because of its close proximity to the University of California, Irvine, where Dr. Elizabeth Head and Dr. Jorge Busciglio—internationally recognized experts in Alzheimer’s and Down Syndrome research—are based. Head and Busciglio were the main organizers of the program for the event.

For more information and to attend the conference, visit [t21rs2022.com](http://t21rs2022.com). ■

## Spine Repair

Continued from cover

As the machine gains traction and popularity, other hospitals in the region look to Amandeep—and to a lesser extent Sarbpaul—to train their surgeons.

The machine is not used for all spinal surgeries, Amandeep said, but it can be extremely advantageous for patients with trickier anatomy, including larger patients or those

with a significantly slipped vertebrae.

The Bhallas are ahead of the curve thanks to MemorialCare’s willingness to pursue and take chances on new technologies, Amandeep said. But it was a long road spanning two continents that put the two surgeons in the same Long Beach OR.

Born in India, Sarbpaul began his surgical career in 1972. Looking to expand his education, he moved to the United States in 1976, becoming a surgical intern at a Denver hospital. Sarbpaul finished his orthopedic residency in 1989 and

had a fellowship in Houston before moving to California, where his son would be born.

Amandeep grew up in Southern California but completed his undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania as an anthropology and biology major. It took some time for him to choose a path but ultimately decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and enrolled in the UCLA School of Medicine.

“Within the different specialties, I loved surgery because you can see the results right away and you get to work with your hands,” Amandeep said.

“I liked the anatomy of the spine because it was the most challenging,” he added. “I knew I would never have a dull week in practice—every week would be dynamic, different and challenging.”

Amandeep did his residency at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center before moving to Boston for a one-year spine fellowship at Harvard.

Sarbpaul said it’s exciting watching his son in the OR and he feels honored to work alongside him. Despite having more experience, Sarbpaul takes a backseat to his son

during procedures.

Amandeep, however, said one of his greatest resources at the operating table is his father’s decades of experience, which he said is priceless. With his dad’s wealth of knowledge joined with newer techniques and technologies such as the robotic arm, Amandeep said the pair create a “wonderful combination of two different backgrounds, skill sets and experiences that are synergistic ... to the benefit of patients.”

Sarbpaul said he will continue his craft as long as his head, heart and hands are aligned and capable, but he acknowledged retirement is likely not far off. When it comes, he said he will be comforted to know that his son will continue a legacy of good, compassionate patient care.

Working with his dad has pushed him to become the best surgeon he can possibly be, Amandeep said. And his presence will be missed in the OR in the future.

“Knowing that you’ve got someone across the operating table from you ... who’s in your corner, you definitely stand taller,” Amandeep said. “I think we’ve had a wonderful run together.” ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Dr. Sarbpaul Bhalla scrubs in for a spinal surgery with his son, Amandeep, at Long Beach Medical Center.



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

The hands of doctors Amandeep and Sarbpaul Bhalla work together to repair a patient’s spine at Long Beach Medical Center.

# City OKs assisted living and memory care facility



Courtesy of the city of Long Beach

A rendering of the Sunrise Senior Living development on Los Coyotes Diagonal in East Long Beach

By Christian May-Suzuki

The Long Beach Planning Commission unanimously approved a proposal for a senior living facility on an East Long Beach lot that has been vacant for several years.

The proposal by developer Sunrise Senior Living—which has built 276 senior communities across the United States and Canada—includes a two-story senior assisted and mental care living facility at 3340 Los Coyotes Diagonal south of Wardlow Road that would include 86 units that are a mixture of studio, one-and-two-bedroom units.

Of the 86 units, 50 are allocated for the assisted living portion of the project and 36 for the memory care portion, providing a total of 109 beds.

Large setbacks implemented as part of the project design will be filled with natural landscaping to enhance the overall aesthetic of the building, and provide a visual buffer on the west side of the property.

The facility will have 61 parking spaces in a lot around the facility, 55 of which will be designated specifically for Sunrise. Many of the residents will not drive, but family members and other loved ones are expected to be present at the facility as well as some ambulance traffic. A maximum of 30

employees are expected to be on the property at any given time, with an expected maximum number of four during off hours.

The project is also structured so that the lot would allow for smooth movement between the other existing buildings—two medical/professional buildings and a church—that are adjacent to the project site.

City staff noted that building facilities like this was necessary to accommodate the city’s aging population.

“With individuals living longer, aging in place can be challenging especially when individuals have special needs that cannot be

accommodated by relatives or other family members,” the staff report on the project said.

The lot has been empty for several years as proposals to build there have been struck down in the past. Sunrise held a community meeting on June 2 to give a presentation to interested residents in the area.

One resident in the area, Reata Kulscar, expressed concerns at the meeting about the use of the adjacent alleyway separating the property from a former Ralphs grocery store building. While talk at the meeting suggested that the alley would only be used for trash pickup and delivery of food and supplies, she quoted the staff report as saying it would be “needed to facilitate access for ambulatory and non-ambulatory residents, shuttle excursions for local field trips, and local deliveries to avoid blocking the front entrance.”

Representatives from Sunrise said at the meeting that most of these activities outside of trash pickup and supply deliveries would be done through the building’s porte-cochere, a covered entrance for vehicles similar to what is seen at many hotels designed for smooth vehicle entry and exit. The alley, they said, would be inconvenient for other uses involving residents.

After minimal comment from Planning Commission members, the motion to accept the proposal passed unanimously. ■

# Long Beach to begin early planning for Downtown pedestrian safety improvements

By Jason Ruiz

Downtown Long Beach could see a dramatic change to its pedestrian infrastructure in the coming years as the city works to make biking and walking around the area safer.

The city is starting the environmental planning process for a “Walkable Corners” project that could install up to 190 curb extensions and pedestrian refuge islands in the Downtown area.

The City Council approved the first wave of grant money earlier this month to pay for an initial environmental review and a public outreach element led by the city’s Health Department, which will teach the public how to use the new infrastructure once it’s built.

Extending corners will both shorten the distance pedestrians have to cover to cross a street and better bring them into view of drivers who currently have to deal with parked cars when looking for

people standing on corners.

The physical barriers, known as refuge islands, will provide a protected place in the middle of the street, similar to the city’s train stations, for pedestrians unable to fully cross the street to wait until traffic clears. The environmental review process could be finished this year with the city moving on to design and engineering in early 2023.

The affected areas would be between Magnolia Avenue and Alamitos Avenue and Seventh Street and First Street. The project is being funded mostly through a grant from CalTrans and is expected to be completed by 2025, according to Public Works spokesperson Joy Contreras.

The project is expected to include about 171 curb extensions and 19 pedestrian islands, but those totals could change depending on the early planning process, Contreras said.

The \$8.7 million project was approved through the CalTrans

Active Transportation Program, which was created through a 2017 state law aimed at increasing other modes of transportation like walking and biking. The grant will come in waves and cover 90% of the project, leaving the city to cover about \$870,000.

The islands and curb extensions are not expected to reduce road widths or take away parking spaces, Contreras said in an email. However, the curb extensions are designed to make pedestrians more visible to drivers and force cars to make slower turns.

Contreras said the streets that could see changes were identified in the city’s “high injury network” in its Safe Streets Action Plan and include Magnolia, Pacific and Atlantic avenues, Sixth Street, Seventh Street and Long Beach Boulevard.

Other elements of the project include adding natural storm drains called bioswales and additional greenery. Contreras said the extra space could also provide more

opportunities for outdoor dining.

Two other active transportation projects in Long Beach were approved by CalTrans and could bring millions more in state funding to the city to improve its bicycle network.

An \$8.3 million Pacific Avenue cycle track that would extend from Ocean Boulevard to Pacific Coast Highway would install a separated bikeway and bus islands that would allow for more efficient bus rides because drivers wouldn’t have to pull over to pick up passengers.

A \$4.1 million project that could turn the middle of Pine Avenue into a bike boulevard to promote multi-modal transportation from Downtown to the Metro A Line Willow Station was also approved. The project would run on Pine Avenue from Eighth Street for about 3 miles before reaching the Willow Station.

Both projects are also expected to be completed by 2025 and could be considered by the City Council in the coming months. ■



# Romeo Chocolates closes its doors on Pine Avenue in anticipation of big changes coming

By Laura Anaya-Morga

Romeo Chocolates, which has occupied its location on Pine Avenue in Downtown Long Beach for almost five years, is closing its doors and making way for big changes and a new Downtown location coming soon, the shop announced on its Instagram page earlier this month.

“Bear with us as we relocate out of Pine Ave to prepare for a new iteration of our chocolate story,” wrote owner and chocolatier Romeo Garcia, announcing the closure.

The award-winning gourmet chocolate shop and wine bar opened its first brick-and-mortar location on 460 Pine Avenue in June 2017 after years of Garcia selling his chocolates, made from home, at pop-ups in neighborhoods all over Long Beach. Before he was a business owner and chocolatier, Garcia had established a 14-year career working in higher education but developed a love for the art of chocolate-making along the way.

“I don’t think I would have ever fathomed that I would transition



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal  
A woman walks past the permanently closed Downtown location of Romeo Chocolates.

into this career, but the thing is you don’t know where passion takes you,” Garcia said at the grand opening event for the Pine Avenue location in October 2017.

For almost five years, the local favorite has offered special holiday

collections, limited-edition creations and luxurious chocolate and wine tastings for the community. Eventually, the shop expanded to more locations across the city and opened its second store at The Hangar, at Long Beach Exchange

in October 2021, which will also be closed during the shop’s transition.

While both of its locations are closed for an unknown amount of time, they will continue to host private tasting events and kids’ chocolate-making workshops at Kubo Long Beach, a diverse co-working and event pop-up space in Bixby Knolls.

This year has not been easy for the shop’s Downtown location as earlier this year, the chocolate shop was burglarized weeks ahead of the busy Valentine’s Day season, leaving it with shattered front windows and an empty cash register. A GoFundMe page made to help the shop recover raised over \$11,700 from community donations.

Though the shop could not give specific details on the new location or when it would be opening, the owner encouraged his customers to keep an eye out on the shop’s social media pages and website to get updates first.

“Our intention will continue to build community, to share our craft of ethically sourced fine chocolate, and to help build the next cadre of culinary / chocolate professionals,” Garcia wrote on Instagram. ■

# From apps to turbine blades, entrepreneurs from CSULB pitch ideas at startup contest

By Christian May-Suzuki

When doctors told Arthur Varin that the treatments available to manage his generalized anxiety disorder were only for symptom management and not to actually cure him, it was not a reality he was going to simply accept.

As a software engineer, Varin believed he had a solution: a “self editing software” that would help teach his brain to turn his anxiety off. Meditation, he decided, was the best way to do that, which led to the creation of Unwind-Meditation Trainer, an app that teaches people how to meditate using a personal progression system.

When he first looked into the apps available for self-guided meditation, Varin—who earned his MBA from Cal State Long Beach in May 2021—said the options available to him at that time were too “cluttered,” and he wanted something more simple and streamlined.

He was among dozens to pitch startup ideas at the Sunstone CSU Startup Launch contest at CSULB on May 6, which featured 20 teams led by students or recent graduates of six Cal State University campuses.

On Varin’s app, users work up from the lowest level, a three-minute guided meditation in which a trainer talks them through the principles and techniques of the art. Meditations slowly get longer and come with less assistance, eventually working up to a 20-minute session. The app also includes a journal to document one’s progress and daily quotes to keep users inspired and teach them aspects of meditation.

While Varin was participating in the Sunstone CSU Startup Launch and looking for additional funding from the cash prizes, the Unwind-Meditation Trainer app has already materialized and is expected to be released to App Stores in July.

Three other teams at the challenge were led by students or recent graduates of CSULB hoping for a chance to win part of the event’s \$130,000 prize pool. One of those was PAVANAS, a project that looks to tackle the shortcomings of the wind energy industry through the production of turbine blades that are more efficient and last longer than what is standard today.

Both PAVANAS and Unwind-Meditation Trainer received \$5,000 as a reward for their third place finish in their respective tracks at the contest. Two other CSULB teams participated in the event, and were formally recognized along with teams from other campuses



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal  
A student makes her pitch to the judges during the Sunstone CSU Startup Launch Competition at Cal State Long Beach.

that did not place.

Classchat—an app specifically designed to help facilitate communication between students, teachers, and faculty—was

recognized for being the only team at the event consisting entirely of undergraduates, led by CSULB student Emanuel Tafese.

The app was designed to be

more secure than commonly used alternatives like Slack and Discord by using Google Accounts to sign into the application. This feature not only makes the platform more secure by tying login information to Google, it also makes it easier and more convenient to use.

The award for the most innovative concept was given to the final CSULB team, which pitched a financial app and website concept called Unstockable. This app was designed out of a need to simplify jargon and remove language barriers for many financial activities to give young adults a tool they can use to learn how to invest.

Unstockable gives users easily accessible and understandable financial information and resources in a centralized platform. The app will also look to direct users to tools from partnered financial institutions to ensure they are getting the proper tools and guidance they need.

Classchat and Unstockable each received \$1,000 for their entries in the contest. ■



Courtesy of L3Harris  
A Boeing 747 is modified at L3Harris Technologies’ Waco, Texas aircraft facility.

# Virgin Orbit announces next launch and fleet expansion

By Brandon Richardson

Cosmic Girl is slated to take to the skies once again next month for Virgin Orbit’s fourth launch, which aims to deliver numerous satellites into orbit for various government agencies, including the United States Space Force.

One of the firm’s LauncherOne rockets arrived at the Mojave Air and Space Port after departing the Long Beach production facility on April 28. The rocket will undergo flight prep before being attached under the wing of the modified Boeing 747 known as Cosmic Girl.

The launch window for the mission is expected to open June 29

at 8 p.m. local time.

The mission, “Straight Up,” is slated to carry seven satellites to an orbit approximately 500 kilometers above the planet’s surface at 45-degree inclination, according to the company. This orbit has never been reached from the West Coast.

The U.S. Space Force procured the launch for the Rocket Systems Launch Program with payloads provided by the Department of Defense Space Test Program. The seven satellites are from multiple government agencies and will serve as experiments to demonstrate various technologies, including adaptive radio frequency and space domain awareness.

“Virgin Orbit has been rising ‘straight up’ since we began commercial launch operations 18 months ago,” CEO Dan Hart said in a statement. “More and more, we are seeing the importance of space to the security of the U.S. and allied countries. We are honored and committed to supporting the Space Force at this critical time.”

To date, Virgin Orbit has launched three missions, including eight Department of Defense science and technology demonstrations across two flights. In all, Cosmic Girl has delivered 26 satellites into orbit.

The mission is named after American singer Paula Abdul’s breakthrough song from her debut album “Forever Your Girl,” which was released through Virgin Records

on June 21, 1988. The record was the most successful debut album ever at the time, the company stated, and the song remains Abdul’s biggest international hit.

One day after announcing the “Straight Up” launch, Virgin Orbit unveiled the expansion of its fleet, stating a second modified plane will join Cosmic Girl in carrying out launch missions around the world.

Florida-based aerospace and defense innovator L3Harris Technologies, which partnered with Virgin for the development of Cosmic Girl, will again modify a 747 to carry and deploy the LauncherOne system. The agreement is for L3Harris to acquire two 747 airframes, one of which is slated to be modified and delivered to Virgin in 2023, according to the announcement.

It was not immediately clear when the third aircraft would be modified and delivered.

The Florida firm will overhaul the Cosmic Girl design with a new cargo configuration that is expected to allow Virgin to deliver its rockets—and ground support system—around the world in the same aircraft that will launch them.

“Virgin Orbit is at an exciting juncture in our growth as a company,” Hart said in the announcement. “As we expand our fleet to serve customers worldwide, we’re enthusiastic to once again partner with L3Harris.” ■

WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF  
**COMMUNITY**  
When you need us...we’re here for you!



**Come see the difference**

**INTERNATIONAL CITY BANK****249 E. Ocean Boulevard  
Long Beach • 562-436-9800**







Rocket Lab's recovery helicopter that was used to catch the first stage of the firm's rocket as it fell back to earth.

# Rocket Lab successfully catches rocket booster out of mid-air

By Brandon Richardson

While successfully deploying 34 satellites into orbit, Rocket Lab pilots caught a first stage rocket booster in mid-air as it fell back to Earth.

The Long Beach-based rocket manufacturer and launch service provider's 26th launch of its Electron rocket—dubbed “There And Back Again,” a nod to J. R. R. Tolkien's “The Hobbit”—was a rideshare mission, carrying payloads for Alba Orbital, Astrix Astronautics, Aurora

Propulsion Technologies, E-Space, Spaceflight Inc. and Unseenlabs.

Among the payloads were satellites that will “monitor light pollution, demonstrate space junk removal technologies, improve power restraints in small satellites, validate technology for sustainable satellite systems that can avoid collisions with untrackable space objects, enable internet from space and build upon a maritime surveillance constellation,” the company stated.

The mission took off from Rocket

Lab's New Zealand complex just before 4 p.m. PDT on May 2 after inclement weather delayed the launch for several days.

“The mid-air helicopter capture was unprecedented because it was not only the first time Rocket Lab has attempted to recover the first set stage of a rocket in that manner but [it's] also the first time any company has used a helicopter to catch a returning rocket from space,” a company spokesperson said in a May 3 email.

The revolutionary maneuver came after the successful recovery of the

first stage during the company's 16th, 20th and 22nd Electron launches, which included controlled ocean splashdowns.

About two and a half minutes after lift-off, Electron's first stage detaches and begins its descent back to earth at speeds of almost 5,150 mph.

During both the splashdowns and the mid-air capture, an internal system re-ori-ents the stage for re-entry into Earth's atmosphere, allowing it to survive heat upward of 4,350 degrees and extreme pressure. A small parachute deploys first at an altitude of just over 8.3 miles to stabilize the stage. At about 3.7 miles from Earth's surface, the main parachute is extracted, slowing the stage's descent to about 22 mph.

Once the stage is in the capture zone, a helicopter crew uses a hook to snag the parachute line before delivering it to Rocket Lab's recovery ship for transport back to land.

The company's recovery team practiced the mid-air capture numerous times before the mission.

“Bringing a rocket back from space and catching it with a helicopter is something of a supersonic ballet,” said Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck. “A tremendous number of factors have to align and many systems have to work together flawlessly.”

Rocket Lab engineers now will assess the stage to determine if adjustments are needed to the system for the next helicopter catch and eventual reuse.

Rocket Lab has now delivered 146 satellites to orbit.

The next launch window for the firm, a lunar mission in partnership with NASA dubbed CAPSTONE, is set to open later this month, the company said, declining to disclose the exact date. ■

# A cafe built out of a shipping container is coming Downtown to Civic Center plaza

By Brandon Richardson

The Container Café—a small cafe literally made out of a shipping container—is expected to open outside Port of Long Beach headquarters in the Civic Center plaza next year.

The port will seek proposals from prospective operators for the sale of drinks and snacks at the cafe.

In honor of Small Business Week, port officials began informing local businesses of the opportunity this week, urging smaller shops to submit when the request for proposals opens on June 1, Executive Director Mario Cordero said in an email Friday.

“We hope to see local businesses putting in their bids,” Cordero said.

Similar to the SteelCraft food hall in Bixby Knolls, the Container Café will be built out of an actual shipping



The Container Café is slated to open in front of Port of Long Beach headquarters in 2023.

container, modified to fit the port's design, according to Cordero.

The \$1.379 million project was not an after-thought addition to the Civic Center development, which includes the port headquarters and City Hall, which both opened in 2019, Cordero said. During construction, port staff coordinated with the Civic Center Ad Hoc Committee on a conceptual design for the cafe.

Electrical and water line connections for the cafe were installed during the Civic Center construction process, Cordero said.

“We coordinated with City Hall leadership on this opportunity to provide a place to serve port and city staff, guests, clients and the general public,” Cordero said. “It will be a good way to help bring more people and activity to Civic Center Plaza.”

Construction is slated to begin this summer, according to Cordero. ■

# Long Beach eyes ADU program to help meeting housing need

By Jason Ruiz

A plan to speed up the production of accessory dwelling units in Long Beach could include lowering city fees and looking to pre-approved designs and manufactured housing to reduce the time needed to complete construction.

A recent city memo outlined options that the City Council could consider to help increase the number of ADUs, commonly referred to as “granny flats,” as the city wrestles with a housing shortage that has contributed to the rising cost of rents in the city.

The council in January requested a program for ADUs as it was finalizing the city's state-required plan for future housing production known as the Housing Element. The city's production goal by 2029 is 26,500 housing units, and city planners have anticipated that ADUs could play a role in reaching that number.

City planning officials estimate that ADU production in the city could peak at around 500 per year in the next decade and remain that high for about five years. The city currently gets around 300 ADU applications per year.

To speed up the permitting process and reduce the costs, the council could consider allowing local designers to submit plans to the city for pre-approval, which could then be sold to homeowners who hope to build a unit in their backyard.

The city could also allow manufactured housing businesses to submit designs for pre-approval by the city to offer a potentially faster construction phase for homeowners.

However, the projected cost to build an 800-square-foot ADU, the largest allowed in Long Beach, could cost about \$220,000 based on 2022 construction prices.

The program would not preclude people from hiring their own designers but would provide an option for people wanting to streamline the construction of a unit without having to potentially correct potential housing code issues that may exist in plans submitted by their architects.

Development Services Director Oscar Orci said in the memo that both options could offer advantages because local operators in the industry are familiar with Long Beach housing codes and in both instances would maintain ownership of their plans and the responsibility for the designs.

Some cities have opted to buy plans from designers and sell them directly to residents, but that option was identified in the memo as a potential legal issue for the city if there were design flaws with the purchased plans. It would also require the city to purchase the plans and likely pass those costs on

to residents looking to build.

The City Council asked for a similar program to be developed earlier this year as it sought a more aggressive approach to producing more housing in the city by providing homeowners a less bureaucratic and cheaper path to adding to their properties.

The proposed program, which could be presented to the City Council in the coming months, would reduce some of the design and engineering fees typically paid

by homeowners from 6% to 2%.

Plan review fees, which the city said would typically be thousands of dollars for an 800-square-foot ADU, would be cut in half.

Other savings would be seen if property owners seek to build a smaller unit because state law would exempt them from paying impact fees to support police, fire and park services. That could reduce a project's cost by about \$3,500.

There would still be unavoidable fees assessed by the Long Beach

Unified School District, which collects about \$4 per square foot of new construction, regardless of the size of an ADU, and a fee to connect the unit to a sewer line. For an 800-square-foot ADU, that could cost \$4,564, according to the memo.

Once the City Council approves a program, it could take about six months for the city to sort through designs submitted for consideration by people looking to build an ADU with a design that's pre-approved by the city. ■

## Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies

### Vessel Speed Reduction Incentive Program

*A partnership for cleaner air, safer whales, and a quieter ocean*

Global shipping companies reduced speeds to 10 knots or less in 2021

**Sapphire Level:** MSC - Swire Shipping

**Gold Level:** Maersk - MOL ACE - Yang Ming - Hapag-Lloyd ONE - NYK - Wallenius Wilhelmsen - CMA CGM COSCO Shipping

**Blue Sky Level:** Evergreen - Hyundai GLOVIS - “K” Line - Wan Hai Lines Ltd.

Thanks to: Maersk, Yang Ming, Swire Shipping, Wallenius Wilhelmsen, ONE, and COSCO Shipping for declining their financial awards to support continuation of the program!

*The 2022 program runs May 1 through December 15, 2022*  
*For more information, visit [bluewhalesblueskies.org](https://bluewhalesblueskies.org)*





The Queen Mary sits empty in Queensway Bay. Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

# Taking on Queen Mary could cost the Port of Long Beach \$354M over the next 5 years

By Kelly Puente

The Port of Long Beach might have to spend \$354 million over the next five years and could be forced to cut back on capital projects if it agrees to take over operations of the Queen Mary and the surrounding land, known as Pier H, according to an analysis of its 2023 fiscal year budget.

Long Beach's Board of Harbor Commissioners, which oversees the Port of Long Beach, reviewed the estimated Queen Mary and Pier H costs and the potential impact on the port's bottom line in a May 2 budget meeting. The port is expected to approve its 2023 budget later this month, but for now, the Queen Mary costs are just an estimate and not included.

Overall, the port estimated that Pier H and the Queen Mary could bring in at least \$38 million in operating revenue over the next five years, but that wouldn't come close to offsetting the \$392 million in costs. The possible costs include \$236 million in capital expenditures and ship repairs and \$146 million for operating expenses.

The port could absorb the massive costs for Pier H, but that would

limit future capital projects, said Sam Joumbat, the port's managing director of finance and administration, told harbor commissioners.

"We will be able to do this, but that's it," he said.

And in the event of an economic

up to \$289 million in repairs to be viable over the next five to 10 years. But at the start of 2022, few of the recommended structural issues have been fixed and their cost would likely be higher because of the ship's continuing deterioration.

*"We can't magically create new money to deal with what hasn't been dealt with in the past."*

- Frank Colonna, Harbor Commissioner, former City Councilman

downtown, the port could be forced to limit current capital projects such as its \$870 million Pier B railyard, he said.

The aging Queen Mary ocean liner has been a major headache for the city of Long Beach as it grapples with how to pay for millions in repair costs, compounded by years of neglect and deferred maintenance.

A marine survey in 2016 found that the Queen Mary would need

transferring control of the ship to the port. City officials have said the port, with its experience in waterfront capital projects, would be better equipped to handle and pay for repairs for the ship and realize the city's longtime dream of developing Pier H into an entertainment destination.

Officials are hopeful Pier H could generate enough revenue to pay for ship repairs, but that prospect is likely years away.

The City Council and harbor commission would both have to approve any transfer, and harbor commissioners said at the May 2 meeting they need more information, including a study session on exact costs and potential revenue.

"Not to be on the negative side of this, but I'm hoping that our City Council really understands that we have to be careful with what we get ourselves involved with and how do we financially make this work," said commissioner and former city councilman Frank Colonna.

Colonna said the port, which is part of the city but has its own budget, would need significant financial support from the city if it were to take on the Queen Mary repairs.

"We can't magically create new money to deal with what hasn't been dealt with in the past," he said.

Commissioner Sharon Weissman said she would like more information on how the Carnival Cruise terminal could be developed and expanded to contribute more revenue.

The Port of Long Beach's overall budget includes \$685.2 million in expenditures for 2023, with \$321.9 million in capital expenditures. The expenditures are up from \$630.2 million in 2022.

Revenue has also been up as the port continues to see record cargo movement. For the 2022 fiscal year, the port's project revenue increased from \$413.9 million to \$455.7 million.

Port officials stressed that the costs for the Queen Mary are estimates and could be higher or lower after further analysis.

Cost estimates include: \$59 million for urgent Queen Mary safety repairs identified in two structural reports, \$150 million in deferred capital improvements, and \$20 million for Spruce Goose Dome repairs.

Speaking to harbor commissioners earlier this motnh, Thomas Jelenić, vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, said transferring control of the Queen Mary to the port would create a major drain on financial resources.

"Following the Queen Mary's 50-year track record of failure as an attraction and hotel, the Long Beach Harbor Department analysis should be enough for the city to come to the conclusion that it is time to scrap the Queen Mary and allocate resources where they can provide public benefit," Jelenić said. "The transfer of the queen to the port, while it maybe be a political convenience, is not a responsible business decision." ■



Owner Erik Vasquez and his sister Cynthia Zaragoza stand next to a boarded-up window that was busted out at their new restaurant, La Esquinita Mexican Grill, in Long Beach's Wrigley neighborhood. Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

## Community rallies around local restaurant with donations after vandalism and a break-in

By Laura Anaya-Morga

Looking through security footage at his restaurant, Erik Vasquez was able to watch the moment a man casually threw a rock at the building that represents a proud piece of his life's work.

Footage shows the unidentified man strolling past La Esquinita Mexican Grill and aiming a large rock at a window. After failing to break it the

first time, he picks it up and throws it against the glass again, shattering it.

It was the second of three crimes that have piled thousands of dollars of debt on the family-owned restaurant, a seemingly senseless string of break-ins and vandalism.

"...to destroy someone's property just because is on another level of low," the family wrote on its Instagram page after one of the earliest in the string of incidents that they're still trying to recover from.

Vasquez's path to opening La Esquinita in Long Beach began in childhood when he would watch attentively as his grandmother cooked for him and her seven children every day in the small ranch town of San Luis Potosí in Central Mexico.

His mother and siblings had already built a life in the U.S., so, at 17, he left his home in Mexico to meet them for the first time. Vasquez said he felt lost and uncertain when he arrived, missing his grandmother, aunts and uncles, but he found his footing at Chema's Place, a popular family-owned Mexican restaurant at 10th Street and Alamitos Avenue where he worked for over 23 years.

There he was a busboy, a dishwasher and eventually a cook, where he was able to build on the passion for food his grandmother inspired.

When a vacancy appeared at a small corner on 755 W. Willow St. almost three years ago, Vasquez jumped at the opportunity to make the dream of opening his own restaurant come true.

Now, Vasquez is the proud owner of La Esquinita Mexican Grill in the Wrigley neighborhood, the same place in Long Beach where he first arrived and where his family has now lived for over 40 years.

"The flavors and recipes come from (my grandmother) but they are also taken from where I worked at Chema's," he said.

Two months after opening in October 2021, La Esquinita got its first major setback.

On the morning of December 18, 2021, the family arrived to open the restaurant and saw a sidewalk strewn with shattered glass and the side of their business exposed. Nothing was taken from inside but the broken window cost them \$1,500 to repair.

A few months later, on April 17, was when the security cameras captured a man casually shattering another window at La Esquinita.

What's worse, less than 24 hours later on April 18, two men in hoodies broke in through the restaurant's back door. "They took some things but nothing too important, we think they were looking for a safe," said Cynthia Zaragoza, the social media manager at La Esquinita and Vasquez' younger sister.

Police say no suspect information is known in any of the crimes, and all three investigations are ongoing.

But neighbors and customers have rallied to support La Esquinita. A GoFundMe page has raised over \$1,700 to cover some of the damages. Vasquez says that surrounding businesses have also offered their support and have come in to buy food frequently since the crimes.

"It is hard to keep moving forward," said Vasquez after having worked so hard for over two decades. "But we hold each other up." ■

CSULB  
ARTS  
FESTIVAL  
2022

together

Events through May 21

«« Scan or visit [cota.csulb.edu](https://cota.csulb.edu) for more info.

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
LONG BEACH  
College of the Arts

Richard & Karen  
Carpenter  
center  
performing  
arts

CARDOLYN  
CARPENA  
KLEEFELD  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART MUSEUM

BEACH

CSULB complies with City COVID-19 related health and safety protocols. Campus policies available at [csulb.edu/covid-19](https://csulb.edu/covid-19)



# Panxa Cocina’s Chef Arthur Gonzalez dies at 47

By Tim Grobaty

Chef Arthur Gonzalez, who began his ascent in the culinary world as a dishwasher at Seal Beach’s Spaghetini before eventually establishing such local favorite restaurants as Roe Seafood in Belmont Shore and Panxa Cocina in Belmont Heights, died last week following a heart attack on May 7 and two subsequent surgeries in his new hometown of Castle Rock, Colorado. He was 47.

Locally, Gonzalez, who grew up in Cerritos, worked at McKenna’s on the Bay, the forerunner to Boathouse on the Bay in Alamitos Landing. His big breakthrough came when he and his longtime girlfriend Vanessa Auclair, operations manager for Roe and Panxa, debuted Roe Fish Market in 2012. In 2014, the couple opened his highly regarded Panxa Cocina on Broadway and Termino Avenue, showcasing his talents at New Mexican and modern Southwestern cuisine.

“He’d been in Colorado for a while now, opening his new restaurant (called Tribe, in Castle Rock, outside Denver),” said his friend and colleague Chef Paul Buchanan, chef and owner of Primal Alchemy. “He worked hard, and I think he had one day off each week when he and Vanessa and their dog would go up into the mountains and camp.”

Restaurateur Luis Navarro, who owns two Lola’s Mexican Cuisine restaurants as well as Portuguese Bend and the Social List in Long Beach, said he always enjoyed competing with Gonzalez.

“We were close,” said Navarro, “We were both kind of at the forefront of the food movement in Long Beach. We’d talk a lot and bounce ideas off one another. Sometimes we got into some heated arguments, but it was always positive. He was solid; always willing to help when you needed new ideas. Our competition was intense, but like an NBA game, we’d compete hard, but then sit back and enjoy a cigar and a glass of whiskey.”

Navarro recalled having a meeting a year and a half ago with a half-dozen chefs, a group that included Gonzalez and Filipino



Chef Arthur Gonzalez at Panxa Cocina in Belmont Heights.

Chef Janice Dig Cabaysa who ran the Corner Stoop pop-up before she died last year at 39. “We got together to talk about the health hazards of being a chef, the toll it takes on physical and mental health dangers that come with the job. And now, a year and a half later two of the six who were at that table are dead.” ■

CITY OF  
LONG BEACH

Bid Opportunities

Title	Bid Number	Due Date
Under Ocean Floor Seawater Intake Demolition Project (EO-3011)	WD-32-21	05/09/2022
LBRA Food Access Projects	RFP HE22-047	05/13/2022
LBRA Food Distribution Projects	RFP HE22-048	05/13/2022
Constr. Mgmt. & Inspection Svcs. for Under Ocean Floor Seawater Intake Demolition	WD-32-21	05/16/2022
Construction Mgmt. & Inspection Svcs. for the Belmont Beach & Aquatics Center Project	RFP PW22-042	05/19/2022
LBRA Promotoria/Community Health Champions Training & Technical Assistance	RFP HE22-061	05/23/2022
Temporary Staffing Services	RFP HR22-046	05/24/2022
Environmental Health Data Management System	RFP HE22-044	05/27/2022
Professional Engineering Svcs. for 2nd Street Bridge over Marine Stadium Rehabilitation	RFP PW22-033	06/01/2022
LNG Station Decommissioning, Tank Removal and Site Restoration	RFP FS22-051	06/02/2022
Year-Round Shelter Operation and Support Services	RFP HE22-045	06/03/2022

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).

Auto Lien Sale Auction

3111 E. Willow Street May 10 & 24, 2022  
Long Beach, CA 90806 Registration & Viewing:  
(562) 570-2828 8:00 A.M. - 9:50 A.M.  
<http://www.longbeach.gov/autoauction>

# Pier 76 Fish Grill closes after 9 years in Downtown

By Tim Grobaty

Pier 76 Fish Grill, a nearly decade-long popular Pine Avenue restaurant for the street’s once-busy lunch scene, has closed its doors.

“It was fun while it lasted,” said owner Chris Krajacic, who brought the seafood restaurant to town in 2012 following six years as executive chef at Walt’s Wharf in Seal Beach.

What ultimately brought about the downfall of Pier 76 is the same that’s plaguing many restaurants these days, including trouble finding workers, and the higher costs of paying them, as well as ever-rising food prices, along with the continuing effects of COVID-19, which continues to keep Downtown offices vacant while employees work remotely.

“No restaurants are immune to the problems,” Krajacic said. “And it’s a combination of those things and more. It’s not the fault of one person, or any one things. It’s a culmination.”

Krajacic also owns the Harbor bar and restaurant on Pine, and he says, while that establishment has similar problems, they’re eased a bit by the fact that it caters more to a night crowd and drinking, while Pier 76 depended largely on lunch clientele, which Krajacic says has gone way down.

“Just look at Downtown during the afternoon,” he said. “It’s dead. A few years ago our place was packed all the time. I’d come to work and see the parking lot packed with cars and think we’re going to be jammed today. That doesn’t happen anymore.”

“Realistically, I should have closed a year ago. I just tried to make it work, and it wasn’t working.”

Krajacic said that he is appreciative of Long Beach and for the customers who continued to dine at Pier 76, “but at the end of the day it comes down to red or black, and we were red.” ■

Saturday, June 4, 2022

Long Beach Terrace Theater | 300 E. Ocean Boulevard

7pm Pre-Concert Talk | 8pm Concert (doors open at 6:30pm)

# “Scheherazade”

Eckart Preu, conductor | Silver-Garburg, piano duo

Abels *Global Warming*

Bach *Concerto for 2 pianos, in C-minor*

Poulenc *Concerto for 2 pianos*

Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade*

Sponsored by:  
Lyn and John Pohlmann  
Mrs. Jane Claus  
and  
THE WESTIN LONG BEACH

Vaccinations required. Masks recommended.

2021 POPULAR IN THE SOUTHLAND LA Times

The Long Beach Symphony was named a ‘Best Place To See A Concert’ by the LA Times in their 2021 *The Best of the Southland* review.

LONG BEACH SYMPHONY  
ECKART PREU, MUSIC DIRECTOR

POPS SERIES  
ARETHA  
A TRIBUTE  
SAT., MAY 21, 2022  
Long Beach Arena

In partnership with the Long Beach Branch NAACP

Generously Sponsored by Valero

Pops Series Sponsor F&M BANK

For Tickets: LongBeachSymphony.org | (562) 436-3203, Ext. 1





JOINT CARE SO EXCEPTIONAL,

# YOU'LL WISH YOU'D DONE IT SOONER.



---

## A new movement awaits.

Some things just aren't worth delaying — like addressing your joint pain so you can get back to what you love. At MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center, our specialized surgeons and care teams better understand the pain and limitations you're going through — as well as the best personalized treatment to get you back to seizing every day, sooner. Whether it's your knee, hip, shoulder, or ankle, you'll receive our nationally recognized joint care, including access to advanced technology like our precision Mako™ surgical system and support from a patient navigator. Get ready to experience a new movement and live your best life.

Find an Orthopedic Surgeon at  
MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center.  
**800-MEMORIAL | [memorialcare.org/Joint](https://www.memorialcare.org/Joint)**



**MemorialCare™**  
Orthopedic & Spine Institute

LONG BEACH MEDICAL CENTER | ORANGE COAST MEDICAL CENTER | SADDLEBACK MEDICAL CENTER