

LONG BEACH

BUSINESS JOURNAL

An edition of the Long Beach Post



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Wearing a mask like some of her students, Mrs. Curtis leads her class in a mid-morning stretch during a summer school lesson at Barton Elementary.

Students, teachers struggle with pandemic repercussions

By Brandon Richardson

When the pandemic overtook the nation more than two years ago and schools were shuttered, the Long Beach Unified School District moved quickly to get technology into the hands of students as learning shifted online. Teachers and administrators had to adapt fast, and students were relegated to the comfort—or discomfort—of their homes.

Throughout the pandemic, the concept of “learning loss” emerged: Students were not learning at the rate they previously were. But students were still learning the entire time, according to LBUSD Superintendent Jill Baker.

“They learned different things,

some of which strengthened their sense of resilience and had positive impacts,” Baker said, noting the increased access and use of technology. “And a lot of students learned things that were not positive: They learned about difficulty and other aspects of violence they hadn’t witnessed before, and the stress of having families without jobs and living in a crowded space.

“It’s super complicated to talk about what students did learn beyond what is traditionally taught in school.”

By the time schools reopened, thousands of students had experienced important developmental milestones from behind a computer screen. Students who had not been in a classroom since fourth grade were now in middle school; seventh graders in

high school.

Some students who had never physically been in a classroom were now in second grade.

“When we talk about social-emotional learning, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, it’s almost like that had been stopped in time,” Baker said.

The social structure of campuses also broke down, Baker said. Traditionally, fifth graders, eighth graders and high school seniors were the de facto experts of their respective schools—they knew the rules, the culture and the general climate of the campus. That was nonexistent when all students returned to the classroom in August of last year, Baker said.

“There was a lack of that kind of role modeling and readiness to support their peers or to show their peers what it was like,” Baker said. “Because they hadn’t done it either.”

Baker said the district did everything it could to plan for the return of students, many of whom were not progressing in their education as well as they would have if it had been uninterrupted by a global pandemic.

“But it wasn’t enough,” Baker said, adding this past school year was “rocky.” Psychologically, she said, many thought they would be coming back to school as they knew it.

“That wasn’t the case.”

LBUSD approves new budget, \$400M for rainy day fund

By Mike Guardabascio

At its final meeting of the 2021-22 school year late last month, the Long Beach Unified School District Board of Education passed its budget for the upcoming year and had an in-depth conversation about the ongoing financial challenges presented by steadily declining enrollment. The board unanimously passed a series of budget items and resolved to set aside \$400 million of its “rainy day fund” to help prevent future layoffs.

Continued on page 5

LBCC eyes bond measure to rebuild Veterans Stadium

By Jason Ruiz

The Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees could place a \$285 million bond measure on the November ballot that would finance the demolition and rebuilding of Veterans Stadium—and potentially the construction of student housing.

Voters approved Measure E, a \$440 million bond measure, in 2008 and Measure LB, an \$850 million bond measure, in 2016 to fund new construction, renovation and repairs at the college, but now LBCC officials say their needs are exceeding their funding.

If the board votes to put the bond measure on the ballot and voters approve, it could cost property owners \$19 for every \$100,000 of assessed value in cities in the district that include Long Beach, Lakewood, Signal Hill and Avalon.

For a home assessed at \$500,000, that would add about \$8 to a monthly mortgage. A \$1 million home would see a \$16 monthly payment increase. The board is expected to meet again on July 20 to decide whether or not to place the bond measure on the ballot.

The money would go toward a total rebuild of Veterans Stadium, which could possibly include a student housing element. College officials have said the stadium is an “eyesore” but also seismically unsound and the

Continued on page 6

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Continued on page 9

LBCC projects \$2.4M surplus next fiscal year 3

LBUSD looks to expand summer programming 3

Study finds juvenile white sharks stay near Southern California city shorelines 4

How LBUSD will spend over \$500M in coronavirus funds 4

How \$239M in federal funding helped CSULB survive the COVID-19 pandemic..... 7

This Poly High grad is the first in her family to attend college—and it's Harvard 8



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Anouska Ortiz shows off her Poly High School class ring.

Aquarium of the Pacific vet publishes findings on artificial insemination for zebra sharks 8

Construction continues on major Long Beach City College projects 11

Newswatch..... 14

U.S. satellite is officially on its way to the moon after successful Rocket Lab mission 14

Editor's note: A story on page 3 of the June 28, 2022, edition titled, "Work on '8 by 28' Olympic initiative continues," inaccurately described the construction timeline for the Belmont Beach and Aquatics Center. It is on track to be completed before 2028, in time for the Olympics.

Virgin Orbit delivers 7 satellites to orbit for military, NASA 14

Cargo flow continues through ports after expiration of dockworker labor contract 15

Molina Healthcare fined \$1M for provider payment delays 15

Harbor Commission votes to assess Queen Mary ahead of potential transfer from the city 16

A beautiful reimagining and rescuing of a historic Los Cerritos home..... 17

First count since pandemic began shows homelessness grew 62% in Long Beach 18

City officials could add another homeless outreach team as part of upcoming budget 19

Ceramist fights deportations and connects with her Cambodian culture one donut pipe at a time 20

Zendejas claims victory in certified election results 21

Ethics Commission weighs tighter lobbying ordinance 21

Removing an old desalination facility could close parts of Junipero Beach for months 22

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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**

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LBCC projects \$2.4M surplus next fiscal year

The final draft of the budget is expected to head to the Board of Trustees for approval in September.

By Christian May-Suzuki

Long Beach City College's revenue is growing—but so is its spending. The college is expecting \$160 million in revenue for its unrestricted general fund in the 2022-23 fiscal year, about \$11.8 million more than last year.

Overall, that will mean a \$2.4 million surplus. While that's good news for the college, it's still almost 33% smaller than last year's surplus—despite an 8% overall increase to the fund's revenues. The difference comes down to more spending, both for one-time projects and growth in the school's staffing.

LBCC's Superintendent-President Mike Muñoz said that the robust state budget was important in allowing the college to increase its spending this year.

"This has been a historic state budget in terms of what we've been able to receive at the community college level," Muñoz said. "We've seen increases in several categorical programs that have gone many years without increases."

One of the biggest changes in this year's budget, though, was due to a sudden set of retirements



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Long Beach City College staff lead students in activities as part of the school's Viking Summer Voyage, a two-week program that teaches incoming students about the college.

the school saw last year. A total of 64 employees—including nine administrators, 29 classified staff, five counselors and 21 faculty—retired on June 30, 2021.

This sudden exodus was jarring, but the government provided additional funding to help fill in the gaps. The state allocated an additional \$2.1 million to LBCC this year through the 2021-22 California Budget Act in part to help the school with hiring.

With that money, LBCC is looking to backfill many of those positions. But the college has also changed some of the roles to reflect new needs and to comply with a requirement the state attached to its funding that full-time faculty comprise a larger share of employees.

Since it received the funding, LBCC has started the process to bring on

40 new full-time faculty members—consisting of 35 teachers, four full-time counselors, and a librarian—as well as two deans, an associate vice president of the Pacific Coast Campus and a director of innovation.

Additionally, three new management positions and six new classified positions have been created, including a science lab equipment technician for physical science. Two new HR analysts positions were also created, and other vacancies have been budgeted for.

In addition to the growing number of faculty and staff, the LBCC Board of Trustees also voted last year to increase pay for full-time faculty and the management team, and those higher wages are carrying over into the new fiscal year.

Overall, LBCC has budgeted almost \$93 million for salaries, while about

\$49.4 million will go toward benefits.

Moving forward, LBCC also has its eye on managing what remains of its COVID relief funds.

The federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) is sunseting in the 2022-23 fiscal year, which, alongside other COVID relief funds, provided the school with over \$100 million over the past three years.

There's an upcoming spending deadline on those funds, Muñoz said, and the school is looking to find productive ways to meet it. LBCC has identified four major points to focus on.

"We've been going through and looking at priorities," Muñoz stated. "The big focus areas are supporting students, keeping employees and students safe, and leveraging those dollars to enhance some of our technological needs."

One example is allocating over \$2 million for a debt forgiveness program for students, something the college has seen success with in the past.

"We're going to do another round for this past academic year to basically forgive the debt for our students," Muñoz said.

Overall, according to its new budget, LBCC is in good shape. The school's general reserve fund is set to finish about 5% higher than it did at the end of last year, which Muñoz says reflects the college's fiscal health.

"All in all," Muñoz said, "we are in a very good position."

The final draft of the budget is expected to be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval in a September meeting. ■

LBUSD looks to expand summer programming

By Christian May-Suzuki

Thousands of students have signed up for the Long Beach Unified School District's summer programs this year, a sharp rebound as the programs return for the first time without COVID-imposed social distancing mandates.

Brian Moskovitz, who serves as Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning & Elementary Schools at LBUSD, did not have data on last year's attendance numbers, but he said participation this year—which he placed at more than 10,000 students—is noticeably higher.

"Last year, we were able to offer an in-person program, but I think

there was still some apprehension on the part of families of sending their kids," Moskovitz said.

The bump in attendance comes as the state offers new funding that is expected to help significantly improve and expand the district's summer programming.

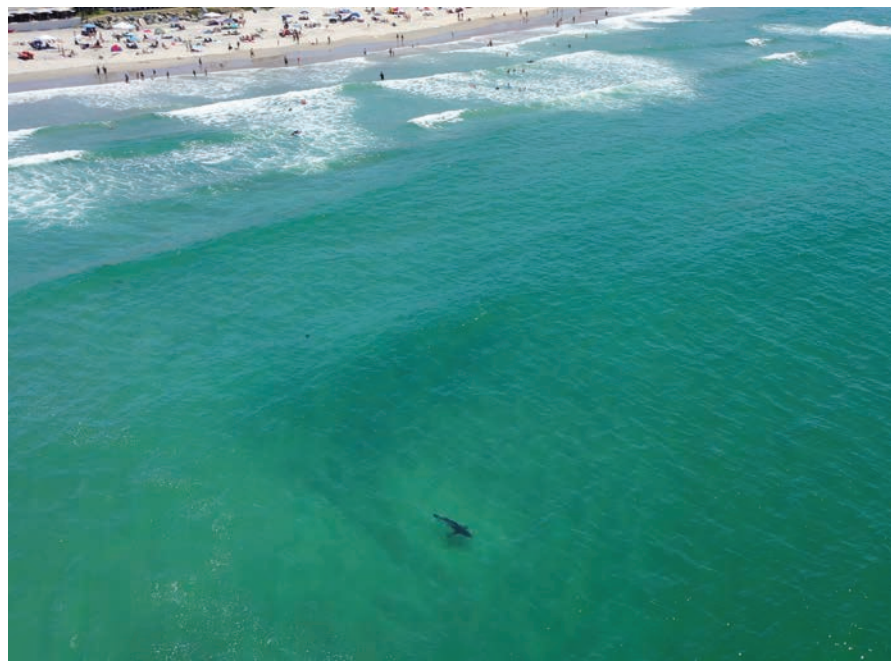
The state's Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P), which was approved last year, provides annual funding to districts for after school and summer school programs that "are pupil-centered, results driven, include community partners, and complement, but do not replicate, learning activities in the regular school day and school year," according to the state's



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Second grade teacher Ms. Zellmer watches students, who are entering third grade next school year, design their own playgrounds using blocks during a summer program at Barton Elementary.

Study finds juvenile white sharks stay near Southern California city shorelines



Courtesy of Patrick Rex and Jack May/Cal State Long Beach

A juvenile shark swims just off the Southern California coast.

By Brandon Richardson

Despite the fact that juvenile white sharks—colloquially referred to as great white sharks—tend to hang out near the

shorelines of Southern California cities, university researchers say surfers and other beachgoers are mostly safe.

A team of researchers from Cal State Long Beach and the University of Minnesota published

a paper last month in the journal “PLOS One” after studying the location, movement and disposition of the young sharks. The study found that the 5- to 6-foot-long sharks tend to stay close to shore to avoid predators, including adult white sharks and orcas.

The young white sharks “form loose aggregations” in small areas along coastal beaches, where they spend “days to months in these nursery habitats” enjoying warmer water and an abundance of food, according to the study.

The sharks, however, optimize growth by only exerting energy when necessary, researchers noted, which means people enjoying the water are, more or less, safe.

“We found that these juvenile white sharks are getting a big morning breakfast and then just chilling for the rest of the day,” lead author and Cal State researcher James Anderson said in a statement. “They’re hanging out at the beach, cruising up and down the shoreline, paying no attention to pretty much anyone or anything around them.”

Active mostly in the evening and morning hours, researchers

observed the sharks chasing prey species in deeper, colder water. During the day, the sharks conserved energy by moving just enough to stay buoyant at the water’s surface, the study found.

Researchers used high-density acoustic arrays placed offshore to receive signals from tagged sharks. By having signals received by multiple receivers, scientists were able to track the sharks’ movements as well as water temperature and depth.

Over the years, these congregations of juvenile white sharks have relocated from places like Santa Monica Bay and Will Rogers Beach in Los Angeles County to Torrey Pines and Solana Beach in San Diego County as well as Carpinteria state beach in Santa Barbara County.

Despite the general safety for beachgoers during the day, researchers still warn caution.

“These are wild animals and wild animals are unpredictable,” Anderson said. “But honestly, you have far more concerns driving the 405 Freeway on the way to the beach.” ■

How LBUSD will spend over \$500M in coronavirus funds

By Christian May-Suzuki

The Long Beach Unified School District, like school districts across the country, was hit hard by the pandemic. But the federal government is committed to helping the district face many of the challenges associated with COVID—to the tune of over \$500 million.

These funds mainly come from three federal assistance packages distributed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Package, and the American Rescue Plan.

An Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) was attached to each of these packages, bringing in a total of \$330.5 million to the district from the onset of the pandemic in 2020 to September 30, 2024, when the funds expire. These funds are considered restricted with guidelines for use, but they are very flexible, according to LBUSD Executive Director of Fiscal Services Renee Arkus.

“They did give some guidelines, but a lot of them translated into things we were already doing with the funds,” Arkus said of the ESSER funds.

Several grants are also coming in from the state to help with specific issues. The largest is an Expanded Learning Opportunity Grant (ELO-G) that provided the district with a payment of \$54.1 million this past year. But the state also provided a \$23.5 million In-Person Instruction Grant that was implemented in March 2021 alongside the ELO-G.

While each has its own name and particular guidelines for use, the focus of these programs is the same: to help close learning gaps that may have appeared for kids who struggled with virtual learning.

District officials, for their part, used their Learning and Support Plan as a model for how the funds should be spent, and that work led to significant investments in different aspects of student well-being.

Academic intervention and support

The area that is set to receive the



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Students, who will be entering the fifth grade next school year, raise their hand to answer their teacher Ms. Ghareeb's question during summer school at Barton Elementary.

most funding over the life of the grants—\$210.3 million of the more than \$500 million in total COVID funding—is academic intervention and support. And in this subset, professional development takes up the largest chunk, \$57.5 million.

But student programs like “summer intervention,” which focuses on the academic intervention programs the district runs during the summer, also fall under this umbrella. That program is slated to

receive \$27.9 from the funds.

Other notable programs included in this branch include \$27 million for intervention and instruction coordinators—who are responsible for “interventions, progress monitoring, and ongoing collaborative planning with teachers to improve core instruction,” according to Arkus—and almost \$19 million for a literacy program expansion, which includes hiring specialized teachers.

New Budget

Continued from cover

The meeting included lengthy presentations on the district’s budget and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), both of which passed 5-0. The district’s budget for 2022-23 lists expenditures of \$1.17 billion.

Yumi Takahashi, the district’s chief business and financial officer, presented a picture of the district’s finances that was not as bleak as many feared amid the pandemic, but she laid out serious challenges for the future. The district remains in steady declining enrollment, with a longtime drop of 2% annually, reaching 3% each of the last two years. Each percentage point represents a loss of \$7-8 million in funding from the state, according to Takahashi. The district had an enrollment of 96,000 students in 2003-04, which has declined to 67,000 students this year.

The other ongoing challenge is attendance; the LBUSD for years had a strong attendance rate of 95% to 96%. That dropped to 90% when schools reopened after COVID-19 closures.

Still, Takahashi said those long-term challenges were mitigated by “higher-than-expected state revenue, with one-time revenues” for the upcoming school year.

While the long-term circumstances will be challenging for the city’s largest employer, the LBUSD does have a large weapon in its arsenal: the large “unrestricted ending balance” it has been building over the last decade. Essentially a rainy day fund, the district began aggressively saving money following the layoffs of the Great Recession, with then-superintendent Chris Steinhauer saying it was one of his top priorities to never again have to lay off teachers.

That rainy day fund is now sitting at \$362 million, a jump of \$43 million from the end of the 2020-21 school year. Takahashi’s presentation put that number at \$476 million at the end of 22-23, and at \$478.9 million at the end of 23-24, at which point the district expects to be withdrawing money from the fund going forward if enrollment numbers don’t reverse.

Takahashi asked the board to approve a resolution dedicating \$400 million of that fund to “continuity of staffing,” in effect, pledging the bulk of the district’s savings to help keep the district from laying off employees as enrollment declines.

“On paper, it looks like we have more money, but enrollment is decreasing,” said Board President Juan Benitez. “What we’re being asked to do is commit a big percentage of what’s in the ending balance right now so that we don’t have to lay off staff.”

The board passed the resolution unanimously.

“We know that there are some cliffs we could fall off, but it doesn’t look like we are because we’re being cautious,” said board member Doug Otto.

The district has been allowed to grow its rainy day fund to such a large number because of the passage in 2017 of state Senate Bill 751, a California School Board Association-sponsored bill that allowed districts to do exactly what the LBUSD has done, save a big chunk of its annual budget to prevent against future financial challenges.

Funding from the state is given to school districts annually for each year’s expenses and is typically intended to be spent on that school year. But during financial hardships for the state, such as the Great Recession, a reduction in state funding can lead to devastating consequences at the local level, as happened in Long Beach and many other cities that experienced widespread layoffs.

Rainy day funds are districts’ way of fending off future breaches of that covenant between the state and its schools. Labor unions and parent groups have frequently cited the amount of money the district has in its coffers as a resource they feel should be deployed more in the short-term to benefit students, teachers and other workers. It was a main point of contention as the Teachers Association of Long Beach and the California Schools Employees Association’s Long Beach chapter each pushed for higher pay during this school year.

LCAP

The district’s LCAP also passed by unanimous vote, with board members praising the Long Beach community for record-setting turnout in providing input through online surveys and in-person forums as far as prioritizing how the district spent its money.

The district’s recent LCAP initiatives include wellness centers at all 11 high schools, additional counselors and social workers, and literacy coaches.

Other notes

In an expected move, the board passed a universal pre-kindergarten plan unanimously, which is the next step in a major change for California public education, which will soon include universal, full-day pre-K and kindergarten plans.

The board also unanimously passed the ELO-P, its Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, which will provide additional funding of \$17 million for expanded school programs before school, after school, and in the summer. The ELO-P is part of how the district has spent its COVID-19 funding, expanding the scope of the school day at low or no cost for families who’ve needed additional flexibility.

“The ELO plan and the after-school programming is something

we know parents have asked for and needed for probably decades in this district,” said board member Megan Kerr. “I’m grateful that the funding is there from the state and the allocation was made to expand really necessary programs.”

Although graduation week took place the week before the board meeting, the board made it official by accepting the recommendation of 5,623 students for graduation

from its high schools (including the three largest, with 958 seniors graduating from Long Beach Poly/PAL, 806 from Wilson and 804 from Millikan).

The board approved the hiring of Wayne Strumpf as its new general counsel, a position that’s been created to help oversee legal issues for the district. Strumpf was previously general counsel for the Imperial Irrigation District. ■



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An empty classroom at Barton Elementary.

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Veterans Stadium

Continued from cover

cost of retrofitting it is less efficient than starting from scratch.

Costs estimates for addressing the stadium have grown over the years. The 2020 master plan adopted by the college earlier in the 2000s placed the cost of a renovation or expansion of the stadium at about \$20 million.

The 2041 master plan adopted in 2016 saw that cost jump to \$88 million.

Earlier this year, consultants presented the board with two options, a renovation of the stadium that would cost about \$141 million, or a total rebuild that would cost about \$185 million.

LBCC has about \$89 million on hand from previous bond measures, but the new bond measure could ask for another \$285 million.

Trustee Sunny Zia asked why the college was asking for nearly \$200 million more than is needed to pay for the stadium project, pointing to previous bond measures that had listed the stadium as a project that would be addressed when voters approved them.

"I'm a little bit concerned that we either ran out of money, or it was mismanaged," Zia said. "Why do we have to go back to the voters for money? I don't want that to be the perception."

Marlene Drinkwine, the college's

outgoing vice president of business services, said the additional money could "free up" the \$89 million that had been earmarked for the stadium project and fund other investments like making the college's energy grid more green or installing new security systems that can lock down classrooms from a central location.

The college has previously unsuccessfully applied for some of the \$2 billion in state funding that Gov. Gavin Newsom proposed in last year's state budget, and Drinkwine said additional bond

money could allow LBCC to build student housing if it can't secure a grant through the state.

Veterans Stadium opened on the Liberal Arts Campus of LBCC in 1950 and has hosted high school and professional football and World Cup qualifier games, and has even served as a motorcycle speedway.

Consultants have told the board that replacing it with a state-of-the-art facility could help the college host sporting events for decades with minimal maintenance concerns when compared to the cheaper retrofit option.

The board is expected to meet again on July 13 to review the results of a poll that's been circulating through communities the district serves to see if there is public support for the bond measure.

If the board places the measure on the ballot, it could join three charter amendments being considered by the Long Beach City Council that would permanently change the city's election schedule by aligning it with the state's, combine the city's gas and water utilities and overhaul the Citizen Police Complaint Commission. ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Long Beach City College is considering seeking hundreds of millions of dollars to replace the dated Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Summer Programming

Continued from page 3

website on the program.

Moskovitz said the state funding will bring in approximately \$18 million more for programs on a yearly basis.

"Our plan is to essentially double the size of ... our summer programming," he said.

One program slated to benefit is LBUSD's Winners Reach Amazing Potential (WRAP), which is offered to elementary school students and extends afterschool academic assistance programs held during the academic year into a more relaxed and enriching summer program. While the programming during the school year focuses on academics, the summer agenda offers a much wider range of activities.

Summer topics range from art to science to drama, and kids are taken on weekly field trips. Activities are tailored to students' interests, Moskovitz said.

"They're able to go around the community, sometimes [by] walking and sometimes on a school bus," Moskovitz said. "They do have kind of a sports theme, so there's a lot of physical activity."

This program has been running for 15 years and has mainly been funded by a state Afterschool Education and Safety Grant, but the ELO-P has offered a new

opportunity to expand.

While the program has been successful over its existence, one of its issues has been a lack of coverage across the district, particularly during the summer.

With the new funding, Moskovitz said the goal is to offer WRAP programs at every elementary, middle and K-8 school in the district.

Currently, during the school year, WRAP programs with community partners like the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club are offered at 58 schools throughout the district, including two high schools: Jordan and Cabrillo. During the summer, 47 sites are offering the program, but several elementary schools like Emerson are not offering WRAP programs at all, instead using other programs like the district's Kids Club as their enrichment program.

This hasn't changed since last year, according to Rasheka Henry, Academic Director of the WRAP program, but expansion is set to begin next year with three new sites: Bancroft, Hughes and Stanford middle schools.

Henry said that there are plans to continue expansion on an annual basis, but there is no timeline or end date set for completion.

But ELO-P funding has allowed the shift toward a bigger program to begin.

"We have started expanding a little bit this summer already," Moskovitz said, "with the idea that we will really move to that doubling by next summer." ■

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FROM THE EDITOR: HAYLEY MUNGUIA

How \$239M in federal funding helped CSULB survive the COVID-19 pandemic

More students graduated from Cal State Long Beach last year than any year before—despite the fact that those students' academic careers were interrupted by a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

So: How did CSULB achieve that?

There are plenty of contributing factors, but the university's chief financial officer Scott Apel told me the financial support that Cal State Long Beach received from the government—about \$239 million from the federal Higher Educational Emergency Relief Fund—was one of the most important.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said, "this was a very successful program."

As for how the money was spent, about half of it—\$120 million—was earmarked for direct aid to students. Beyond that, Apel told me, there was little direction initially on how to distribute it, so CSULB came up with its own formula.

"Nobody knew what to do, so we gave a little bit of money to everybody who was eligible," he said, "using a sliding scale based on [information from students' Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms], with an eye toward giving neediest students the most."

And "everybody who was eligible" essentially meant all students. While the first round of funding, issued during the Trump Administration, excluded international and undocumented students, CSULB used foundation and other funding to ensure those students would also receive direct aid. The Biden Administration later expanded eligibility to include all students.

"The people that were not eligible at first—it wasn't based on financial need," Apel said. "Those kids didn't have less need. They were just kind of disallowed based on the governmental perception of their status."

While the amount of funding each student got varied based on need, Apel said, "in totality, everybody got something."

The other half of the money, just under \$119 million, was intended for CSULB to spend and recoup lost revenue rather than to redistribute to students. But direction from the government on this front was similarly lacking, Apel said.

"Nobody knew what was going on," he said. "The government didn't really provide much in the way of guidance. We obviously expected there to be some audits and things later, so we figured that we wanted to be kind of restrictive in what we spent it on."

So a small group of people within the university—Apel, the provost, the Academic Senate and some student leaders on campus—worked together to figure out what that should look like.

Two years after the first round of HEERF money was distributed, that group's work has led to the allocation of:

- \$34.7 million for technology to facilitate online teaching and learning;
- \$29.8 million to replace lost revenue, which was largely the result of the state budget reduction;
- \$22.4 million for faculty and staff support, which included workshops and other measures to

ease the transition to online learning;

- \$10.2 million for student support services, including programs to help with mental health and other basic needs;

- \$9.9 million for indirect cost recovery, which is a standard use for grant money that's meant to reimburse the university for the expenses it incurs in the process of administering the funding;

- \$8.5 million for health and safety, including new HVAC and filtration upgrades, enhanced cleaning protocols and personal protective equipment; and

- \$3.2 million for COVID testing and vaccine delivery.

When looking at the biggest chunk of money, which went to technology, I asked Apel whether that spending was essentially a one-off or if it represented a longer-term investment in how CSULB approaches technology. His answer: "It's both."

As an example of the one-time costs, Apel pointed to CSULB's purchase and maintenance of WiFi hotspots for students who didn't have regular access to the internet off-campus. The university is charged a monthly fee for keeping those devices active, which comes out to about \$100,000, he said.

That cost was necessary amid stay-at-home orders, but the CSULB campus is again open for students who need internet access, so it

doesn't make sense to keep spending that extra money.

But, Apel said, other investments in technology that make more sense to maintain in the long-term—like offering WiFi outside CSULB buildings or in parking structures—are here to stay.

Apel also said a new investment in outdoor classrooms will outlive this particular pandemic.

"Not that we're anticipating other pandemics," he clarified, "but it creates a wonderful new space that we don't normally have for students and faculty. Clubs can use them, and the community can use them, as well."

Overall, Apel said, there's no question that the HEERF money helped CSULB survive what could have been a devastating hit.

"We kept the place running," he said.

Pointing to the record number of graduates—which hit a new high of 10,593 for the 2020-21 school year, and current estimates place above 11,000 for 2021-22—Apel said the funding's success speaks for itself.

"Those students were smack in the middle of a pandemic," he said of the graduates. "There's not a doubt in mind that that would not have happened without this help from the federal government."

"It was desperately needed," he added, "and it came at just the right time." ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A small group streams music in an outdoor seating area equipped with WiFi at Cal State Long Beach.

This Poly High grad is the first in her family to attend college—and it’s Harvard

By Tess Kazenoff

Anouska Ortiz sat in front of her computer staring at an unopened email from the Harvard University admissions department.

It was the email she had been anticipating since she'd applied for early admissions months before, and the moment she'd been waiting for since her freshman year, when Harvard moved to the forefront of her dreams.

Harvard first came onto Ortiz's radar between her freshman and sophomore year, when a conference for the National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists led Ortiz to Boston.

It was only a two-day conference, and she didn't even have time to explore the Ivy League campus, but just by standing in Harvard Square, she knew it was where she wanted to be.

"I was like, this is going to be my home in three years," said Ortiz, 17.

Now that the moment was here, Ortiz couldn't help but feel filled with doubt; she's a first-generation student whose parents immigrated from Mexico. Growing up, she'd



Anouska Ortiz stands on a boulder in front of Poly High School, where she graduated from this year. Ortiz will be attending Harvard in the fall.

only known one person who'd gone to college, a boy in her North Long Beach neighborhood.

"It was just a little bit difficult for me to wrap my head around the idea that, 'Yes, I can; yes, I deserve to go to college,'" said Ortiz. "But once I told myself, 'Yes, going to

college is attainable, you can go there, you deserve it,' I've just been dead-set on going."

As much as the desire to go to Harvard fueled her ambitions, when college admissions season came around, Ortiz questioned if she should even apply, considering

Boston College and other schools in the area instead.

It was her AP European History teacher, Steven Meckna, that changed her mind.

"He was like, 'No, you can't just apply there. You have to apply to Harvard. They want you. You'll be amazing there!'" said Ortiz.

He was the first person who confirmed to Ortiz that she could in fact achieve what she thought was impossible, and it was just the push she needed to apply.

"It was crazy how that one person just made me change my entire mindset about the college application process," said Ortiz.

Navigating the college admissions process as a first-generation student was no easy feat for Ortiz, and she sought support from her community in both the PACE college acceleration program at Poly High School, as well as Upward Bound, an organization dedicated to assisting first-generation students with applying to college.

"I didn't really know what college is, like what the process is, what financial aid is," she said. "I had to teach myself how to navigate the school system."

Continued on page 11

Aquarium of the Pacific vet publishes findings on artificial insemination for zebra sharks

By Brandon Richardson

The Aquarium of the Pacific has long been a leader in shark conservation efforts, a legacy that is continuing with veterinarian Dr. Lance Adams' newly published paper on the artificial insemination of zebra sharks.

Adams, who has cared for the Aquarium of the Pacific's thousands of species for over 20 years, was the lead author of the paper published in the journal "Frontier in Marine Science." The study found that artificial insemination can be a safe and effective method for breeding zebra sharks, which are listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

"At aquariums, managing self-sustainable populations of sharks that are genetically diverse can be challenging," Adams said in a statement, "and shipping a sperm sample from one aquarium to another for artificial insemination is much



Gatsby, one of the Aquarium of the Pacific's zebra sharks, swims past two guests after her artificial insemination.

Continued on page 12

Pandemic Struggles

Continued from cover

The challenges students continue to face and their impact are apparent when looking at standardized test scores. After steadily increasing since 2014-15, math and, to a lesser extent, English proficiency for LBUSD students took a sharp downturn, according to the district's annual report.

For the 2018-19 school year, the district's Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) math proficiency surpassed 45%. In 2020-21, that figure had fallen to just over 30%—slightly above 2014-15 levels. Similarly, the SBAC English proficiency dropped from nearly 55% in 2018-19 to less than 50%.

The percentage of "high school ready" eighth graders also decreased from 59% in 2019-20 to 51% in 2020-21, the report shows.

The number of LBUSD students enrolled in summer school has nearly tripled, from 4,822 in summer 2019 to 13,311 this summer, according to district spokesperson Chris Eftychiou. That figure, however, is misleading because before COVID-19, summer school was offered only to high school students.

Now, students of all ages are enrolled for additional summer schooling.

"We would not characterize the grades one to eight offerings as simply being for those who 'fell behind,'" Eftychiou said. "Rather, we're offering both support classes as well as enrichment classes to students for learning acceleration coming out of the pandemic."

Final data on student retention—that is, keeping students at the same grade level in the next school year rather than promoting them to the next grade—is not yet available, Baker said, noting that the district has suspended the traditional retention criteria. The idea is to assess each student holistically, rather than focusing on specific moments in time. The district implemented a new program, i-Ready, focused on growth monitoring.

For example, if a first grader did not meet the technical criteria to promote to the second grade, but they made a year and a half growth during the school year, the student could advance. The idea being: If a student continues to make more than one year of growth, they will catch up on their own without retention.

To combat the ongoing academic challenges, the district implemented the Learning Acceleration & Support Plan and invested millions into academic and social support for students. LBUSD spent \$65.7 million on academic acceleration and support, \$19.6 million on infrastructure and capital for the future, \$5.8 million for mental health support and \$5.3 million on engagement.

This investment funded after

school, summer and Saturday programming, as well as teacher training on social-emotional learning strategies, student intervention and wellness centers at every high school that are staffed by a psychologist, social worker or counselor.

The wellness center program is slated to expand to middle schools at the start of the 2022-23 school year, Baker said.

Despite the challenges and shortfalls, there are a number of bright spots for the district reflected in its annual report.

The number of accelerated Math 6 placement students has continued to increase. In 2019-20, 62% of sixth graders were placed in accelerated math. That figure increased to 70% and then 75% in 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively.

At 84%, the Long Beach Unified high school graduation rate remains the same as the state and is on par with previous years, Baker said. The district, meanwhile, surpassed the state average of students completing UC and CSU entrance requirements—59% of LBUSD students, compared to 52% across the state.

Teachers, administrators also struggling

For people who enter a profession for the sole purpose of teaching and nurturing students, the pandemic has been somewhat demoralizing.

"They were going through the pandemic, managing all things with their own families and their own life," Baker said, noting the added stress of supporting a full caseload of secondary students or a class of 30 elementary kids.

"Teachers are compassionate ... and it's stressful when you can't make the difference that you're trying to make in the lives of students."

Throughout the pandemic, teachers and administrators alike struggled to keep up with the ever-changing guidelines coming out of local, state and federal governments, Baker said. Sometimes, the altered guidelines required changes literally overnight.

The constant shifts made running schools, teaching and learning even more challenging during an already turbulent time. In May of this year, the district announced nearly 25% of its 86 schools would have new principals next year.

On top of everything, the pandemic has led to declines in both attendance rates and enrollment in the Long Beach school system, Baker said. Both metrics directly impact the district's funding, which has resulted in a tightening budget.

Prior to the pandemic, LBUSD had a 96% attendance rate for its tens of thousands of students. Preliminary data from the 2021-2022 school year shows attendance at

about 90%, which Baker described as a "significant" drop.

On top of dropping attendance, the school district's enrollment has been in decline for two decades. The district had about 96,000 students during the 2003-04 school year, compared to about 67,400 in 2021-22, with the largest declines coming amid the pandemic.

All of these challenges still remain and, after over two years, the coronavirus is still ravaging the nation, forcing everyone to continue to live with it as best they can—including the district, its teachers and its students.

At Long Beach Unified, however, the increased access and use of technology and more prevalent mental health services for students are just two examples of positive outcomes of the pandemic, Baker said. The focus on learning intervention and acceleration also bode well for the future of students in the district, she said.

"I really believe in what our staff is doing to meet the needs of students in this moment," Baker said. "While it's hard to talk about the pandemic, we've learned a lot and I think we're on a path toward a new version of Long Beach Unified."

"I'm super hopeful about the future—what we're learning and what we're able to invest in." ■



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Westerly School of Long Beach Celebrates Graduates Bound for Preferred High Schools



Photo courtesy of Westerly School

Westerly School Class of 2022 Graduates.

“Back when I was in 4th grade, I wanted nothing more than to be in 8th grade. Now that I’m here and standing on this stage, I don’t want to leave.” -Kailyn Nguyen, Westerly School Class of 2022

Westerly School, the sole independent school in Long Beach serving roughly 175 K-8th grade students, recently celebrated the promotion of its 15 eighth grade students: the Class of 2022.

It is significant to note that about half of these students have been “Westerly Wildcats” since Kindergarten, and have spent nine years (two-thirds of their lives) on the Westerly campus – for the most part.

Unlike prior Westerly graduates, the Class of 2022 persisted in an especially unique and challenging academic experience, as all three of their Middle School years were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Even though my middle school experience was mainly on Zoom because of COVID, my 8th grade year was the best. I can gladly say that in 8th grade I have made even more friendships and become closer to those I was friendly with in the past.” -Alyssa Cuff, Westerly School Class of 2022

Despite the unprecedented challenges, the Class ultimately proved their strength in the face of adversity throughout their Middle School years and continued to model adaptability, responsibility, kindness, respect and honesty – the core values of Westerly School.

Embodying these values, coupled with

consistent achievement in academic and co-curricular subjects, played a significant role all 15 graduates earning acceptance into their top choice high schools across the city of Long Beach as well as Orange and Los Angeles Counties:

- Long Beach Polytechnic High School (CIC and PACE programs) – Long Beach
- Huntington Beach High School- Huntington Beach
- Orange County School of the Arts- Santa Ana
- Palisades Charter High School- Pacific Palisades
- Sage Hill School – Newport Beach
- Sato Academy of Mathematics and Science-Long Beach
- St. Anthony High School – Long Beach
- Valley Christian High School- Cerritos
- Vistamar School – El Segundo

With all the necessary COVID safety precautions in place, Westerly was able to commemorate their accomplishments on June 15, 2022 by hosting an in-person graduation ceremony on campus, which was made open to the entire Westerly community (students, staff, parents, families and friends) for the first time in three years.

The ceremony featured several traditions unique to Westerly School, beginning with the Pledge of Allegiance led by the graduates’ younger siblings. Each graduate delivered a speech which they had been preparing for months,

highlighting their favorite memories and key learnings from their Westerly experience. They also showcased their musical talents with two performances – a vocal rendition of “We’re Going to Be Friends” by the White Stripes, and a surprise flash-mob style dance to “Baby” by Justin Bieber.

Other noteworthy moments included the recognition of three class valedictorians who earned identical GPAs: Alice Hall, Celia Jorgenson, and Landon Luxenberg; and the Core Values Award honoree, Alyssa Cuff, for embodying the Westerly Core Values.

The event culminated with Kindergarten through 7th grade students participating in a “Moving Up” ceremony, in which they officially advanced to their next grade level in front of their peers and families. Kindergartners also presented flowers to the 8th grade class, who have served as their mentors by way of the school’s mentor-mentee program (students in grades 5-8 are individually paired with students in grades K-4 to serve as their mentors for an entire year).

As Westerly proudly sends off its newly anointed alumni toward their next academic chapters, its administration, faculty, and staff congratulate each graduate for their incredible achievements in academics, athletics, arts, and leadership.

“My time at Westerly has shaped my future. This school has taught me to grow and learn from my mistakes, which is a lesson that will stick with me my whole life.” -Hunter Altizer, Westerly School Class of 2022

About Westerly School: Westerly School is a non-profit, non-denominational, independent school accredited by WASC and CAIS located on a five-acre campus in the heart of Long Beach. The school’s mission is to develop the whole child through a challenging and stimulating program in an inclusive and diverse community. We ignite within each child a lifelong love of learning by encouraging them to discover their full and unique potential every single day.

Westerly School is accepting applications for the 2022-23 academic year. To learn more, contact admissions@westerlyschool.org, call 562-981-3151, or visit the website at www.westerlyschool.org.

COVID Funds

Continued from page 4

Infrastructure for the future

Almost \$150 million is being allocated to assist in the installation of new infrastructure to support learning in the wake of the pandemic. No single program in this group received more money than the funding of technology purchases, which is slated to receive a total of \$79.9 million.

Arkus said that the purchases of Chromebooks and other computers was a necessity for the district as it sent more of their existing stock home with kids to enable socially distant learning.

“We sent computers and devices home for the students to learn off of, then we had to replace and replenish to keep our computers and our Chromebooks up to par,” she said.

Classroom infrastructure updates were also needed to try and facilitate a smoother distance learning experience and to create a more comfortable classroom experience, which the district has allocated \$52 million from 2021-2025 to implement.

“We had to modernize some of our existing infrastructure, so that our teachers have access to cameras, and [can connect] their computers to other visual devices to help support social distancing,” Arkus said.

Social-emotional well-being

Another \$16.8 million went toward efforts to improve social-emotional well-being, and much of it focused on counseling and supportive services.

A one-time allocation of \$3 million was used in the 2021-2022 fiscal year to help support the district’s family resource centers, which focus on providing support for the social, emotional and behavioral needs at 32 schools in the district.

From 2021 to 2024, \$3.9 million is allocated for social-emotional support for teachers and students, and \$7.5 million is committed to various student health and mental health services.

Other spending

Other programs make up about \$118.4 million worth of allocations. Payment of additional salaries and benefits to new teachers made up the largest piece of this category, with a total of \$80.5 million from 2021 to 2024 reserved to cover these costs.

The district has also been providing extended food service during the pandemic, and meals for all students are free of charge. About \$10.4 million in COVID funds have been allocated to this service, including \$8.9 million already spent from 2019 to 2021.

One of the most important aspects of staying safe during COVID, though, was cleaning, and the district invested \$7.6 million toward cleaning efforts in the 2020-21 year, with \$1.5 million allocated from 2021 to 2024. ■

Construction continues on major Long Beach City College projects



Courtesy of Long Beach City College

A rendering of the new Building E, which will house the College Center at Long Beach City College's Liberal Arts Campus.

By Christian May-Suzuki

Thanks to a variety of bond measures that voters have approved in recent years, Long Beach City College has a slew of major construction projects underway.

The Board of Trustees heard an update on some of these projects at

its June 22 meeting.

Here’s a look at where things stand.

Building MM

Building MM is undergoing a renovation of the west wing, which will house the HVAC, Carpentry and Construction Engineering departments. The facility will also see a total teardown of the east and south wings and the construction

of a new 19,383-square-foot program space for the Horticulture, Anthropology and Trades and Industrial Technology departments.

“The trades are a really important aspect of what we offer our students and community, as well as our employers in the region,” Long Beach City College President-Superintendent Mike Muñoz said. “For us, it’s really important that those facilities have the state of the art equipment and layout functionality.”

While the project was initially slated for completion this fall, several delays have pushed that date back. Officials hope the west wing renovation will be ready to host classes in this fall, while construction on the rest of the project is scheduled to begin in 2023.

Improving accessibility

LBCC is also aiming to improve its accessibility, in line with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The first phase of this project, which began in the spring of 2021, focuses on improving wheelchair accessibility on the pathways around the Liberal Arts Campus, which will include adding handrails in some places.

Continued on page 12

Poly High Grad

Continued from page 8

Although the fact that Ortiz’s mother and father had a third- and sixth-grade education meant she had to forge her own path toward higher education, more importantly, it further inspired her to reach her goal of becoming a fetal surgeon (a dream ignited by watching “Grey’s Anatomy,” according to Ortiz).

“They had a childhood where they had to leave school behind in order to work to support their family,” said Ortiz. “I remember them telling me that they don’t want that for me.”

Ortiz credits her mother in particular, a tortilla distributor who often works from 3 a.m. until 3 p.m., with providing the most unwavering support to Ortiz, as well as becoming her biggest motivation.

“That is why I want to be better for our family, so that she doesn’t have to work, she doesn’t have to worry about bills, she doesn’t have to worry about waking up early again,” said Ortiz. “That unconditional support transcends through everything.”

And when Ortiz finally opened the email, in fact confirming that she had been accepted to Harvard

University’s class of 2026, her entire family shared in her joy and emotion.

“The excitement that I’ve had since freshman year—it just all led up to that one moment, and I was just so incredibly nervous. And then when I saw the result, that’s when I just became the happiest ever. I just could not control my emotions,” said Ortiz. “I was crying. My mom was crying. My dad had confetti that he had bought a week before. My sister was crying. It was amazing.”

For Ortiz, who was finally achieving the goal she’d set for herself three years before, it was about so much more than her personal aspirations—but the dreams her parents had for her as well.

“I feel like I’m doing this for my parents who sacrificed so much to come over here, and although they may not know advanced calculus, or how to write an essay ... they still provided endless support,” said Ortiz. “And this, I feel is just carrying the torch from what they did over 20 years ago when they first came to this country for a better life ... and you know that when I take them over to Harvard, I’m for sure gonna brag about them like, ‘Yes, these are my parents,’ and buy them whatever they want from the merch store.”

Before Ortiz heads off to Boston in

the fall to double major in chemical and physical biology as well as linguistics, in the meantime, she hopes to spend her summer studying French and a Mesoamerican language, Nahuatl, as well as practice her cooking skills.

And as soon as she steps onto campus in August, she plans to head straight to the student resource center for first-generation student support, with plans to give back just like the many people in her life who have given her the same support.

“I want to see the success rate grow, and do my part in helping people like me, like Chicanos, go to college or graduate high school, or accomplish whatever goal they have in mind,” said Ortiz. “That’s the overarching reason, I just want to help people out.”

For Ortiz, her education won’t stop at four years, and she knows that the experiences, knowledge, mentorships and friendships she develops through her time at Harvard will serve her throughout her life.

“My college experience will transcend into my career experience,” Ortiz said. “And I know that I’ll make lifelong friends there, and that I’ll learn new skills that will serve me in whatever stage of life that I’ll be in. College is just the first step.” ■

Zebra Sharks

Continued from page 8

safer, less stressful and less expensive than transporting a large shark.”

The Aquarium of the Pacific is believed to be the first facility to perform a successful shark artificial insemination in the United States, which took place in 2009 under Adams.

Titled “Artificial Insemination and Parthenogenesis in the Zebra Shark *Stegostoma tigrinum*,” the paper describes a study of artificial insemination of zebra sharks as a method to reproduce the species in captivity. The study was the brainchild of Adams and involved four sharks—one male and three females.

The paper’s co-authors and study contributors included scientists from the Georgia Aquarium; Delaware Biotechnology Institute’s Center for Bioinformatics & Computational Biology at the University of Delaware; and Loyola University, Chicago’s Health Science Center, Department of Comparative Medicine.

The paper detailed the methods used in the study and animal care, genetics, efficacy of artificial insemination and other variables. The study compared artificial insemination with natural reproduction by housing a male zebra shark with two reproductively active females, but no offspring was produced.



Aquarium of the Pacific staff veterinarian Lance Adams injects semen into Gatsby, one of the facility’s zebra sharks.

After two medical procedures, however, the Aquarium of the Pacific became the first to successfully reproduce a zebra shark via artificial insemination. Fern, one of the aquarium’s female zebra sharks, laid fertile eggs that hatched in 2014.

Two sharks were born in 2014, marking the first successful reproduction of a large shark species. Zebra sharks can grow to between 5.5 feet and 11.5 feet long, according to the aquarium’s website.

One of the two offspring, a female named Gatsby, still lives in the

Aquarium of the Pacific’s Tropical Reef Habitat. Gatsby recently underwent her own round of artificial insemination.

The other shark was transferred to another Association of Zoos and Aquariums institute as part of the Species Survival Plan for zebra sharks, according to the Aquarium of the Pacific announcement.

All veterinary procedures conducted at the Aquarium of the Pacific, including shark artificial insemination, are done in accordance with the organization’s animal welfare

policy to “ensure the health, safety, wellbeing and humane treatment of animals,” the announcement stated.

The artificial insemination process is relatively straightforward and fast—Gatsby’s procedure for example took about 10 minutes from capture to release. Aquarists first lure the sharks into a stretcher with a piece of fish. The shark is then rolled so it is belly up, putting it in a relaxed state of immobility.

Adams then performs an ultrasound to ensure eggs are present in the shark’s oviducts before inserting a speculum into the shark’s cloaca and depositing the semen sample using a catheter. The shark is then rolled upright and released.

Now that the paper is published, scientists around the world can replicate Adams’ methods and produce additional data about shark artificial insemination, which could prove vital to the conservation of species in the future.

“I hope that shark populations recover and that this work will not be needed to save a shark species from extinction but, if it is, I will be grateful to have contributed,” Adams said in an email to the Business Journal. “It is a gratifying feeling to be able to document this accomplishment for the aquarium and show the results of our dedication to progressing the field of aquatic animal care.” ■

LBCC Construction

Continued from page 11

“They weren’t major changes, but you will certainly notice them if you are in a wheelchair,” LBCC spokesperson Stacey Toda said.

The second phase of the project, which will focus on the buildings, includes adding new restroom accessories and signage, doors with vision windows and new accessibility hardware like ramps and handrails.

The first phase improvements are expected to be completed later this summer, while the building improvements began in late May and are scheduled for completion next year or in 2024.

Music and theater complex

Work is in progress to replace Building G and Building H, which house the school’s music and performing arts facilities, with a 67,331-square-foot facility that will include a building with instructional classrooms, a black box for theater performances and specialized labs and practice rooms for the Music Department.

“I think it really rounds out what we are providing to the community,” Muñoz said. To be able to have the music and [performing] arts complex built out really ties everything together to create an

enhanced student experience.”

Construction on this project is expected to begin later this year, with the completion scheduled for the fall of 2026.

College Center

The reimagining of the College Center looks to have room for some of the school’s recent projects, including a basic needs center and social justice center. It is also expected to house resources like student government, dining and conference rooms for students to use.

“We’re a little landlocked on space,” Muñoz said of the reasoning for a new center. “Over the last couple years, we have added different programmatic components that we didn’t have office space for, so we’re building a new building with some of these new programs in mind.”

A coffee shop will also be installed near the center, replacing a pavilion north of Building A that is close to the site of the new center. This shop is expected to serve customers while the construction of the new center is underway, which is expected to begin in the spring of 2024. Construction work for the coffee shop is scheduled to start next summer.

Building B

A potential renovation project for Building B has turned into a

full demolition and reconstruction after seismic engineering studies showed the cost of improvements exceeded the school’s threshold for renovations—which is 75% of the potential replacement cost for the building.

Now, the project includes the demolition of the Building B for the construction of 43,106 square feet of programming space for the Anthropology, Fashion, and Nutrition departments, as well as serving as a general classroom venue for the school.

The project is in its preliminary stages, and the college is still seeking funding. Officials hope early design work can begin in the summer of 2024.

Student housing

LBCC is also exploring a potential student housing project on campus. The college is currently eyeing the area southwest of Parking Lot M, to the south of Veterans Memorial Stadium.

A student housing feasibility study has already been conducted to identify student housing demand, which resulted in a project design with 421 beds for students. The school submitted applications for a \$6.7 million planning grant and a \$83.7 million construction grant, but both were denied.

The school will submit a new grant request in October and is also exploring other options to fund the project’s estimated \$93 million cost.

One of the potential sources is through Senate Bill 169, signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in December, which establishes a grant program to fund the creation of affordable student housing. Muñoz also floated the idea of potential future bonds, but he said the college is still exploring its options.

“As far as bonds and other state funds, none of those strategies have been committed to,” Muñoz said. “It is just [considering] at a very high level what could be explored and looking at how to get student housing.”

North Long Beach center

A plan is currently in development for a potential North Long Beach Center for Higher Education on two lots on East 59th Street between Atlantic and Lime avenues. The facility is a city project that LBCC could use alongside other education partners. Programming offered would include non-credit courses, outreach and an enrollment center.

“I think that’s also a very exciting opportunity for Long Beach City College to increase its presence in a part of our community that has historically been underserved,” Muñoz said. “I think the intent is to create a footprint within North Long Beach.

The project is still in the conceptual stage, so there is no construction timetable at this time. ■



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Courtesy of Rocket Lab
Rocket Lab mission control monitors the CAPSTONE mission.

U.S. satellite is officially on its way to the moon after successful Rocket Lab mission

By Brandon Richardson

After circling the Earth 37 times over six days, NASA’s CAPSTONE satellite is officially on its way to the moon, where it will test a new orbit for future missions.

The microwave-sized satellite was blasted into space aboard an Electron launch system by Long Beach-based Rocket Lab. The rocket delivered CAPSTONE, which is owned and operated by Advanced Space on behalf of NASA, and one of Rocket Lab’s Lunar Photon spacecraft to

orbit in the early morning of June 28.

CAPSTONE traveled around Earth with Photon incrementally igniting its 3D-printed HyperCurie engine to alter the spacecraft’s orbit around the planet before reaching an apogee (the farthest point from Earth during its orbit) over 43,000 miles.

After the final burn of the Photon engines, CAPSTONE was deployed on a ballistic lunar transfer trajectory to the moon at 12:18 a.m Long Beach time on July 4, traveling 24,500 mph. The satellite will use its own propulsion and the sun’s gravity to navigate the rest of the way.

The release of CAPSTONE to its lunar trajectory marks the completion of Rocket Lab’s role in the mission.

“The Rocket Lab team has been working on CAPSTONE with NASA and our mission partners for more than two years, developing new small satellite technology in the form of the Lunar Photon spacecraft to make this mission possible,” Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck said in a statement. “So it’s an incredible feeling after all that hard work and innovation to achieve mission success and set CAPSTONE on a course for the Moon.”

The journey to the moon is expected to take about four months, with CAPSTONE expected to arrive at its lunar orbit on Nov. 13.

The satellite will, for the first time, test a Near Rectilinear Halo Orbit around the moon. Data from CAPSTONE will inform future lunar missions, including NASA’s Gateway program—a small, human-tended space station that will orbit the moon and provide extensive support for NASA’s Artemis campaign.

“The CAPSTONE mission marks the beginning of humanity’s return to the Moon,” Beck said.

Artemis is expected to land the first woman and person of color on the moon as part of establishing a long-term presence on the Earth’s only natural satellite.

CAPSTONE will be the first U.S. satellite to settle into orbit around the moon in nearly a decade. The last U.S. orbiter was the Lunar Atmosphere and Dust Environment Explorer, or LADEE, which launched aboard one of Northrop Grumman’s Minotaur V rockets

September 7, 2013.

The LADEE mission ended on April 18, 2014, when the spacecraft’s controllers intentionally crashed it into the dark side of the moon.

Including its recent mission, the firm has successfully launched 27 electron rockets and delivered 147 satellites to orbit. CAPSTONE is the first deep-space mission for Rocket Lab, which was founded in 2006.

The mission also featured several other “significant technological firsts,” according to the company. CAPSTONE marks the first use of the Photon as well as the first collaborative mission between Rocket Lab and Advanced Solutions—a Colorado-based flight-software firm acquired by Rocket Lab last year.

Other company firsts include:

- The first time using the FR-lite satellite radio, for which Rocket Lab has an exclusive manufacturing license agreement with Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory;

- The first mission where Electron’s second stage deorbited the same day as launch; and

- Rocket Lab’s first mission planning and executing lunar trajectories.

With a payload of 661 pounds, CAPSTONE was Electron’s heaviest lift to date.

“This has been Rocket Lab’s most complex mission to date and our team has been incredible,” Beck said. “We pushed Electron and Photon to their limits and proved it’s possible to do big missions with small spacecraft.”

“Now we’ll be applying this ground-breaking technology for more interplanetary journeys,” Beck added, “including our upcoming missions to Venus and Mars.” ■

Cargo flow continues through ports after expiration of dockworker labor contract

The contract negotiation update came as both ports praised the new California budget, which includes over \$2 billion for ports.

By Brandon Richardson

The labor contract between 22,000 dockworkers at 29 West Coast ports and their employers expired July 1, but cargo flow through the ports has continued as normal.

Negotiations for a new contract between the International Longshore & Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association began in May. From the beginning, both groups have candidly stated an agreement would likely not be reached by the deadline.

Despite the ongoing mediation



Courtesy of the Port of Long Beach
A dockworker moves tires at the Port of Long Beach.

and no contract extension, both parties maintain that no work slowdowns, stoppages or lockouts have been planned, and goods will continue to move through West

Coast ports.

“Both sides understand the strategic importance of the ports to the local, regional and U.S. economies, and are mindful of the

need to finalize a new coast-wide contract as soon as possible to ensure continuing confidence in the West Coast,” a joint statement from both sides of the negotiation reads.

The San Pedro Bay ports—Long Beach and Los Angeles—combined handle over 30% of containerized imports into the U.S. Last year, both ports moved a record number of containers for a total of over 20 million 20-foot equivalent units (the standard measure of a shipping container).

The contract negotiation update came as both ports released comments praising the California budget, which was signed late last month by Gov. Gavin Newsom and includes over \$2 billion for ports.

The budget includes \$1.2 billion over two years for “port-specific high-priority” projects meant to increase capacity and efficiency, including rail and roadways, bridges and equipment.

“These investments in a vital economic engine will enhance the efficiency and sustainability of cargo movement and help fund important

Continued on page 21

Virgin Orbit delivers 7 satellites to orbit for military, NASA

By Brandon Richardson

After initially postponing the launch, Virgin Orbit successfully delivered seven satellites to orbit earlier this month after the July 1 launch of its “Straight Up” mission, the company announced.

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. Among the payload was Lonestar, a tactical space support vehicle developed by Dynetics for the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command.

Other spacecraft delivered to orbit include two CubeSats for NASA’s ELaNa 39 mission. One satellite will monitor energy input from the sun to the top of Earth’s atmosphere, while the other will test GPS for future on-orbit assembly, docking and formation flying SmallSat missions.

Virgin Orbit’s modified Boeing

747, Cosmic Girl, took off from the Mojave Air and Space Port on July 1 at 10:50 p.m. local time, marking the company’s first-ever evening operation. The airplane then traveled several hundred miles before releasing the LauncherOne system above the Pacific Ocean.

At 12:55 a.m. July 2, the firm successfully delivered its payloads in orbit approximately 500 kilometers above the Earth’s surface at a 45-degree inclination. LauncherOne was the first—and remains the only—system capable of reaching this orbit from the West Coast.

While the launch was originally slated for June 29, Virgin Orbit stood down when the rocket’s propellant temperature was not optimal.

“Straight Up” is the first of three missions included in a Space Force contract awarded to Virgin Orbit in April 2020.

The mission was named for American singer Paula Abdul’s breakthrough song, “Straight Up,” which was released on her 1988 debut album “Forever Your Girl,” released by Virgin Records. “Straight Up” was the Long Beach company’s fourth successful mission since it was founded in 2017.

Virgin Orbit has delivered a total of 33 satellites to orbit and has a 100% mission success rate.

The firm is now preparing for a mission in collaboration with the United Kingdom Space Agency, the Royal Air Force and Space Port Cornwall. The mission will mark Virgin Orbit’s first international launch and will be the first orbital launch for U.K. soil. ■



Courtesy of Virgin Orbit
Virgin Orbit’s Cosmic Girl carries its LauncherOne system during the “Straight Up” mission.

Molina Healthcare fined \$1M for provider payment delays

By Brandon Richardson

Molina Healthcare was fined \$1 million by the California Department of Managed Health Care, the state announced last month, for failure to resolve tens of thousands of provider disputes in a timely manner, which resulted in payment delays.

Between September 2017 and September 2018, the Long Beach health care provider failed to acknowledge and resolve 29,124 provider disputes in the state-prescribed amount of time. In addition to the fine, which has already been paid, Molina paid \$80.3 million to providers as well as \$1.8 million in interest.

“It is important health plans promptly and accurately pay claims to hospitals, doctors and other providers when health care services are provided to enrollees to ensure the financial stability of providers, and the overall stability of the health care delivery system,” DMHC Director

Mary Watanabe stated, adding that Molina’s “systemic failures” jeopardize the financial stability of health systems.

California law requires health plans to acknowledge disputes within two working days if submitted electronically and 15 working days if submitted via a physical form. Health plans must resolve or amend (with explanation) these disputes within 45 working days.

Molina agreed to take corrective actions, according to the state. Company representatives, however, did not respond to multiple requests for comment regarding the steps the firm is taking to ensure efficiency in terms of disputes and payments.

The state announced Molina is required to report information to the DMHC to demonstrate compliance with the law, in addition to the company’s internal actions.

In an email to the Business Journal last month, a company spokesperson said Molina



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal
The Molina Healthcare offices in Downtown Long Beach.

“officially resolved” the issue with DMHC in 2019, adding that the deficiencies arose before the firm’s “recent turnaround.”

In May 2017, amid “disappointing financial performance,” the health insurance company fired its two top executives—CFO Dr. Mario Molina and his brother, CEO John Molina, the latter of whom is now the primary investor in the parent

company that owns the Business Journal. The two are the sons of the company’s founder, C. David Molina.

“In 2020, DMHC conducted a routine audit ... and the report showed no findings of Provider Dispute Resolutions,” the spokesperson stated. “Molina remains focused on serving its valued members, providers and state partners throughout California.” ■

Harbor Commission votes to assess Queen Mary ahead of potential transfer from the city

By Brandon Richardson

The Port of Long Beach is moving forward with its own assessments of the dilapidated Queen Mary ahead of the ship's potential transfer from the city to the Harbor Department, a move that could make the port responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars in upkeep and repairs on the ocean liner.

The Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners voted unanimously late last month to approve two contracts—and amend a third—for an extensive assessment of the historic ship. The assessment project is a means for the port to know exactly what it would be taking on if the ship is transferred.

Previous assessments have estimated repairs to the ship could cost upward of nearly \$300 million. City officials have said the port is better equipped to handle and pay for repairs, as well as develop the surrounding land, due to its experience with waterfront capital improvement projects.

The city has owned the ship since

Continued on page 18



The Queen Mary sits vacant off the Long Beach coast.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal



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July 12, 2022

COLUMNIST: TIM GROBATY

A beautiful reimagining and rescuing of a historic Los Cerritos home



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

A beautifully restored and updated home at 4131 Cedar Ave. is for sale in Los Cerritos, listed at \$3.499 million.

This home is special, even by the standards of its elegant Los Cerritos neighborhood. The two-story red brick Colonial home has stood on Cedar Avenue since 1930, at a time when there was still a lot of vacant land in the area drawing the attention of wealthy families, being lured by the nearby Virginia Country Club golf course and the large lots that could accommodate big homes with plenty of room left over for landscaping, pools and outdoor entertaining.

The home at 4131 Cedar Ave. grabbed the attention of Realtor and developer Alison White, who noticed it when it went on the market and immediately knew she had to buy it. Or, rather, rescue it. “I said, ‘I have to save that house,’” she said, meaning she felt she had to prevent it from falling into the hands of institutional flippers who wouldn’t be likely to give it the attention it deserved to bring it back to its historic glory.

At the same time, White had an accident and broke her foot and had to have emergency surgery. She initially thought that it would preclude her purchase of the home, but she had submitted an offer, and “I woke up from the surgery asking about the house.” The owners chose White over what could’ve been perceived as more mercenary buyers, and she bought it in early 2021 for \$1.399 million without seeing the inside, other than a video walkthrough.

And now, after a year of intense work by White and her all-star team, which includes design expert Mindy Laven and noted architect Steve Sennikoff, the home has been not only painstakingly restored, down to historic windows with solid wood trim and the intricate 10-inch crown molding along the ceilings, but vastly improved as well, with entire rooms rebuilt and in several cases, moved and expanded.

“It needed everything,” she said. “Shoring, air-conditioning, doors and windows replaced with wood.” Not to mention walls knocked down, carpeted floors returned to original hardwood flooring and much more. It’s a mind-boggling redo that makes this home well worth the \$3.499 million list price. The listing is by Spencer Snyder.

To call White a fix-and-flipper is to vastly misunderstand the staggering amount of work and money she poured into this project. Rather than throw some paint around and plant a few flats of petunias, she undertook a thorough reimagining of the residence. And, though this is her 35th flip, she says it was the most ambitious and most daunting—as well as the most rewarding—of her undertakings.

She modernized the Cedar house by opening up the floor plan, allowing for more light and space. The living room once had a small window facing the backyard which, at great expense, was removed and replaced by French doors leading out to a beautifully simple and inviting swimming pool.

Next to the pool, a garage had been converted to a fairly rustic family room, leaving no place to put vehicles. White added a garage and thoroughly modernized the family room which can now be used as a pool house.

“I think it looks fabulous,” said Dorothy Sears Banks, who grew up in the house after her parents bought it in 1969 and who sold the house to White. “She updated some things, and restored other parts. She renovated the master room in a

way that’s really nice overlooking the backyard. And did she show you the Prohibition room?”

She did; it’s a tiny hidden room behind a pivoting panel that White wasn’t aware of when she began remodeling the kitchen. They had the kitchen designed in such a way that she’d have to tear down the wall that hid the little speakeasy that had a space that was signed by visitors going back to the 1930s as well as various liquor labels. “I said we had to keep it,” she said, so it was back to the drawing board to change the kitchen’s plans to accommodate the Prohibition room.

White had initially wished to save the home’s red-brick exterior, but so many of the bricks had been degraded over time that she eventually had to surrender to patching them and giving the house a coat of white paint. “I was heartbroken, but I knew it had to be done and I think now that it looks wonderful,” she said. “But I had to stay away while the painters were working on it. I couldn’t bear to watch.”

Architect Sennikoff, who has designed several homes in Naples and Newport Beach, collaborated with White on the redesigns, noting, “She’s got a lot of vision and the house now looks like we designed it; we drew it up in accordance with her vision.”

He recalls seeing the house for the first time, before work began. “It was falling apart,” he said. “And it was very dark. We had to open it up quite a bit to make it more modern, letting the outside in, bringing in a lot more light. Homeowners and architects in the 1930s didn’t think about design the way we think about it now.”

Although much of White’s work is done in Westchester, where she lives, she’s become more enamored of Long Beach, where she also owns a home in Belmont Shore.

“It’s a beautiful city, and the prices are lower than in many parts of Los Angeles. I bring people here to look at houses and many of them have since bought a home here. I keep recruiting people to come to Long Beach.”

Because of the amount of money White has poured into the Cedar house, sparing no expense on every detail, even if she sells the house for its asking price, she’s not going to make a ton of money on it. “I didn’t anticipate spending so much,” she said. “But it needed to be done. It’s a beautiful house. I’m really happy with it. Whoever buys it is going to love it.” ■



Courtesy of Alison White and Christopher Lee Foto

A before and after photo of the dining room of 1930 home at 4131 Cedar Ave.

First count since pandemic began shows homelessness grew 62% in Long Beach

By Jason Ruiz

The number of people who are homeless in Long Beach increased by 62% since 2020, according to data released earlier this month from the point-in-time count held in February. Nearly 1,300 more people are now in some state of homelessness than were counted in 2020, with 2,287 of those people being unsheltered. The 2020 count found 2,034 people total either living on the streets, in their cars or in one of the city’s shelters. This year’s count saw that number jump to 3,296.

The city did not conduct a count in 2021 due to the pandemic. A comprehensive report with data about the demographic, financial and health data of those counted was also released by the city on July 1.

It showed that over two-thirds of the people counted (69%) are unsheltered, but Jennifer Rice Epstein, a spokesperson for the Health Department, said that the city has increased the number of people who are in some form of shelter since the 2020 count. A total of 1,009 people are in some form of housing or temporary shelter, up from the 452 people the city counted as sheltered in the 2020 count.

The city has touted non-congregate living situations like those provided through motel conversions and motel vouchers as one of the ways it’s been able to house more people in recent years, because people are more



Volunteers talk with Jacob Lansdale, who is homeless, as he sits next to his cart during the Long Beach homeless count.

willing to accept accommodations where there is more privacy and safety.

Still, there are 700 more people living on the streets compared to the point-in-time count conducted in 2020.

Rice Epstein said the city could house even more people if landlords are willing to step up and allow the hundreds of people currently experiencing homelessness with housing vouchers to move into their units.

“We could decrease our numbers by 15%, street homelessness specifically,” she said, making a designation between those people already living in shelters.

The city is currently waiting to hear back on up to \$45 million in state funds it requested earlier this year to build 35 tiny homes at the Multi Service Center and to potentially purchase another motel to convert into transitional housing.

One of the biggest changes, though, was a marked increase in the number of people who were found living in their cars. Nearly a quarter of those living on the street were living in their cars, according to city data.

The largest age group experiencing homelessness was the 18-54-year-old population (2,290), but 938 people over the age of 55 were also counted.

A total of 38 families with children were counted, 33 of which are living in some form of shelter.

A majority of those counted were male (71%), while Black people (1,195) made up the largest racial population of those surveyed by the city. White people (1,187) were the second largest racial group counted. (According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates, Long Beach’s overall population is 12.6% Black and 28.1% White.)

Data compiled from the city shows that a large amount of those living in homelessness have some physical, mental or behavioral health issues. Over one-third (1,214) reported having a severe mental illness, a 143% increase from 2020. People with physical disabilities (826), chronic medical conditions (704) and substance abuse issues (951) also made up large percentages of the overall count.

The report pointed to systemic inequities in governmental policies that have disproportionately affected communities of color, particularly when it comes to poverty and low rates of home ownership. The report said that if those inequities were eliminated, the number of people who are currently homeless could be reduced by 26%.

Since 2012, the average cost of a studio apartment in the city has increased from \$700 to \$1,450. Over 40% of those surveyed cited financial stresses as a reason they ended up on the streets, a 35% increase since 2020. ■

City officials could add another homeless outreach team as part of upcoming budget

An expansion would add one more team, bringing the total to three, which would allow the city to offer the outreach service over weekends.

By Jason Ruiz

Long Beach could be looking to expand its recently created homeless outreach team, which responds to calls involving the unhoused with nurses and clinicians instead of police officers, in the upcoming fiscal year.

The city announced two Restorative Engagement to Achieve Collective Health (REACH) teams last year, which use a public health nurse, mental health clinician and two outreach workers to connect with people experiencing homelessness both to lessen the strain on police and fire personnel, but also to connect them to services like housing and mental health care.

The teams currently only work weekdays.

An expansion would add one more team, bringing the total to three, which would allow the city to offer the service over weekends.

Kelly Colopy, director of the city’s Health and Human Services Department, said that since its implementation in August, the REACH team has responded to 567 calls where the team met more than 1,800 people, and 87 of those resulted in ongoing support for mental health and other services.

The two teams have helped to move some of the most vulnerable residents off the streets over the past 10 months, Colopy said.

“People with over 20 years of unsheltered homelessness, people with mental health issues that have impacted their ability to provide basic care for themselves,” Colopy said during a June 27 press conference. “People who are regularly using fentanyl and are at high risk for overdose and those who are directly experiencing human trafficking.”

The press conference was held a few days before the city released the results from this year’s homeless count, which showed a 62% increase in homelessness from 2020. The city did not conduct a count last year.

Expanding the program to three teams will require the city

to allocate about \$500,000 more to the Health Department to pay for the nurse, clinician, outreach workers and necessary supplies, said Paul Duncan, the city’s homeless outreach director.

Duncan said that one nurse currently part of the team is paid out of Measure H funds, the countywide tax to address homelessness approved by voters in 2017, but the city has exhausted those funds for the program and would either need to get more from the county or have the City Council direct more money to the REACH program in the upcoming budget cycle.

Adding more REACH teams has been referenced as a priority by both remaining mayoral candidates, Councilmembers Rex Richardson and Suzie Price, who are heading to a November runoff.

Richardson asked the city in April to look at the feasibility of adding teams and has said the city needs to have more control over mental health services. Price has

said that each of the nine City Council districts needs its own REACH team.

The REACH teams recently got a new Ford Transit van that’s been converted into a type of medical triage facility where the team’s nurse can provide onsite care for people they encounter in the field.

The \$95,000 van has the capacity to hold multiple people at once and is stocked with medical supplies like Narcan, a nasal spray given to people to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

Adding a third team could help extend those services to weekends and also help shoulder the load of what’s expected to be an increase in calls now that calls placed to the city’s emergency lines will be rerouted to REACH teams.

Teams originally worked five days a week from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., according to the city, with after-hour calls being directed to a voicemail that advised calling 9-1-1. Colopy said that between 2018 and 2020,

the city received over 12,000 calls regarding homeless encampments.

Colopy said the city’s efforts to do outreach through the REACH teams and other methods, though, need to be joined by willing landlords who can help the roughly 500 homeless individuals who have housing vouchers by accepting and allowing them to sign a lease for a rental unit.

City housing choice vouchers provide a set amount of the monthly rent based on ZIP code with tenants expected to pay 40% of their income with the city’s housing authority paying the difference. But if a tenant has no income, Duncan said the full amount is typically covered.

Colopy called on property owners to step up and accept those payments.

“If you are a landlord please help and call the housing authority and sign up to participate,” Colopy said. “You can make a very big difference as these people have the opportunity to be permanently housed with your support.” ■

Queen Mary

Continued from page 16

it arrived in the 1960s but until recently has leased it to operators, which were responsible for repairs and upkeep. The most recent operator, Urban Commons, filed for bankruptcy last year.

Lloyd’s Register Americas Advisory Services (LR) and ABL USA were awarded contracts for \$127,795 and \$143,110, respectively, for the ship assessments. NRC Environmental Services had its on-call hazardous waste contract amended for an additional \$2.4 million. With a \$300,000 project contingency, the total project will cost just under \$3 million.

Sam Joublat, managing director of finance for the port, said the reports will take up to a year to be completed. Additionally, the city will pay \$1 million toward the project with another \$500,000 being considered to be paid out of revenue

generated by the ship.

Port officials declined to comment further on the assessment or the potential transfer of the ship into its care “given that it’s a pending matter before the commission.”

LR will perform historic document review, onboard inspections and strength assessment. ABL, meanwhile, will provide naval architecture services, including stability modeling, calculations for longitudinal strength, ballast and tank inspection planning, and engineering support.

As for the \$2.4 million increase in NRC’s hazardous waste contract, the money is necessary because ballast and fuel tanks must be cleared and cleaned before full assessments of the vessel can be completed.

These services are consistent with those provided by existing on-call hazardous waste removal contracts the city has with three companies: Ocean Blue, Clean Harbor and NRC, all three of which bid on the job.

The ship has been closed to the public for over two years, but the city is in the midst of millions of dollars

of repairs. Officials hope the ship can reopen later this year, and the City Council just approved a contract with Evolution Hospitality for day-to-day operations. Joublat said the work is not expected to interfere with operations.

During the June 27 meeting, Commissioner Bobby Olvera voiced concerns about labor use by NRC. Olvera questioned whether the port included a project labor agreement to ensure living wages and demanded port staff ensure the firm does not subcontract out the work to companies not beholden to such labor agreements, which has occurred in the past.

Joublat assured the commission that staff would hold NRC to its labor agreement with the port.

International Longshore Workers Union Local 56, however, has a grievance pending with NRC over a separate labor contract, several union members stated during public comment. The union members claim NRC has not used ILWU workers for jobs within the port despite the

contract, which has now lapsed, and a new agreement has not been reached.

Commissioners, for their part, said the board would cancel the NRC contract if the firm does not use Local 56 for appropriate jobs, with the contract transferring to one of the other two on-call hazardous waste firms.

Also during public comment, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association Vice President Thomas Jelenic said his organization continues to have concerns about the possible transfer of the Queen Mary to the port. Jelenic pointed to a recent City Council decision to spend \$2.87 million in pre-opening expenses to ensure the ship was prepared for visitors and argued the LR, ABL and NRC contracts should be a city matter.

“Both sums of money represent a never-ending expenditure of limited public funds for a project that has a history of 50 years of failure,” Jelenic said. “Left unsaid is the estimated \$300 million in repairs cited in the 2015 marine survey and the hundreds of millions needed to make the Queen Mary a successful operation.” ■

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Ceramist fights deportations and connects with her Cambodian culture one donut pipe at a time

By Laura Anaya-Morga

Vanndearlyn Vong is fighting deportation, connecting with her culture and healing through the art of ceramics, all to the soundtrack of '70s Cambodian rock.

Sitting at her pottery wheel, Vong puts in her earbuds and gets ready to create.

"I feel like I am swimming back to my roots or finding them again," she says about her thought process as she transforms the lump of clay in front of her.

Vong carefully forms it into her desired shape, ready to be trimmed, glazed then fired. The outcome is a perfectly fashioned pipe in the shape of a donut, a cultural symbol for Cambodians living in the U.S.

Donut shops became a staple for Cambodians who fled the violence of the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s. Building off of the success of one Cambodian refugee, Ted Ngoy, donut shops became a symbol of resilience and hope for a healing



Long Beach resident Vanndearlyn Vong is haloed with her ceramic donut pipes that she makes and sells in Los Angeles.

community. It is estimated that roughly 80% of donut shops in Southern California are owned by Cambodian refugee families.

Vong sells her pipes, and 40% of the proceeds go toward funding the

Long Beach Southeast Asian Anti-Deportation Collective (LBSEA) to fight against the deportation of Southeast Asian immigrants in Long Beach.

A first-generation Cambodian-American, Vong, 23, grew up next to a donut shop that she would often go to with her babysitter, getting to know the elders that worked there and even helping them with simple tasks like replenishing sugar containers. It was a way that she connected with her culture and stayed immersed in the Khmer language, one that she noticed herself slipping away from as she got older.

"As a child, I knew the language and was actually able to communicate with adults better than now, and I think with that comes cultural understanding," said Vong. "The clay has helped me connect to my culture. ... It gives me a glimpse into what our way of life might have been like before colonization."

In high school and throughout college, Vong became politically involved after analyzing how Cambodian people were often forgotten or left out of important conversations, especially those involving immigration reform. As a result, she graduated from Cal State Long Beach this year with a political science degree and a minor in Cambodian language and culture.

Before joining LBSEA in 2020, Vong had already gained political organizing experience by campaigning for various Long Beach politicians including Councilmember Roberto Uranga, former Councilmember Lena Gonzalez, state Assembly candidate Josh Lowenthal and Councilmember Suely Saro—the city's first Cambodian-American

council member.

A year later, in July 2021, her journey into pottery began in an effort to raise funds for LBSEA. The collective advocates for southeast Asian immigrants facing deportation after they conclude jail or prison sentences, saying it's an additional and inhumane punishment that is unique to immigrants.

Art as healing

When Vong is in the studio, the world around her gets put on pause, and the Cambodian psychedelic rock music from the 1960s and '70s playing in her earbuds helps keep her in the zone. The steady beats direct her focus and the lyrics connect her to the language of her ancestors.

"There's things that I'm able to process and work through as I work with the clay," she says.

Making ceramics gives her an outlet to decompress and disconnect, something that she says is critical in allowing her to help others through LBSEA.

A dying practice

Khmer ceramics date back to the sixth century, according to the National Endowment for the Arts, and come in a number of forms, including bells, bottles, bowls, figures, storage jars, pots and urns. The intricate details in each piece are what have inspired Vong to pursue the practice of her ancestors.

When the Khmer Rouge regime took control of Cambodia in 1975, a systemic genocide began that primarily targeted artists, writers and intellectuals, and ultimately killed nearly 2 million people.

It is estimated that only three Cambodian master ceramists survived the genocide, one of whom Vong hopes to work under and learn from this month in an effort to keep Cambodian ceramics alive.

Vong and her partner will travel from Long Beach to Lowell, Massachusetts, to visit Yari Livan, the only surviving Cambodian ceramics master living in the U.S.

"I feel hopeful. ... I feel like he's that single thread that we have and I hope to make a good connection with him and continue the tradition for our community," Vong said.

For Vong, the art of perfecting her craft will be a lifelong journey that she is ready for: "I'm very humbled and grateful to learn from the clay and learn how my ancestors were working with it. ... I imagine what their way of life might have been and how working with clay might have been healing for them." ■

Zendejas claims victory in certified election results

By Jason Ruiz

Downtown Councilmember Mary Zendejas can officially claim victory in the June 7 primary after Los Angeles County Election officials certified the final vote count earlier this month, which showed she had just enough votes to avoid a runoff election in November.

Zendejas (50.25%) led since election night and finished with over 1,100 votes more than the second-place candidate, Mariela Salgado. Local election rules require candidates to finish with over 50% of the vote to win outright.

Zendejas has served as the 1st District City Council representative since winning a 2019 special election. She will be joined by incumbent Councilmember Roberto Uranga, who also won his primary race to continue representing West Long Beach over the next four years.

Three other City Council races and the mayor's race were not decided in the primary and will head to November.

The July 1 update showed no large changes from the last few releases of votes from the county. Councilmember Rex Richardson (44%) finished 7 percentage points ahead of Councilmember Suzie Price (37%) in the race to become the city's next mayor.

The 3rd District runoff race

will have Kristina Duggan (22%) matched up against Kailee Caruso (20%), who finished less than 100 votes ahead of the third-place finisher, Nima Novin (20%).

Recounts are only initiated by the Long Beach City Clerk if the vote total between the top two vote-getters is less than 50 votes and less than 0.5%, but that doesn't stop individual candidates from requesting one. However, the city only pays for automatic recounts spelled out in the city's election ordinance.

Other seats that will be decided in November are the 5th and 9th District seats. Megan Kerr (48%) and Ian Patton (31%) maintained their positions since election night in their bids to represent the new East Long Beach district that includes parts of Bixby Knolls and Virginia Country Club.

The city's northernmost district will see Joni Ricks-Oddie (49%) and Ginny Gonzales (23%) continuing their campaigns for the 9th District seat.

The three other citywide races are also now officially over with Dawn McIntosh (City Attorney) and incumbent City Prosecutor Doug Haubert and incumbent City Auditor Laura Doud all winning in the primary.

The county's final tally showed that just over 28% of registered voters cast a ballot in this election. About 25% of Long Beach voters participated in the June 7 primary. ■

Ethics Commission weighs tighter lobbying ordinance

Commissioners have started reviewing the 12-year-old law, which, thus far, has never been used to charge anyone with violating lobbying rules.

By Jason Ruiz

The Long Beach Ethics Commission late last month discussed potentially tightening the city's lobbying ordinance by requiring elected officials to report their contacts with lobbyists, changing who has to

register as a lobbyist and adjusting how often they have to file disclosures.

The existing ordinance requires people to register as lobbyists if they cross certain thresholds for the amount of money they're paid to represent clients or for lobbying more than 50 hours in a quarter. Powerful city employee unions, neighborhood associations, business improvement districts and nonprofits do not have to file their activities.

Earlier this year, commissioners started reviewing the 12-year-old law, which, thus far, has never been used to charge anyone with violating lobbying rules. The law has been criticized for containing loopholes and exemptions allowing some special interest groups to lobby city officials without having to document their activity. The ordinance also relies on lobbyists to self-report their activities.

Dockworker Contract

Continued from page 15

port projects such as the Pier B On-Dock Rail Support Facility and the Supply Chain Information Highway," Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said.

The San Pedro Bay ports have suffered severe congestion since 2020 due to several factors, including increased e-commerce amid the pandemic. At one point, there were over 100 container ships waiting off the coast for their turn at berth. That number has since decreased to 19 as of June 30, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California.

The budget also allocates \$30 million for operational and process improvements at the state's ports, \$40 million to increase the state's commercial driver's license capacity and \$760 million for the purchase of zero-emission equipment, vehicles and infrastructure. Additionally, the budget includes \$110 million over three years for a goods movement workforce training center for San Pedro Bay port workers.

The training center will focus on worker skill development, upskilling and reskilling workers

"to address the rapidly changing needs of the logistics industry." One particular area of focus at the center will be training workers in emerging green and zero-emission technologies.

One key disagreement between the ILWU and PMA is the advancement of automation at ports, which the union claims will cost thousands of jobs and make terminals less efficient, while the PMA claims it would increase efficiency and require different skills for workers, namely for the maintenance of equipment. The training center would play a role in re-training those workers.

"The unprecedented supply chain challenges of the past two years have underscored the need to invest in new technology and training at our ports to keep goods moving reliably, efficiently and safely," Jim McKenna, president and CEO of the PMA, said in a statement.

"The members of our union have adapted to new technologies and have helped shape training programs since our inception in the 1930s," ILWU Local 13 President Ramon Ponce de Leon added. "With this important announcement, we look forward to training future generations to be productive employees on our working waterfront." ■

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R-7191 Artesia Great Blvd	PW-22-089	08/01/2022
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Continued on page 22

Lobbying Rules

Continued from page 21

That could change if commissioners continue down the path they discussed at their June 29 meeting: potentially requiring elected officials like City Council members and the mayor to document their meetings with lobbyists and advocates, something they don't currently have to do.

"They're the ones with the public's trust and obligation, and I want to see the obligations on them," said Commissioner J.P. Shotwell.

Other changes could increase reporting frequency to quarterly, with some members saying the current biannual filings often lead to issues being voted on before lobbying reports are filed with the City Clerk's Office.

The commission could make formal recommendations to the City Council later this year, but it would be up to the City Council to adopt any changes to the city's lobbying ordinance.

The June 29 study session by the commission signaled that it could propose some sweeping changes that would require more people to register as lobbyists or at least report their advocacy activity.

There was support for changing rules about nonprofits to require them to register their activity without having to register as a lobbyist, something that could affect their tax status with the Internal Revenue Service. Nonprofits, including those that represent business interests like the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, were exempted when Long Beach's lobbying law was adopted in 2010.

Requiring any documents or presentations given to city officials by lobbyists or advocates to be made public could also be one of the recommended changes.

"It would be better if those documents saw the light of day prior to the decisions being made," said Ethics Commission Chair Susan Wise.

Commissioners also showed support for changing the threshold for when a person would have to register as a lobbyist including reducing the threshold from 50 hours and potentially adding a trigger for a certain number of contacts with city officials. Changes could also require preparation time as hours that count toward the threshold.

"If you're only including meetings and someone spends 100 hours on a report and presents it to 30 people in five minutes then they're not a registered lobbyist," Commissioner Barbara Pollack said of the current policy.

The commission is expected to continue its study session in the coming months before voting on a list of recommendations to be sent to the City Council for consideration. ■



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Part of Junipero Beach could be closed later this year as crews work to remove a desalination intake prototype installed by the Long Beach Water Department in 2007.

Removing an old desalination facility could close parts of Junipero Beach for months

By Jason Ruiz

A 15-year-old pilot project that the Long Beach Water Department initiated to test a new desalination filtration process could be removed later this year and require parts of Junipero Beach to be closed to the public.

The Under Ocean Floor Seawater Intake & Discharge Demonstration System was intended to study a new and less intrusive way of stripping the salt out of seawater to make it safe for consumption.

An initial permit allowed the department to study the technology for five years, and the department extended the permit for an additional 10 years. But now, the project is expected to come to an end in May 2023. Removing the system is expected to cost about \$5 million with work expected to start in September.

The project area is located between the Junipero Beach parking lot and the ocean. Removing the system is expected to take about seven months, said Lauren Gold, a spokesperson for the department.

Gold said there will be some disruptions to the beach and a small part of the parking lot that will serve as a staging area, but the neighboring beach concession stand, Saltwater Deck, and the beach bike path will remain open to the public as crews work to remove the intake and discharge sites buried under the sand.

"We don't anticipate that those would be simultaneous, so that

minimizes the beach area closures at any one time," Gold said in an email about the demolition of the desalination system.

The California Coastal Commission, which granted the permits to the department, is also requiring the removal of the system to take place between Labor Day and Memorial Day. Gold said that there is no hard date for work to begin, but it should start shortly after Sept. 5 and last about seven months.

The project was part of what was the largest research project of its kind in the country and was capable of desalinating 300,000 gallons per day.

The underground Junipero Beach installation tested less intrusive ways to take water from the ocean and filter it for consumption while reducing the damage done to marine life. At the same time, an actual desalination site was installed in East Long Beach at the Haynes Power Plant, which is operated by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. That site operated until 2010.

Tai Tseng, assistant general manager of operations at the Water Department, said the technology being studied at Junipero Beach worked, but the department would need about 100 to 200 times the intake for a full-scale facility, adding that the technology was feasible but not cost-effective. The department's groundwater treatment plant has the capacity to process 62.5 million gallons per day.

"That's a lot of beach we'd have to take up," Tseng said.

The Long Beach Water Department was looking at desalination in the early 2000s but has since focused on accessing groundwater, which makes up about 60% of the city's water supply. The annual budget adopted late last month included \$41 million in investments into the city's groundwater supply chain, including the development of several new wells.

Long Beach hasn't ruled out desalination completely.

A 2019 report prepared for the department listed scenarios where the city could look to desalination in the future. Desalination received high scores for being drought-proof and for the potential for federal and state funding to be used to build a facility.

It received the lowest score for the permitting process that would likely be difficult due to desalination plants' potential to create greenhouse gases and harm ocean life, and it was projected to cost more than three times the amount to create an acre-foot of water—about 326,000 gallons—than pumping it out of the ground.

In May, the California Coastal Commission unanimously rejected a desalination plant project in Huntington Beach that could have generated 50 million gallons of water per day due to concerns about how it would affect the environment.

California is in a third consecutive year of drought, and state water officials have warned that more dramatic measures to conserve water could be announced in the coming months if dry conditions persist. ■

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