

LONG BEACH

BUSINESS JOURNAL

An edition of the Long Beach Post



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Dr. Graham Tse walks through the pediatric intensive care unit at Miller Children's & Women's Hospital.

Health care workers tackle COVID, monkeypox crises

By Brandon Richardson

After almost two and a half years of working through a global pandemic—one that is still prevalent—health workers in Long Beach and across the U.S. are now facing yet another disease spreading through their communities: monkeypox.

Officials in the local health system, however, say they are ready to take on the one-two punch.

“I don’t want to underplay burnout,” Dr. Graham Tse, physician-in-charge of COVID at Long Beach Memorial, said. “Everyone’s been affected, but we support each other as a team.”

The coronavirus pandemic has taken its toll on Long Beach, with 1,308 related deaths and over

145,000 cases reported as of Aug. 4 since its onset. The disease has come in waves, with the worst of it striking in the winter of 2020-21.

At its peak, the pandemic threatened to overwhelm area hospitals, which were nearing capacity and oftentimes short-staffed, in part due to a years-long nursing shortage. Since then, the severity of the coronavirus has ebbed and flowed—but never let up entirely to allow health workers to breathe.

“The demands on our people and their selfless dedication to serve are unmatched,” Carolyn Caldwell, president of St. Mary Medical Center, said in an email.

Now, after a spike in COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths that is just beginning to subside, monkeypox is spreading quickly,

with state, county and local officials all declaring a state of emergency last week. Since the first Long Beach case was reported on July 16, the figure grew to 25 as of Aug. 5—an average of more than one new case per day.

“There’s no panic, there’s awareness,” Tse said about the atmosphere at the hospital. “We’re working closely with the public health department, internally our epidemiology and infection prevention specialists are educating our providers and our staff, and we’re being cautious.”

There is some overlap in symptoms for COVID-19 and monkeypox, Tse said, so staff must take extra precautions until it is determined which, if either, of the diseases they are infected with. The guiding principles of the hospital are to ensure the safety of patients, visitors and staff, he added, so if there are concerns, patients are isolated until specialists make a determination.

The health care industry has become accustomed to dealing with health emergencies since early 2020, Caldwell said. Tse echoed Caldwell’s sentiment, adding that one silver lining of the coronavirus pandemic is that communication among hospitals and various local, state and federal health agencies

Long Beach Memorial CEO, COO resign unexpectedly

By Brandon Richardson

Two top executives at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center are slated to leave the hospital after they unexpectedly announced their resignations late last month.

CEO John Bishop shared the news of his departure, along with that of chief operating officer Ike Mmeje, in a July 26 letter to staff obtained by the Business Journal.

“Like many, I have found myself during the last two years of a pandemic doing a lot of personal reflection, and I’ve been evaluating both my personal and professional goals,” Bishop wrote.

“As we position ourselves for the future, I have concluded that what

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Health care workers will see wage bump

By Jason Ruiz

Health care workers erupted in applause last week when the Long Beach City Council voted unanimously to move forward with boosting the city’s minimum wage for health care employees to \$25 per hour instead of asking voters to decide on the issue in the Nov. 8 election.

The increase will apply to all employees including clinicians, nursing assistants, janitors, pharmacists and laundry workers at private Long Beach health care facilities. The types of facilities it would apply to include acute psychiatric hospitals, dialysis clinics, hospitals and other businesses that are part of an integrated health care delivery system.

There are over 1,100 health care facilities in the city that account for about 19,000 jobs, or about 11% of the city’s workforce.

“These hospitals definitely can afford this and there’s no reason they can’t pay their workers \$25 or even more,” said Suzanne Jimenez, the measure’s proponent and political director for Service Employees International Union-

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Major upgrades coming to VA hospital

The construction project, which includes a new mental health and community living center, will bring long-needed improvements to the facility and the patients it serves.

By Christian May-Suzuki

Major renovations are coming to the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center in Long Beach.

The \$387 million construction project, which includes a new mental health and community living center, will bring long-needed upgrades to the facility and the patients it serves.

Here is a look at what's in store.

Mental health facility

A new mental health facility is coming to the hospital to replace its 1966 predecessor, according to the medical center's chief engineer, Anthony Streletz.

"There are unique needs for veterans of the different specialized trauma that they go through in combat that no one else goes



Courtesy of VA Long Beach Healthcare System

The new community living center being built will feature a "small house" concept to promote a more intimate environment.

through," Streletz said. "It's steadily increased as a need."

Replacing the outdated center will be two new buildings: an 82,000-square-foot inpatient center and an 80,000-square-foot outpatient center. The inpatient center will have 45 beds for veterans, 15 more than the current center, and the outpatient center will offer a meeting space with large open spaces.

The new center is being built on a separate lot from the old one, allowing service to continue while the new buildings are under

construction. Work on the new facility began in January 2019, and the hospital expects that the buildings will be ready to welcome patients by August of next year. The demolition of the old mental health facility is slated for January 2024.

Community living center

Construction is also underway on a community living center, which will house veterans that are in need of assisted living services. Like the mental health center, the current building offering these services was originally put up in the 1960s.

"The manner in which services are provided has changed significantly over the decades," Streletz said.

The new 160,000-square-foot community living center will have 120 rooms and be built in a design style called the "small house concept."

Instead of connecting hundreds of rooms to a single communal space, the new center will be divided up into 10 houses that each have their own communal space along with 12 individual rooms.

"We are trying to orient it towards a more home-like environment for

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Long Beach Memorial

Continued from cover

is best for both the organization and for me is to allow for someone new to lead you through the next exciting chapter," Bishop added.

The medical center will conduct a national search for a new CEO, according to a statement from the hospital, and Bishop has agreed to stay on until a replacement is found.

Mmeje, on the other hand, will leave the hospital Aug. 24 "to pursue other opportunities," the statement reads.

Helen Macfie, who has been a member of the MemorialCare health system's senior leadership team for over 17 years, assumed the role of acting COO on July 27. Macfie most recently served as the health system's chief transformation officer.

"I am excited to join the senior leadership team on the Long Beach campus as we work together to strengthen our relationships, enhance our operations and provide the very best care to our

patients," Macfie was quoted as saying in Bishop's letter. "I have been meeting with John and Ike to discuss our opportunities, and I look forward to working with them and the rest of the team to identify, prioritize and implement key initiatives."

Bishop first joined the Memorial team in 2009 as chief financial officer of the Long Beach campus. In 2015, he assumed the role of CEO.

Prior to coming to Long Beach, Bishop was CFO of Saddleback Memorial Medical Center.

Mmeje has been COO of Memorial since September 2017. He also became COO of Miller Children's & Women's Hospital in early 2019.

"We greatly appreciate both John's and Ike's contributions to our organization and their years of dedicated service to our community," the hospital said in its statement. "We are also grateful to Helen and the other talented leaders at the Long Beach campus who will help lead the hospitals through the transition and in the years ahead."

The announcement came less than two weeks after a story



Courtesy of Long Beach Memorial

Long Beach Memorial executives John Bishop, left, and Ike Mmeje announced their resignations last month.

published by the Southern California News Group described how the hospital narrowly avoided losing Medicare funding after patient care lapses. State inspectors spent nine days at Memorial reviewing the

records of 33 patients and conducting interviews with staff.

A hospital spokesperson declined to comment on whether there was a connection between the recent report and the resignations. ■

LA County, Long Beach health officials opt not to reinstate indoor mask mandate

Both the city and county continue to strongly recommend wearing masks in most circumstances.

By Brandon Richardson

Citing continued downward trends in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, Los Angeles County scrubbed plans late last month to re-impose a universal indoor mask-wearing mandate. The decision came two days after Long Beach announced that it would not impose a local mask mandate regardless of the county’s decision. The city, instead, will continue to follow California Department of Public Health guidelines,

which only recommend—not require—masking in most circumstances, according to a July 26 announcement from the city’s Health Department. “The Health Department strongly encourages people to practice personal responsibility and common-sense measures to protect themselves, their loved ones and the greater community from COVID-19,” the Health Department said in a statement. “People are advised to mask indoors when in public places, conduct rapid testing before and three to five days after social gatherings and choose outdoor activities where possible.” Masks are still mandated in indoor health care facilities, transit hubs, on transit vehicles, airports, correctional facilities and shelters. A universal mandate would spread the requirement to all indoor public spaces, including shared office spaces, manufacturing

facilities, retail stores, indoor events, indoor restaurants, bars and schools. In mid-July, with coronavirus surging, Los Angeles County health officials announced a universal indoor mask mandate would likely be reinstated on July 29. At the time, Long Beach health officials said they were uncertain if it would fall in line with the county. Speaking to the Board of Supervisors on July 26, however, Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said countywide cases, hospitalization and death numbers were stabilizing. She stressed during her presentation, however, that transmission of COVID-19 remains high across the county, and the virus is still a leading cause of death, killing more people in the first six months of the year than drug overdoses, the flu and traffic crashes combined. But the idea of a renewed indoor

masking mandate has generated opposition, including from the Los Angeles County Business Federation and county Supervisor Kathryn Barger, who said she believes in the effectiveness of masks, but not of mask mandates. Barger said that she does not believe there is any “empirical data” proving that a mask mandate will be more effective than simply strongly recommending masks. “I am adamantly opposed to mandating the masking because I truly do believe it’s going to have the opposite effect,” Barger said. Barger earned support from Supervisor Janice Hahn, who said she feared imposing a universal mandate would “be very divisive for LA County.” “I honestly believe there are a significant number of the population who are not willing to accept mask mandates at this point,” Hahn said. City News Service contributed to this report. ■

Wage Bump

Continued from cover

United Healthcare Workers West. The SEIU-UWH led the charge to qualify the issue for the Nov. 8 ballot, turning in enough signatures early this year to force a vote. After that, the council had the limited options of putting it on the ballot for voters to decide, creating a competing initiative to place on the ballot alongside the minimum wage increase or adopting it outright, as it did Aug. 2.

Representatives from some of the city’s largest health care providers, including Long Beach Memorial and St. Mary Medical Center, tried to persuade the council to send it to voters, noting that it could affect how health care is delivered for the entire city.

“The people have spoken, and they want to take care of health care workers as they have taken care of us,” said Councilmember Suely Saro, who made the motion to adopt it as an ordinance.

Saro and others thought the cost of putting the issue on the ballot—about \$100,000 to \$150,000—would not be justified given the thousands of people who signed on to support the ballot initiative.

The council had waited until last week to take action as it awaited the completion of an economic impact report from the

Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. The LAEDC had only about a month to compile the 50-plus page report, but it found that the wage hike would likely result in the loss of upwards of 58 jobs. Those who keep their jobs, however, could see millions in wage growth that could allow them to quit second jobs, something echoed by multiple speakers who supported the wage hike during last week’s City

was conducted, its authors recommended a broader study to examine how the wage increase would affect the Long Beach health care network over the next few years. “There are a lot of unknowns, but the one thing we do know is that the health care workers who endured an unprecedented time over the past few years will be compensated today and going forward,” said Councilmember Al Austin.

Pay Measure coalition, a group of health care providers who opposed the measure in Long Beach and other cities, said in a statement that the policy is harmful and would arbitrarily impact which workers make more money to do the same job depending on whether they work at a facility covered under the measure. “It will exacerbate disparities in our health care system by creating staffing shortages at community clinics and public health care providers that disproportionately serve disadvantaged patients,” the group said in a statement.

Enforcement of the measure would fall on the city, and officials estimate that it could cost \$1.2 million per year for the city. Long Beach was the largest remaining city to make a decision on the measure out of about 10 where similar measures were circulated. It now joins Downey and Los Angeles, which adopted the measures as ordinances earlier this year.

A coalition of hospital groups is now trying to repeal the votes of the LA and Downey city councils through a referendum process. To implement their decision, Long Beach council members are expected to vote on the minimum wage increase ordinance at the Aug. 9 meeting. City ordinances that are not emergency ordinances typically go into effect 30 days after they’re signed by the mayor, who tweeted that he supports the measure. ■

“The people have spoken, and they want to take care of health care workers as they have taken care of us.”

- Suely Saro, Long Beach City Councilmember

Council meeting. The report also warned that the long-term effects of the wage increase could lead to limited job growth in those job classifications and potentially cause some facilities to close or relocate, or invest less in technology to account for the increased labor costs. Because of the condensed timeframe in which the report



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Dr. Anissa Davis, health officer for the city of Long Beach, talks during a media conference along with Long Beach government and health officials about the latest update on the rise of monkeypox cases in Long Beach.

Long Beach declares local monkeypox emergency, expands vaccine eligibility

By Jeremiah Dobruck

Long Beach’s city manager declared a local emergency last week in an effort to speed up the local response to monkeypox, a move that follows in the footsteps of Los Angeles County, Orange County and the state of California, which have all recently issued emergency declarations.

The decision, which came days ahead of a federal emergency declaration, unlocks some access to state and federal reimbursements and lets the city act more swiftly in deploying resources, purchasing

needed supplies and coordinating across multiple agencies. At the same time it announced the emergency declaration on Aug. 2, Long Beach also expanded who is eligible for a monkeypox vaccine. Anyone who’s been exposed to the virus can get the vaccine, which can still be effective in preventing disease if it’s administered within a few days of someone being exposed. But the city has mostly restricted eligibility to the LGBTQ community, where the disease is disproportionately spreading. Last week, the city announced it would also start providing shots to

immunocompromised residents, “who may be at high risk for severe disease.” The city also expanded eligibility to include gay or bisexual men and transgender adults who have had multiple or anonymous sex partners in the last 14 days, “including engaging in survival and/or transactional sex (e.g., sex in exchange for shelter, food and other goods and needs).” The full list of people eligible for the vaccine is: • People who were exposed to someone with confirmed monkeypox and do not have symptoms. • People who attended an event/

Two Crises

Continued from cover

has improved greatly. “There’s much more collaboration to make sure everyone’s on the same page,” Tse said. Health workers have more advantages in combating monkeypox, Tse noted. First and foremost, it is not a new disease, but one that is well-known to the medical community, unlike the novel coronavirus. When it first emerged, scientists and doctors did not even know how COVID-19 was spread. This is not the case with monkeypox, which spreads through close, personal,

often skin-to-skin contact, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Additionally, a vaccine already exists for monkeypox. Tse urges everyone to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and for everyone in eligible, vulnerable groups to get inoculated against monkeypox after consulting a doctor. Early in the coronavirus pandemic, there were shortages of tests as well as protective equipment for health workers—two issues that no longer exist, Tse said. And when the coronavirus vaccine was rolled out, there was limited quantity—another nonissue today. The monkeypox vaccine, however, is somewhat limited due to U.S. stockpiles expiring. But production

is well underway, and doses are being shipped nationwide regularly. One area of concern, however, is that the collective public health consciousness has deteriorated further throughout the course of the coronavirus pandemic, Tse said. This shift away from worrying about general public health to only one’s individual health is due in large part to the rampant spread of misinformation, he said. Prior to the pandemic, it was common for people to go to work, school and other public areas despite having a cold or even the flu. This practice, however—the culture of being present and productive no matter what—is unsafe and people should stay home if they are feeling ill, Tse said.

venue where there was high risk of exposure to someone with confirmed monkeypox. •Gay or bisexual men and transgender persons who are on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). • Gay or bisexual men and transgender people who attended saunas, bathhouses, sex clubs, circuit parties or sex parties where they had anonymous sex or sex with multiple partners. • Gay or bisexual men and transgender people with a diagnosis of gonorrhea or early syphilis within the past 12 months. • Gay or bisexual men and transgender people 18 and older who had multiple or anonymous sex partners in the last 14 days including engaging in survival and/or transactional sex (e.g., sex in exchange for shelter, food and other goods and needs). • Residents who are immunocompromised, including those with advanced or uncontrolled HIV, who may be at high risk for severe disease. Long Beach officials said on Aug. 2 that they had vaccinated 620 people so far, but they expected that number to hit 1,400 by the end of last week. Vaccines have been in short supply across the country, but as the city receives more, it will continue to expand who can get a shot. “By expanding vaccine eligibility even further, we can continue working to slow the spread and quickly protect our highest risk populations,” Mayor Robert Garcia said in a statement. As of Aug. 5, there were 25 confirmed or presumptive cases of monkeypox in Long Beach, including the first local child to contract the disease. “Although the number of monkeypox cases are still low, we are taking this response very seriously,” said City Manager Tom Modica. To get vaccinated, you must pre-register with the city at longbeach.gov/monkeypox. If you meet the eligibility criteria, the city will contact you with information on how to get vaccinated when it’s your turn. ■



A woman walks into the Long Beach Senior Center on Fourth Street in Alamitos Beach.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

How COVID changed senior care in Long Beach

By Christian May-Suzuki

Staff shortages. Increased isolation. Technological challenges.

Senior service providers, like so many other businesses, faced significant hurdles during the COVID-19 pandemic. But unlike in other industries, these businesses were serving a population that was already vulnerable to isolation and illness.

Across the board, senior care providers in Long Beach had to shift. Senior Helpers, a home care provider, had to mitigate the risk of bringing the virus into clients' homes, while the business models for nonprofit Heart of Ida and the city's senior centers—which rely on people coming in person to use or request service—were upended.

A shortage of workers was one of the most immediate challenges when COVID hit.

Senior Helpers, for example, couldn't function without its caregivers.

The agency continued its home visits, even in the height of lockdowns, and caregivers' jobs became even more tedious to ensure the health and safety of themselves and their clients.

"Have they been anywhere? Have they been exposed? Do they have a temperature? These are all questions a caregiver has to answer before clocking into a home," Senior Helpers owner Julia LaPlount said.

But wages for home care providers

tend to be low, and LaPlount said larger unemployment checks during COVID caused her to lose workers.

"A lot of our caregivers just quit. They just wouldn't show up," LaPlount said. "When you assigned them shifts, they just didn't answer, and they collected unemployment."

While LaPlount said her agency would ideally have two-to-three caregivers on staff for every client, that ratio fell to one caregiver per client—11 of each—during the worst of COVID.

To make up for this gap, LaPlount, her grandson and her daughter—who had been handling the administrative tasks—also served as caregivers, a responsibility that LaPlount said they have only recently been able to relinquish as more caregivers have been brought on.

Heart of Ida, meanwhile, is a smaller operation with anywhere from two to four people on its staff, though the nonprofit relies on volunteers to provide many of its services. These volunteers came in steadily through the pandemic, but on the administrative side, the group's founder Dina Berg still had to put in long hours to help sign people up for new virtual programs that were in high demand while the nonprofit's base of operations at the Long Beach Senior Center was closed.

There were financial difficulties, as well.

As a nonprofit, Heart of Ida has always run a tight ship, but the group

had to end certain programs, such as a "Safe at Home" initiative that helped install grab bars and other safety amenities in clients' homes, that had previously provided necessary funding. The loss of revenue forced Berg to rethink what programming was essential for her to maintain.

"It made us reassess what we needed, where our programs should be," she said of the pandemic. "It really just made us stop and think about us as an organization in the future and what we want."

And during the pandemic, one priority became clear: combating isolation.

"You could tell they were kind of starting to lose it," Berg said of some lonely clients.

While the popularity of digital tools like Zoom skyrocketed during the pandemic, adapting to new technologies posed a challenge to some seniors.

So Heart of Ida and Senior Helpers both fell back to a more traditional method of communication: calling clients regularly to check in on them.

"When you can't see seniors, you still have to establish some kind of contact with them," LaPlount said. "We spent a lot of time just on the phone, calling them and seeing how they were doing."

But the telephone didn't address every need.

For the city, Zoom was a necessity

for seniors to participate in virtual classes that focused on topics like flower arrangements and painting, where seniors would use their own supplies or materials.

"It was tricky," Recreation Superintendent Heidi Mazas said of trying to get seniors used to Zoom. "You would get them into class, and then the next day they would have trouble."

City staff had to get creative. One way to address the problem was by starting classes with the ins and outs of Zoom before getting into the actual topic of the class.

It's a change that Mazas said will stay for the long term, as the city will continue to prioritize digital inclusion in its senior programming. One example is the city's new "tech days," which are held once a week.

"Now, we have it consistently on our calendars," Mazas said.

Even with service providers' best efforts, the pandemic still had a deep impact on seniors in Long Beach. Berg noticed an older woman develop a limp, and Mazas still knows seniors that are fearful of returning to in-person events, even over a year after the centers reopened.

As the needs of the senior population in Long Beach continue to evolve, so too will the organizations tasked with nurturing them.

"It's a personal business," LaPlount said, "and it needs to be treated that way." ■

VA Hospital

Continued from page 3

veterans to feel more self-sufficient and self-capable within the spaces and are cared for," Streletz said. "It's a much more community-focused type healing environment."

Some of these houses will focus on specific needs, Streletz said, like veterans suffering from dementia, which can create a better environment for the veterans and the staff members who care for them.

Work on this project started in late August 2019, and the new community living center is slated to welcome its first patients by the end of 2023. The current center is scheduled for demolition starting in January 2024.

Athletic complex

An outdoor athletic complex that will serve mobility-challenged veterans is on its way to replace a grass-field parking lot at the hospital.

The complex will still need parking, so the project includes a new 140-stall asphalt lot.

"With our veteran demographics, grass flats aren't the best type of parking [for those] with a lot of mobility issues," Streletz said. "So we're basically upgrading that parking area."

The lot will meet standards outlined in the Americans with

Disabilities Act, with improved pedestrian accessibility that includes a new wellness path.

The athletic complex, meanwhile, will include a basketball and tennis court, an outdoor gym and an archery range—all of which will be specially built to serve those with mobility challenges.

"Para-athletes come here to train," Streletz said. "These facilities will be for their use."

Work on the project is expected to start in September and be completed in December. Patients will be able to use the field approximately 30 days after completion.

Parking garage

As some of these projects are replacing parking lots at the hospital, a new parking garage is also being built.

The garage will be an expansion of the existing parking lot D, increasing its capacity from 250 to 580 parking spots.

"We can only take down so much parking at a time," Streletz said. "It'll render the campus inoperational if we don't have enough parking."

Construction is expected to start in the winter or spring, with work wrapping up in the spring of 2024.

Kitchen upgrade

The hospital's kitchen has long been in need of an update, as it currently only serves as a reheating room—forcing the hospital to bring

food in from elsewhere.

"For whatever reason, the determination was made that kitchen services for prepared food would not be provided at this facility," Streletz said. "We would cater it from our sister facility in Greater Los Angeles on a daily basis, and then it would be reheated here and distributed to the patients."

Patients, of course, noticed the difference and have long complained about the lackluster food.

But taste isn't the only consideration. Staff members have noted that it's more difficult to meet

patients' specific dietary needs with catered food. So the new facility will instead be a full-service kitchen.

"The new kitchen provides better quality food that can be custom made to the patients' diets and needs," Streletz said.

Work on the kitchen began in late December 2018, and officials expect it to be completed this December.

But because supplies need to be moved to the new facility, and staff need to be trained on the new full-service operation, Streletz said the new kitchen likely won't be in use until the spring. ■



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CITY OF LONG BEACH

Continued on page 8

Mammography

Continued from page 7

who might not be comfortable while maintaining the proper position, or skin folds or other abnormalities that could hide cancerous cells—and determine the steps that will lead to appropriate solutions.

Things like setting up a team, effectively defining a problem and its scope, setting specific goals and analyzing the workplace and workflow to identify obstacles are all part of the curriculum the ACR is bringing to the table.

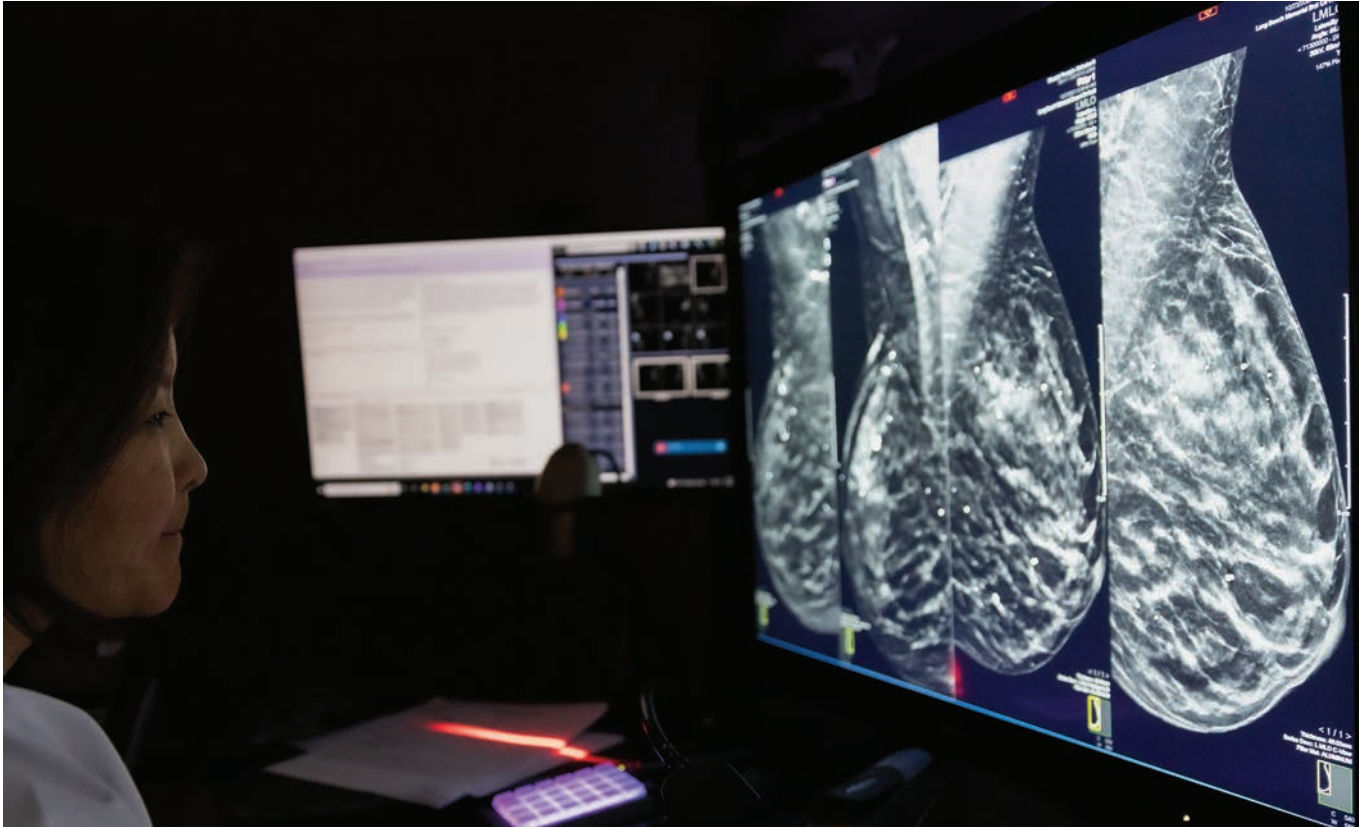
“All improvement is not easy to do. It’s not intuitive,” Larson said. “To do it reliably requires having project management, it requires improving methods, having the organization support, having access to data, all those things.”

In fact, as a requirement to join the collaborative, institutions needed to have a dedicated “quality improvement coach,” or someone with quality improvement experience.

“Anyone who has done quality improvement recognizes that there’s many ways a quality improvement project can fail,” Larson said. “It has to do with the methodology, with the interactions between the team members having access to the data, the support from the local leadership, or the collaboration between different parts of the organization.”

While this type of focus on problem-solving would be beneficial in any field, it’s clearly needed in the world of mammography.

The inability to meet mammography standards is one of the biggest reasons that sites



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Dr. Angela Sie, medical director of breast imaging at the MemorialCare Breast Center in Long Beach, examines a patient’s mammogram images.

fail accreditation with the ACR, Larson said, and having that accreditation is an important part of demonstrating legitimacy for a hospital’s radiology procedures.

The inconsistency is also a problem acknowledged by major health organizations.

“It’s [an area] that the FDA has specifically looked at, because they recognize the challenge,” Larson said. “It’s very important in the diagnosis of breast cancer, the way the breast is positioned on an image can make the difference between whether a cancer is detectable or not.”

But the six institutions currently working in the collaborative are well-positioned to help address the problem.

“We already were very data driven; we already had implemented many quality improvement processes and items and software,” the Todd Cancer Institute’s executive director and collaborative sponsor, Lisa Poorman, said. “We were already trying to get there.”

Still, MemorialCare Breast Center’s imaging director Angela Sie said she has been pleasantly surprised by the collaborative’s approach.

Breast Center supervisor Bree Hysjulien, who serves as the project leader for the collaborative.

The results of these exams are gathered and shared with the other hospitals to compare with other systems as a way to test the effectiveness of the new methods.

While the new practices and standards that come out of this collaborative are key, a broader goal of the collaborative is to establish leaders in the field to spread that knowledge.

“That’s what we hope will differentiate it from being just a course you take or a project you



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Bree Hysjulien, breast center clinic supervisor at the MemorialCare Breast Center, demonstrates the process of conducting a mammogram.

“Anyone who has done quality improvement recognizes that there’s many ways a quality improvement project can fail.”

- David Larson, Stanford Department of Radiology’s Vice Chair of Education and Clinical Operations

“For some reason, I thought it was just going to be, ‘Oh, this is what you have to do to optimize positioning,’” Sie said. “It’s much more process-based, and it has really taught us how to attack a problem, how to improve the solution and how to measure how you are doing.”

The collaborative also has checks in place to ensure the new processes are achieving the intended results. Every week, the team audits about 60 breast cancer scans that have resulted from the collaborative’s process, according to MemorialCare

undertake one time,” Larson said. “It becomes not only something that you ingrain within your own organization, but that you then share and learn from others.”

The team at the MemorialCare Breast Center, for its part, is ready to take on that task.

“Nowadays with Zoom, you can have a conversation with anyone anywhere in the world,” Sie said. “We can discuss what we went through, how it affected us and if we had lasting improvement, because the goal is to have lasting improvement in our positioning.” ■

Breakers Hotel to open next October as a Fairmont property



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Mayor Robert Garcia and members of Pacific6 Enterprises watch the unveiling of the Breakers Hotel under its new operator, Fairmont.

By Christian May-Suzuki

The long-awaited opening of the Breakers Hotel is slated for next fall—and the property now has a new operator behind the effort.

Officials announced late last month that Fairmont Hotels and Resorts is adding the building to its portfolio in partnership with the property’s owner, Pacific6 Enterprises. The hotel’s official name is now Fairmont The Breakers, Long Beach.

It was an easy call for executives with the multinational hospitality company ACCOR, which owns Fairmont, who made a recent visit to

see the hotel.

“My colleague and I were invited to come down here in February,” ACCOR United States COO Ben Cadwell said. “After that, we looked at each other and said, ‘This is the perfect Fairmont hotel.’”

The property is still in the midst of an extensive renovation process to prepare the building—which was last occupied by an assisted living facility from 1991 to 2015—to host guests.

Most of the 185 units offered will be king-sized rooms, but there will also be 26 suites for guests.

Several existing features from the original concept, like the Sky Room and the rooftop

bar, have been renovated, while other amenities, including a pool and a new ground-floor Italian restaurant, have been added to enhance the experience for both guests and locals. A ground-floor spa with treatment rooms will also be open to the general public and offer a membership to about 300 interested patrons.

“It’s the only spa in any hotel in Long Beach,” Pacific6 Enterprises Vice President of Real Estate and Hospitality Renato Alesiani said. “I would also say it’s the only luxury spa in the entire city.”

Designated as a historic landmark in 1989, changes made to the building as part of the renovation process needed to be approved by the Long Beach Cultural Heritage Commission. While some changes—like the addition of an elevator on the exterior of the building—were necessary for the building to function, the building’s owners have tried to preserve as many historical elements as possible, Alesiani said.

In adding the Long Beach property to its portfolio, Fairmont continues to strengthen its presence in California. The historic building joins the recently reimagined Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles, coastal Fairmont Miramar in Santa Monica and the brand’s original flagship hotel Fairmont San Francisco.

“It’s an unrivaled collection of properties that are luxury hotels, which are authentically local, and

at the heart of their community,” Cadwell said of Fairmont’s California selection. “The Breakers is going to be a wonderful addition to that collection.”

Local officials are also pleased with the news.

“This is one of the most beautiful buildings in the entire city,” Mayor Robert Garcia said during the July 27 announcement event. “The work that is happening here is really quite incredible. This is going to be a very special moment for the city of Long Beach.”

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the news will be a boon for the city.

“Previously, certain conventions were not able to choose our destination because we were unable to offer a luxury boutique hotel,” Goodling said in a statement. “Fairmont’s presence in Long Beach allows us to grow both our convention and pleasure travel markets.”

The construction process is beginning to wind down, according to Alesiani, with work on the building’s infrastructure, including drywall, electricity and plumbing, remaining. Model rooms are expected to be ready by the end of this year, and the opening of the hotel itself is expected in October 2023.

Editor’s note: Pacific6 is the parent company of Pacific Community Media, which owns the Long Beach Business Journal. ■

Downtown Long Beach sees its highest office vacancy rate in 20 years, data shows

By Christian May-Suzuki

The COVID-19 pandemic is still impacting business in Downtown Long Beach, which saw its office vacancy rate hit a 20-year high in the second quarter of this year, according to a report released last week.

Even as office rental rates remain lower than other nearby cities, Downtown Long Beach saw a vacancy rate of 22.4% last quarter, the Downtown Long Beach Alliance found in a report on the commercial office market.

DLBA Research and Public Policy Analyst Morris Mills said the overall shift toward virtual work outside the office played a major role in the growing vacancy rate. In particular, he said, small businesses have slowly started moving out of their spaces.

“[For] an office of about eight or 10 people, it might not be in their

budget or there is no reason for them to keep paying rent,” he said. “So they are corroding away like that.”

A series of vacancies in some of Downtown’s biggest Class A buildings—Landmark Square, One World Trade Center and Shoreline Square Tower—were major contributors to the trend, which has been ongoing since the beginning of 2020.

Those three buildings account for over a third of Downtown’s office space, and the total occupancy rate in the three properties dropped from an average of 74% in the second quarter of 2021 to 66% last quarter. The number is low, Mills said, but the drop was not unexpected, as the DLBA predicts even more businesses will downsize their office footprints.

Even with an increase in vacancies, the average asking rent per square foot in Downtown Long Beach has increased by



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A man walks by the International City Bank building on Ocean Boulevard in Downtown, which has a massive “for lease” sign posted in the grass.



Karl Chan is the new CEO of Laserfiche.

Laserfiche announces new CEO to replace longtime executive

By Christian May-Suzuki

The longtime CEO of a prominent Long Beach business has officially made the decision to pass the torch. Chris Wacker—who served as the CEO of Laserfiche after his wife, Laserfiche founder Nien-Ling Wacker, died in 2014—retired as CEO on Aug. 1. Current president and CTO Karl Chan has assumed the role of CEO in Wacker’s stead. Wacker was a longstanding presence at Laserfiche, which is a software-as-a-service (SaaS) provider of content and business process management products, for 35 years, but he has now stepped back into a more passive role. He is still serving as the president of the Laserfiche board of directors while Chan oversees the day-to-day operations of the business. “Karl is an extraordinary business leader and visionary technologist who has been instrumental in Laserfiche’s success for the past 30 years,” Wacker said in a news release announcing the move. “The

company is entering a new era of accelerated innovation and digital transformation, and Karl is well positioned to lead Laserfiche to continued global growth.” Chan’s long-term tenure with Laserfiche has placed him at the center of many of its most important projects. In particular, he was instrumental in the success of the company’s cloud-based services, called Laserfiche Cloud. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Los Angeles Business Journal in 2015 for his work. In a news release, Chan said he was honored to be selected to lead Laserfiche. “The rapid pace of change we are seeing today means that there is [an] abundant need for process automation and digital transformation,” he said. “I’m excited to drive the delivery of innovative solutions that will empower our customers and enrich the world.” Laserfiche also announced that Peter Wayman will be stepping into the role of president, and Michael Allen will be appointed chief technology officer. ■

Office Vacancy

Continued from page 9

3.6% to \$2.56, with the primary culprit being inflation, according to Mills. The cost of operations for office buildings—which includes everything from maintenance workers to air conditioning—has grown, making rents increase even as demand falters. The rate in Downtown Long Beach, though, is still lower on average than San Pedro, Torrance, Irvine

and Downtown Los Angeles, but it’s currently the highest it has been in Long Beach since 2018, according to analytic service Placer.Ai. Another note in the DLBA’s quarterly report is the lack of overall office utilization. Unlike the occupancy rate, which measures how much space is being leased, the office utilization rate measures how much space companies are actually using in their day-to-day operations. “A lot of offices may be on paper being occupied or not, but people might not necessarily be going in,” Mills said. “That’s the big difference.”

Long Beach Development Services Director Oscar Orci announces retirement

By Christian May-Suzuki

After more than 30 years working for cities across Southern California, the head of Long Beach’s Development Services Department is stepping down. Oscar Orci—who has served as the director of the department for the past two years after serving as its deputy director for the previous four—announced his retirement late last month. His last day with the city is Aug. 12. During his time as director, Orci led the development of an updated Housing Element and oversaw the completion of several notable housing projects, including Shoreline Gateway, which is now the city’s tallest building. “We are grateful for Oscar’s unwavering leadership over the last several years—both as director and deputy director—

who continued leading our Department of Development Services with dedication throughout the pandemic and ensuring City planning, permitting and affordable housing services continued despite the unprecedented challenges,” City Manager Tom Modica said in a statement. “I wish him all the best as he embarks on his well-deserved journey into retirement.” Orci, meanwhile, thanked city officials for the opportunity to lead the department. “Although I have not been with the Department too long,” he said, “I believe I was able to leave things a little better than when I arrived.” Christopher Koontz, who currently serves as Development Services’ deputy director, will serve as the acting director while the city conducts a nationwide search for a replacement. ■



Development Services Director Oscar Orci has announced his retirement.

Individual data for the city of Long Beach was unavailable, but according to the DLBA report, office utilization in the greater Los Angeles area—which includes cities like Long Beach, El Segundo and Torrance, along with Los Angeles itself, among others—has climbed to 42% as of June, up from a low of 19% in January 2021. But that number is still far below the pre-pandemic mark of 98% utilization. Despite this continued rise in vacancies, though, the occupancy rate in Class C buildings—which are generally older properties—actually

increased from 83% in the second quarter of last year to 89% this year. While there’s no one single reason for the differing trends in Class A and Class C properties, Mills noted that the lower overall price of the older units could explain why Class C buildings are more attractive at the moment. Even as Downtown Long Beach sees climbing office vacancy rates, Mills said the DLBA has positioned itself to help the area emerge from the pandemic and succeed moving forward. “The pandemic has really changed our role,” Mills said. “We are excited for what’s to come.” ■

The Magnolia, a new 142-unit residential development in Downtown, is 46% leased

The first tenant moved in on June 1 and, as of late July, almost half of the building’s units had been leased.

By Brandon Richardson

Downtown Long Beach has 142 more much-needed apartments for lease with the opening of The Magnolia at the southwest corner of Magnolia Avenue and West Broadway, across the street from the George Deukmejian Courthouse. But almost half are already off the market. Built by Ensemble Real Estate Investments, the seven-story project consists of a mix of studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments ranging from 532 to 1,232 square feet. Units are going for \$2,580 to \$4,233 per month. The apartments have open floor plans and include smart home technology, energy efficient features, full-size in-unit washers and dryers, plank vinyl wood flooring, WiFi and more. “Long Beach is the only major city with a coastal downtown between San Diego and San Francisco,” Tyson Sayles, a principal at Ensemble, said in a statement. “Downtown Long Beach’s vibrancy is shown in its aquarium and beaches, its performing arts and business, its local retailers and its public transit and freeway access.” The developer noted that the project is within walking distance to parks, the Metro A Line and Downtown destinations such as restaurants, shops and entertainment. The development is also walkable to Downtown office buildings. The Magnolia quietly opened on May 9, according to Ensemble spokesperson Cameron Andrews, with signs announcing the units for rent. The first tenant moved in on June 1 and, as of late July, 46% of the building’s units had been leased, Andrews added. The project broke ground in January 2020 with construction expected to take about 18 months. The coronavirus pandemic, however, caused delays, Andrews said. Plant-based Mexican food restaurant Sugar Taco and Pawspace, a daycare, boarding, grooming and adoption center, have leased the ground-floor retail space, but neither business is open yet, Andrews said. “We are excited to meet our new Long Beach neighbors and join the eclectic and delicious food scene in the seaside city while sharing our



The first tenant moved into The Magnolia, a 142-unit mixed-use development in Downtown, on June 1, and the project is already 46% leased.



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DO YOUR PART TO SAVE WATER DON'T IRRIGATE DECORATIVE GRASS

1

Please turn off irrigation to any grass area that is solely ornamental after June 10

2

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3

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New GM named for Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center

By Christian May-Suzuki

A familiar face is returning to Long Beach to run the Convention Center. Robert Smit—who served as the vice president and general manager for the Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport Hotel and Conference Center for Rancho Cucamonga-based consultant Pacific Global Hospitality and regional vice president for outdoor hospitality provider AutoCamp in San Francisco. Smit took the place of Charlie Beirne, who left Long Beach in April after 11 years at the helm of the Convention Center to accept

“Not only does Robert have an incredible background in the convention and hospitality industry, he also has a strong working knowledge of the local industry and our convention center as a former local GM and past-chair of the Long Beach CVB.”

- Steve Goodling, President and CEO of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau

from 2011 to 2016—was named the general manager of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, the center’s operator ASM Global announced. He started Aug. 1. Since leaving Long Beach, he has served in a variety of roles, including as a customer success director for hospitality technology service firm Mews, principal innovator

a general manager role at the Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center. “I am thrilled to be coming back to Long Beach to manage the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, which has been recognized many times over for its innovation and creativity in the meetings and events space,”

Smit said in a release. “I look forward to working with the ASM Global team, the City, and the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau to position the center as a top destination for conventions, events, and entertainment.” Beirne’s replacement brings over 40 years of experience in the hospitality and meetings industry, including executive management positions at major hotel chains like Hilton and Marriott. “In recruiting for this position, we sought someone with a wide range of skills and a varied background,” ASM Global Executive Vice President Bob McClintock said. “Robert’s experience, business acumen and attention to detail match ASM’s commitment to the customer experience and the shared vision for the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center’s future.” As general manager, Smit is overseeing the daily operations and long-term planning of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center. “Not only does Robert have an incredible background in the convention and hospitality industry, he also has a strong working knowledge of the local industry and our convention center as a former local GM and past-chair of the Long Beach CVB,” President and CEO of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau Steve Goodling said. “We look forward to working with the center’s incredible team under his leadership.” Moving forward, some of the key priorities of the Convention Center include expanding programming, identifying funding opportunities for improvements to the center and continuing to strengthen the center’s image as an attractive meeting and convention host. ■



Courtesy of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center
New Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center General Manager Robert Smit.

Long Beach unemployment ticks back up

By Brandon Richardson

After declining every month since July 2021, unemployment in Long Beach increased in June, according to data released by the California Employment Development Department late last month. The city’s unemployment rate dropped to 4.6%—just below its pre-pandemic low of 4.8%—in May but jumped to 5.3% in June, state data shows. Los Angeles County’s rate increased the same amount, from 4.5% in May to 5.2% in June. The overall state unemployment rate also increased, up to 4% from 3.8%. “After an impressive start to

the year, in which the state added jobs at a rate 20% higher than the rest of the nation, we shouldn’t over-interpret a slowdown in one month,” Taner Osman, research manager at Beacon Economics and the UC Riverside Center for Economic Forecasting, said in a statement. “Still, California’s tight labor market has not eased up and will continue to act as a constraint on job growth.” The city’s rate remains higher than about 68% of the county’s 134 cities and census areas, according to state data. Only 25.4% of areas have higher unemployment rates than Long Beach. Eight cities have the same unemployment rate as Long Beach:

Baldwin Park, Covina, El Segundo, LA, Norwalk, Pico Rivera, Pomona and South Gate. In Long Beach, the labor force shrank by 2,300 month-over-month to 229,600 in June. The number of unemployed residents, meanwhile, increased by 1,500 to 12,100. Countywide, the labor force decreased by 46,900 people to 4,960,500, while the number of unemployed residents jumped by 33,800 to 256,700. Across the state, 93.6% of the jobs lost in March and April 2020 as the pandemic set in have been recovered, according to the analysis Beacon and UCR. Health care saw the most payroll gains, followed by government, retail, leisure

and hospitality, information and manufacturing. Various sectors, including administration support, construction and others, posted job losses statewide in June, according to the analysis. In LA County, leisure and hospitality saw the largest month-over-month increase with 5,200 new jobs, with accommodation and food services accounting for 98% of the gains. Trade, transportation and utilities, construction, financial activities and government also expanded countywide. Education and health services was the only sector to decline in LA County in June, losing 7,200 jobs, according to the EDD. ■

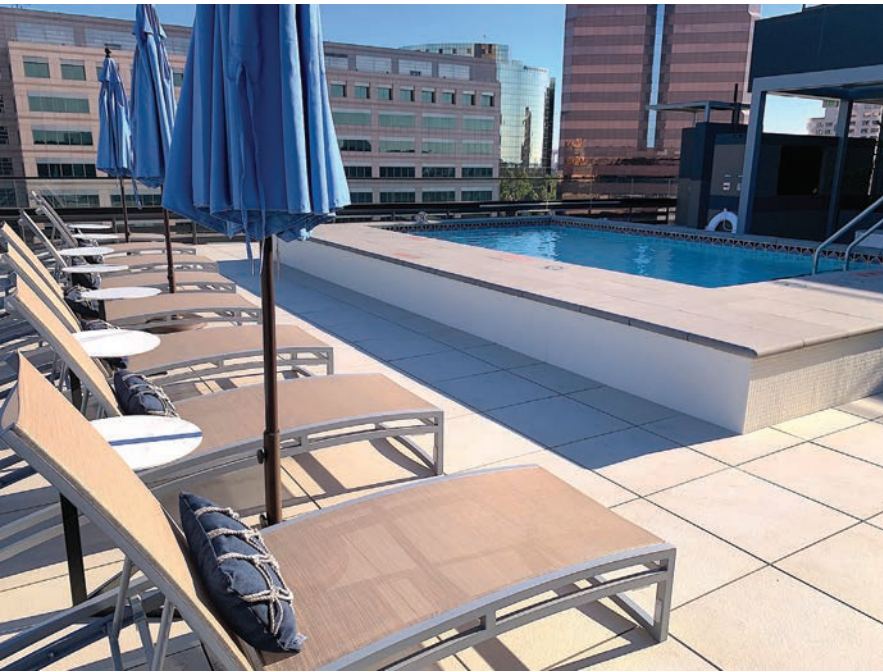
The Magnolia

Continued from page 11

commitment to a better world one taco at a time,” Sugar Taco owner Jayde Nicole said in a statement. Pawspace is expected to open later this year. Each resident of The Magnolia receives a free annual membership, which includes three free days of daycare, one free overnight boarding, 15% off all services and products and 10% off adoption fees, and dog-walking services. The development features a host of amenities, including a rooftop complex with a pool deck, a fitness center, co-working space and a garden terrace. The pool deck includes a heated jetted pool, daybeds, lounge chairs, an outdoor shower and an outdoor TV fireplace. Also on the roof is the Sky Lounge, which features outdoor barbecue grills, a communal farm table and lounge seating with an outdoor fireplace. The Parlor, meanwhile, is a communal seating area with TV for gaming and movies. A large veranda rounds out the rooftop offerings with a fully equipped gourmet kitchen, lounge and bar seating, and more communal space. The project offers 191 parking stalls, including 21 with charging capabilities dedicated to electric vehicles, across three levels: the building’s first two floors, as well as one subterranean level. The Magnolia is not the first Long Beach development for Ensemble, which has been based in Long Beach for 26 years. The firm simultaneously built the 94-unit 442 Residences on Ocean Boulevard and the 112-unit Crest adjacent to the Long Beach Convention Center. The two projects opened in 2019. “We’re excited to have Ensemble ... complete another great project in Downtown, this one enhancing our West Gateway corridor,” Mayor Robert Garcia said in a statement. “Their vision has helped strengthen Long Beach, making our downtown even more of a community—and it is an ideal place to work, raise a family and invest in the future.” ■



Courtesy of Ensemble Real Estate Investments
The interior of an apartment inside The Magnolia, a mixed-use development that opened this year in Downtown.



Courtesy of Ensemble Real Estate Investments
The rooftop pool on the seventh floor of The Magnolia, a new residential development in Downtown.

CITY OF LONG BEACH Bid Opportunities		
Title	Bid Number	Due Date
Speed Cushions	PW-22-088	08/11/2022
Engineering Design Svcs. for WMI Project 2-C at LB Airports Tarmac	WD-22-001	08/15/2022
Comprehensive Assessment	WD-22-010	08/17/2022
Promotional Items	AP-22-120	08/23/2022
J. Will Johnson Tanks Roof Repairs Project (Spec WD-58-22)	WD-22-006	08/25/2022
Promotional Items	WD-22-011	08/26/2022
Printing Services	WD-22-008	08/26/2022
ActivateLB Customer Activation	ED-22-102	08/30/2022
ERP Consulting Services	TI-22-096	08/31/2022

Bidder Registration

To receive notifications of bid opportunities, register with the city, and download additional bid details, visit www.longbeach.gov/purchasing.

Auto Lien Sale Auction

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Long Beach, CA 90806
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ONE COUPON PER CUSTOMER: EXPIRES ON 9/22/22.

COLUMNIST: TIM GROBATY

Here are 5 million-dollar houses for less than a million dollars

People interested in buying their first home may find some hope in recent news accounts about the decades-long real estate boom finally cooling down due to a number of factors, including: rising interest rates, an increase in the cost of goods and services, inventory of homes for sale on a bit of a rise, people who have been holding onto their homes beginning to fear that they've missed the peak and are finally putting their homes on the market, and inflation in general, which is outpacing wage increases.

It's a complicated and complex set of factors, some of which deter homebuyers, some of which put a damper on the crazed bidding wars, some of which can result in the cutting of asking prices.

In Long Beach, things are still going fairly swimmingly for sellers, especially in what I can only jokingly refer to as nice, yet "affordable" areas, which pretty much defines the eastern part of the city, or what people in the local real-estate business are terming, in haughty Londinese, the East End.

According to various real estate sites, the average price of homes in eastern neighborhoods is now over \$1 million a copy. El Dorado Park Estates tops the list at \$1.3 million, followed by Los Altos at \$1.3 million, the Ranchos Estates at \$1.07 million and the Plaza at \$1.02 million.

The homes in El Dorado are on the larger size, but in the other neighborhoods, the vast majority of the houses are three-bedroom, two-bath models, invariably under 2,000 square feet, and almost all are over a half-century old now.

But those are average figures, and for "bargain hunters" (and here I go again being flippant about \$850,000 homes being bargains), there are still plenty of homes in these million-dollar neighborhoods for under seven figures. Here are five of them, ranging from \$800,000 to \$968,000. If things don't cool off too quickly, most are likely to hit \$1 million soon. Profit! All are three-bedroom, two-bath homes, except where noted.



Listing photo

3630 Hackett Ave.

Here's a corner lot on Hackett Avenue at Keynote Street. My grandfather told me once to never buy a corner lot, a bit of advice I've taken to heart as old-time wisdom and have never questioned. You might like it though in this Plaza neighborhood near the confluence of Palo Verde Avenue and Los Coyotes Diagonal—and a short walk to Baskin-Robbins. The 1,395-square-foot home has great curb appeal, and the interior is light and open with nice hardwood flooring and upgraded bathrooms and kitchen. The backyard is particularly pleasant and shady with a nice brick patio. It's listed at \$900,000 by Mike Gaines.



Listing photo

2308 Tevis Ave.

Three bedrooms and just one bathroom in 1,360 square feet make this home a bathroom shy of the others in this article. And, like the Marber Avenue home, it's this close to the 405. And, like the Hackett house, it's on a corner lot with Woodruff Avenue. And, at \$968,000, it's the priciest one in today's list. Why? Well, it's pretty nice looking inside, with the rooms painted neutral colors and a sparkling and wide-open kitchen that opens fully to the living room. The bathroom has been totally redone with a walk-in shower, and it has a nice curb appeal. The grassy backyard is great if you're a dog, but it's not currently set up for entertaining. Its listing agent is Marcus Young.

want to spruce up the bathrooms a bit. One nice feature is a bonus room out back attached to the detached garage. It's not exactly extra-bedroom material, but it's a nice space for an office, a studio or just to getaway from the bedlam of the house. It's listed by Thomas Applegate at \$815,000.



Listing photo

3315 Studebaker Road

What's the deal with red doors? There are a lot of explanations, ranging from the idea that it's a sign of a mortgage-free house to a symbol of welcoming travelers and telling them this is a house where they can stay for a night or two. Also, it's said to bring good luck to the home's inhabitants. This home in the Plaza, just south of Wardlow Road, does, in fact, look welcoming, and once you're invited inside you'll find a large living room with a used-brick fireplace and a large family room. The kitchen has lots of counter space and stainless appliances. Listed by Sharon Amarantos at \$950,000, the 1,368-square-foot home has a nice backyard that includes an avocado tree as well as an orchard with lemon, lime, peach and pomegranate trees. You'll never go hungry and there's even enough for your guests.



Listing photo

2559 Vuelta Grande Ave.

Here's an El Dorado North home that looks fairly idyllic from the outside. Paint's good, nice big shade tree out front, raised yard. Once inside, though, this home begins to show its 70 years. Listed at a bargain \$799,900 by Ray Duran III, the house hasn't had much in the way of improvements since 1952. Kitchen looks original, as do the baths. The original hardwood floors "may be restorable," according to the listing, which goes on to present this home as a wonderful opportunity to make it different than it is. The kitchen "offers plenty opportunity to create your own custom kitchen and layout." The featureless backyard "is a blank canvas ready for all of your own exterior landscaping ideas." Still, it's a nice neighborhood and it's a good price—recently reduced by \$50,000, so if you're not afraid of some hard work, it could be a nice place to live. ■



Listing photo

2430 Marber Ave.

This 1,322-square-foot North Los Altos home is just steps away from the 405 Freeway, if that's a selling point (I've lived close to the 405 for a while, and it's not a selling point, though eventually the thrumming sound of rushing cars can be thought of as a rushing river, which can have a calming, soporific effect). The home, just a block east of Bellflower Boulevard, has nice original hardwood floors and a bright kitchen with plenty of storage space. You might

Beachwood Brewing is expanding into Bixby Knolls with a new tasting room and distillery



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Co-owners Julian Shrago, left, and Gabriel Gordon stand in the new Beachwood Brewing and Distilling location in Bixby Knolls.

By Brandon Richardson

The minds behind the award-winning Beachwood Brewing are preparing to expand on their historically hoppy hustle, looking

now to the spirit world with plans to open Long Beach's third distillery early next year.

"We've been interested in doing spirits for a long time," co-owner Gabriel Gordon said in an interview. "It's kind of a natural evolution for brewers."

The company has taken over the former Liberation Brewing Co. location at 3630 Atlantic Ave. in Bixby Knolls and opened a 24-tap tasting room for its beers last week. The brewer will strictly sell beer for about six months, Gordon said, as it

Ruth's Chris Steak House now open in Downtown

By Brandon Richardson

Ruth's Chris Steak House is now open and serving up its sizzling beef fare in Downtown Long Beach, the chain announced last week, almost two and a half years after officials shared their plans for the space.

The 8,075-square-foot high-end steakhouse, located on the ground floor of the former Salvation Army building at 180 E. Ocean Blvd., features three main dining rooms, a bar, an outdoor patio and two private dining rooms that can be used for personal and family gatherings, business meetings and more.

The restaurant's construction was part of a larger renovation of the 12-story building, which was sold by the Salvation Army to Thrifty Oil Co. five years ago for \$35.8 million.

"We are honored to bring this new Ruth's Chris location to Long Beach

and serve the community and those that live in and around the area," General Manager Wendi Thompson said in a statement. "Ruth's Chris offers its guests a one-of-a-kind experience – whether they're celebrating a special occasion or enjoying an intimate dinner."

Like the more than 150 Ruth's Chris locations around the world, the Long Beach location serves up a variety of USDA Prime beef cuts on 500-degree plates. The restaurant chain's specialty cuts include a bone-in filet, a bone-in New York strip and a massive 40-ounce tomahawk ribeye.

Ruth's Chris also serves lamb chops, shrimp, crab and lobster tail. The restaurant features around 250 wines and more than a dozen signature cocktails.

"This location is our first in Long Beach, representing an exciting expansion in Southern California that further entrenches us in the area's fine



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Ruth's Chris Steak House is now open in Downtown Long Beach.

dining scene," Cheryl Henry, president and CEO of Ruth's Hospitality Group, Inc., said in a statement. "We look forward to welcoming new guests, as well as those who are already familiar with and passionate about our brand."

Guests should be sure to adhere to the restaurant's dress code. While the steak house describes its atmosphere as "comfortable, family

awaits its distilling license.

Ultimately, the focus of the business will be spirits, but Gordon said the company will brew small batch—about seven kegs' worth per run—specialty beers on site. The tap house will mostly serve beers from the company's Huntington Beach production facility as well as its Downtown Long Beach brewpub and the Blendery, its other Downtown operation that focuses on barrel-aged sour beers.

After tossing the idea around for a while, Gordon said the group finally applied for a distilling license during the coronavirus pandemic. The team got halfway through the process but could not decide on how best to utilize its existing space.

The first option was to reconfigure the Blendery operation, Gordon said.

"We were trying to figure out the biggest size we could get without completely decimating the space that's needed for barrel aging our sour beers," Gordon said, adding that coronavirus negatively impacted the sales of the Blendery beers.

Then the pandemic began to wane and sales picked up, and the team did not want to reduce production for the spirits experiment, he said. But when the crew at Liberation decided to cut its losses and close up shop after business slowed throughout the pandemic, the landlord emailed Gordon, and Beachwood had its distillery location.

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Long Beach unveils proposed 2022-23 budget

By Jason Ruiz

Long Beach leaders unveiled a proposed \$3.2 billion budget last week that would add police officers, speed up the repair of city streets and invest in other city infrastructure, while also patching together one-time funds to fill a significant projected deficit.

Mayor Robert Garcia and city leaders detailed the budget at an Aug. 2 press conference inside the City Council chambers, which begins a roughly monthlong process of public meetings before the City Council votes to approve the budget for the fiscal year, which starts in October.

The city’s general fund, which pays for basic city services like police and fire personnel salaries, watering parks and fixing roads, grew to \$669 million this year, and its allocations could be subject to change depending on what programs individual council members want to bolster over the coming weeks.

Alongside the city’s budget is a new five-year spending plan for Measure A, the city’s 1% sales tax that has generated tens of millions per year and has been used primarily to fund police and fire staffing but also improvements to city facilities and streets.

That funding will dip over the next few years as the city diverts a quarter of those funds to Los Angeles County to pay into the Measure H homeless



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal
A man interprets as City Manager Tom Modica gives a presentation in the council chambers on Long Beach’s \$3.2 billion budget for fiscal year 2023.

tax, which could complicate the city’s efforts to balance the 2024 budget that current projections show has a \$25.6 million deficit.

“Next year will be tougher,” City Manager Tom Modica said. “We do hope that the economic recovery will continue, but you don’t ever know what the future will hold.”

Here are some key takeaways from the proposed 2023 fiscal budget.

Homelessness

One of the largest concerns of residents and city officials over the past few years has been the growing number of people living unhoused in the city—and how to get them off the streets. The city’s annual

homeless count showed that the number of unhoused people in the city grew by 62% since 2020, the last year that a count was conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year’s budget proposes adding another Restorative Engagement to Achieve Collective Health (REACH) team to the city’s ranks, which would bring the total to three. The teams comprise homeless outreach workers, a clinician and a nurse that respond to calls to the city about homeless individuals and provide medical service and try to connect them to city services and housing opportunities.

City officials said earlier this year that the team has responded to hundreds of

calls already since the first two teams were mobilized a year ago, but that number is likely to increase now that the city’s dispatch system will reroute calls for service from police and fire personnel to the REACH team.

It was estimated that adding a third REACH team would cost about \$500,000 but would expand the teams’ availability into weekends.

The proposed budget also calls for nearly \$2.5 million in funding for encampment cleanups and \$250,000 for a towing fund that would forgive fees for unhoused people who have their vehicles impounded by the city.

It also proposes \$9.3 million to be spent over the next five years on repairs at the city’s Multi-Service Center and for the purchase of a hotel to house people.

Public safety

The proposed fiscal budget calls for the creation of 20 additional positions within the Long Beach Police Department, with 16 being for officers to patrol communities on bicycles and four being proposed for new “quality of life” officers.

The 16 bike positions would be split up across the city’s four different police divisions and wouldn’t respond to typical calls for service; instead they would focus more on community engagement. The quality of life officers are armed officers who are dedicated to homeless outreach, and with the

Continued on page 21

Tony’s Kitchen offers a little bit of everything

By Matt Miller

Anyone who has children knows that you can’t please everybody all of the time, especially when it comes to dining out.

But Bixby Knolls’ new spot, Tony’s Kitchen, has the solution.

Chef Antonio Gomez, 46, with his wife and general manager Nery Ursulo, 44, opened Tony’s Kitchen at 4280 Atlantic Ave. in the former home of Bixby’s Brooklyn Deli in early March, and their concept is based on their own experiences of going out to eat as a family.

When the family goes out, Ursulo is always looking for the Mexican dishes on the menu, their kids love American food, and Gomez is the one that likes all cuisines and loves to try new food.

“A little of everything” was the spark of their idea, and now it’s become their restaurant’s tagline. Their goal: to create a restaurant where the whole family can eat together and everyone’s cravings are met.

Standard diner-style breakfast and

lunch items make it easy to appease the less adventurous, but Gomez recommends some of the more unexpected items on the menu.

Featured items include linguini del mar (\$17.45) with salmon, shrimp, scallops and clams in a tomato cream sauce; blackened chicken panini (\$11.45), which includes chicken slathered with garlic aioli, topped with coleslaw and guacamole; and the Hawaiian burger (\$11.45) with grilled pineapple, teriyaki and jack cheese.

While they’re still working on the decor and ambiance, the Gomez family describes Tony’s Kitchen as a “dreamy plaza that can transport you to Mexico or Italy.”

When the doors first opened, the couple admits they had very minimal decor and didn’t know how to translate their Italian/Mexican/American menu into a visual ambiance, but they were able to work with the neighborhood art school, StudioPick, which led a community painted mural that created the beautiful “town” inside Tony’s Kitchen.

Tony’s Kitchen started as a shared



Matt Miller / Business Journal
Chef Antonio Gomez, 46, with his wife and general manager Nery Ursulo, 44, opened Tony’s Kitchen at 4280 Atlantic Ave.

space concept. The initial test market began inside El Sol Bakery, 1503 Magnolia Ave. in May of 2020, serving mainly carry-out orders during the pandemic shutdown. But after 18 months, Tony’s Kitchen quickly proved its concept and gained a loyal following, and this past December, Chef Gomez decided to expand.

“We have always loved this

area, and [the] community in Bixby Knolls. Once we found this location, we knew it was perfect for us to share our fresh homemade dishes.”

The Gomez family is serving the Bixby Knolls neighborhood their homemade a-little-bit-of-everything menu seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ■

Anna’s bar brings ‘beer for the people’ and small bites to former Kress Market space



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal
Manager Gerard McAvoy wipes down the bar at the recently opened Anna’s, which took over the former Kress Market location on the southwest corner of Pine Avenue and Fifth Street.

By Jason Ruiz

When Kress Market closed over a year ago, it joined a growing list of North Pine Avenue businesses that left an open storefront on Downtown’s main street. But the market’s former home now has a new occupant.

Anna’s, named after owner Anna Lewis, has taken over the space at the corner Pine Avenue and Fifth Street, offering small plates, wine and low-cost beers that are currently selling for between \$2 and \$4 a pint.

Lewis and her husband, Elliot, who owns and operates the Catalyst branded dispensaries in Long Beach and beyond, made a pledge to invest in the block after the dispensary was granted a special permit to open in Downtown in June 2021.

The Pine dispensary is located next door to Anna’s, which the couple hopes will help bring life and culture to the 400 block of Pine, which has seen a spate of closures recently.

“I gave my word, hell or high water, we’d improve the block,” Elliot Lewis said.

In March 2021, Long Beach Coffee & Tea, which was located across the street from Kress, announced it was closing. Kress closed later that year and was followed by Romeo Chocolates, which had operated on the block since 2017.

Waters Edge Winery also shuttered its Pine Avenue location late last month, and soon, Gold’s Gym, a 35-year staple of North Pine, will be relocating to The Pike Outlets down the street.

Elliot Lewis said he made the decision to open another business next to the dispensary in part

because of the promise that he made when petitioning to open the dispensary that the block wouldn’t suffer because of its presence, something that was of concern during the permitting process.

While Pine is a main artery of Downtown, the number of restaurants and bars begins to dry up as you head north from Fourth Street. Anna’s will be the only bar between Fifth Street and Anaheim Street.

Anna’s is still working out its menu, but the plan is to offer simple bar food that will range from salads and charcuterie boards to paninis, the bar’s manager Gerard McAvoy said. There will also be opportunities for pop-up chefs to operate in the space on a monthly basis.

Its alcohol license allows it to sell beer and wine, and the couple said there are no plans to raise the price of beer. Catalyst’s slogan is “Weed for the People” and the prices reflect a similar “Beer for the People” approach, Elliot Lewis said.

The improvements may not stop with Anna’s.

The couple leased the entire corner that used to be Kress, and is looking at turning the space that used to be the marketplace into another food establishment. While plans are not finalized, it will likely be an Italian deli with some sort of bottle shop.

“Little by little we’re going to do it, and Catalyst is going to be the development engine for the block,” Elliot Lewis said.

The Lewises say that the hope is that in 10 years, the block can be fully activated, potentially with traffic blocked to allow for a second promenade to exist on North Pine. ■

Waters Edge closes Downtown location

By Christian May-Suzuki

Waters Edge Winery, which has become a Pine Avenue mainstay since it opened in 2019, is seeking a new home.

The winery shuttered its 217 Pine Ave. location late last month after just under three years there. The move comes as a “last resort” after several months of deliberation with the building’s landlord, owner and winemaker Collin Mitzenmacher said in a July 22 email to Waters Edge members.

Representatives for the winery were not available for comment.

The new location has yet to be finalized, but Mitzenmacher said in his email that he enjoyed the Downtown area and that there would be frequent communication regarding the details of the location.

“We intended to keep downtown Long Beach as our home base,” he said.

Mitzenmacher’s winery sources its grapes from a variety of locations from Argentina to Australia but ferments the juice locally. This unique model allows Waters Edge “to remove 60% of

the costs associated with running a winery attached to a vineyard,” Mitzenmacher said in October 2019 as the winery opened.

When it opened, Waters Edge Winery replaced the Mariposa nightclub that closed in 2014. The property’s interior was completely renovated, trading the nightclub setting for a wine bar and open-space tasting room where patrons could comfortably enjoy their beverages.

However, according to Mitzenmacher’s email to members, “building issues coupled with growing homelessness on Pine” prompted the decision to change locations.

“We’ve decided that this location was not conducive to what we envisioned,” Mitzenmacher said in the email.

The winery’s Wine Club service is still available with pickup out of the Waters Edge Wine Bar and Lounge on Alamitos Bay Landing, and some members have seen a change in their program alongside a price decrease on the monthly membership fee.

For future updates, Waters Edge Winery can be found on Instagram and Facebook @wewinerylb. ■

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Ding Tea bubble tea chain to open this fall in Bixby Knolls

The popular boba tea franchise, which is well regarded for its extensive selection of milk tea and other specialty drinks, will open at 3908 Atlantic Ave.

By Cheantay Jensen

News of the Taiwanese bubble tea franchise, Ding Tea, coming to Bixby Knolls may not come as a great surprise: Signage for the new business went up about a month ago, but the owners say they now have a tentative timeline for opening. Come this fall (ideally September, according to ownership), the popular boba tea franchise, which is well regarded for its extensive selection of milk tea and other specialty drinks, will be open at 3908 Atlantic Ave., next door to the Ramen Hub & Poke

and Somi Somi restaurants. Behind the new franchise are Frederick Ulanday, a Long Beach native, and Darren Espina, an Australian transplant who worked in bank finance before moving to Long Beach in 2019. It had been a long-time dream of both of them to own their own businesses, Espina said, and what attracted them to Bixby Knolls was the strong neighborhood-oriented business community and diverse dining scene. “We’re really excited to open and be part of the Bixby Knolls business community and the community as a whole,” Espina said. “We want to be involved in fundraisers and whatever we can do to help make Bixby Knolls a destination for people to come in Long Beach.” Though the Bixby Knolls Ding Tea will be the franchise’s second storefront in Long Beach (the other is near Cal State Long Beach), the tea house will be the only boba and milk tea business along the Bixby Knolls business corridor, which, generally speaking, is the stretch along Atlantic Avenue between East



The Taiwanese bubble tea franchise will be opening in Bixby Knolls at 3908 Atlantic Ave. next to Somi Somi and the Ramen Hub & Poke.

Bixby Road and East Clairborne Drive, where the First Friday events are held. Once open, patrons can expect all the same beverages you’re used to from Ding Tea, which include flavored teas, milk and coffee teas, plus the unique Yakult and

Slush drinks that may be modified by sweetness and with dozens of boba toppings. The Bixby Knolls Ding Tea will be open seven days a week, with plans for extended late-night hours to match the neighboring Ramen Hub, Espina said. ■

Beachwood Expands

Continued from page 15

When Liberation permanently shuttered, brewing equipment was left behind, which will be used to manufacture various spirits, Gordon said. The distillery will not produce brown spirits such as whiskey, focusing instead on vodkas, gins and rums. “As much I love bourbon and whiskey in general, brown spirits are a really long-term investment,” Gordon said. “It would be a decade before I made anything that’s remotely as delicious as what is already out there.”

Gordon said he and his team, including brewmaster and co-owner Julian Shrago, plan on using the expertise they have gained operating the Blendery in Downtown when creating their spirits. “We’re quite good at blending—using strange fruits and herbs and spices and whatnot in our sour beers,” Gordon said. “We’ve become proficient at extracting those flavors and concentrating them ... and so infused spirits should be right in our wheelhouse.” Beachwood does not have its spirit recipes honed yet, Gordon said. The facility should be licensed to distill in about four months, he said, which coincides with when the commercial

still is slated to arrive on site. With a license and still on hand, the recipe fine-tuning should take about two months, he said. Once the recipes are ready and the company has its first batches of spirits ready for sale, a full cocktail program will be added to its menu of 24 beers. The facility also will manufacture its own mixers, including tonics, ginger beers and bitters, Gordon said. The company plans to produce enough of its spirits to sell in the tasting room and over the counter of the Bixby Knolls location. Based on demand, however, Gordon said it would be easy to scale up production. Beachwood will join an exclusive

list of Long Beach distillers that consists only of Portuguese Bend and Willie’s Tin Shop, which opened in 2019 and 2021, respectively. There will also be food for sale on site, Gordon said, noting that the company will start by bringing in food trucks and pop-ups. In the future, the team has plans to build a “really small” kitchen, he said, which would then allow the team to serve outside wine and spirits as well. “All that is very long term,” Gordon said. “In the short term, we’re just hoping to create a nice environment for the people of Bixby to come and drink really good beer, and hopefully be a welcome part of the neighborhood.” ■



The new Beachwood Brewing and Distillery in Bixby Knolls features 24 taps.



Equipment that will be used to produce spirits, beer and mixers at the new Beachwood Brewing & Distillery in Bixby Knolls.

Regulators revoke liquor license for Bottoms Up Tavern

By Anthony Pignataro

A troubled bar in North Long Beach is closing its doors after state alcohol regulators took action against its liquor license following a deadly crash that killed a father and his daughter as they slept. Bottoms Up Tavern, at 1739 E. Artesia Blvd., lost its liquor license because of illegal drug sales at the bar, according to the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, but the increased scrutiny came after a patron there drove his truck into a nearby apartment moments after leaving the bar. “ABC agents opened an investigation following a fatal

The suspected driver, Octavio Montano Islas, remains at large. The District Attorney’s Office has issued a warrant for Islas’ arrest on two counts of felony manslaughter, one count of felony driving under the influence, and one count of felony hit and run, according to the LBPd. Bar owner Suzanne Blevins later said she discovered security camera footage showing Islas leaving the bar, getting into his truck on Artesia Boulevard and then making a flailing left turn onto Rose Avenue before crashing into the Palacios’ home at high speed. Shortly after the crash, more than 75 people picketed the bar, carrying signs saying “SHUT IT DOWN!” and

“The closure of Bottoms Up is welcome news, and I look forward to working together with the community and stakeholders to identify and attract a business that will make a positive impact on the community.”

- Rex Richardson, Long Beach City Councilmember

crash on March 1 that took the life of a father and his young daughter,” the ABC said in a statement. “Today agents posted a notice of indefinite suspension after their undercover ABC investigation found that the Bottoms Up Tavern was operating a disorderly premises involving numerous illegal sales of cocaine, ecstasy (MDMA), oxycodone, and cannabis, at the licensed location.” It’s not the first time Bottoms Up has been tied to a deadly crime. In 2019, Delfon Kinney Sr., 48, opened fire at the bar, killing Manny Marquez, a 44-year-old bar-back, and wounding a cook. Police soon arrived and shot Kinney, who was later found dead inside. The crime horrified neighbors along with Bottoms Up ownership and staff. The March 1 crash again shocked the neighborhood when it killed 42-year-old Jose Palacios and his 3-year-old daughter Samantha.

“REMEMBER THEIR NAMES!” ABC opened its investigation into Bottoms Up a few days after the crash. The state agency said the tavern’s owner signed an agreement accepting the penalty. The license must be transferred within 180 days to a new owner at a new location outside the city of Long Beach. ABC Director Eric Hirata called the bar “a disruption to the neighborhood and local community” in the statement. The business is moving to a new location at 9875 Alondra Blvd. in Bellflower. A person who answered the phone at the business last week said Bottoms Up would not be operating again in Long Beach. On July 20, the owners of Bottoms Up posted a long statement on Instagram titled “Reason why we are closing...” In their statement, the owners criticize the city for many of the bar’s problems, saying officials “came



An officer posts a notice of suspension on the door of Bottoms Up Tavern in North Long Beach on Sunday, July 31, 2022.

down on us pretty hard” while crime is “very high” in the area. “We had once loved this place with an indefinite plan to stay forever but we lost that in Oct 2019 when Manny was killed here,” the owners said in their Instagram statement. “Multiple qualified buyers came to look at The Tavern and all but one of them decided that the crime and violence in the area was too much for them.” City Councilmember Rex Richardson, who in March also called

for the ABC to investigate the bar, was pleased to hear of the closure. “Our residents deserve neighborhood serving amenities in their community that add value,” Richardson said. “The closure of Bottoms Up is welcome news, and I look forward to working together with the community and stakeholders to identify and attract a business that will make a positive impact on the community.” City News Service contributed to this story. ■

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Marine Mammal Care Center begins search for new CEO

By Tess Kazenoff

Amber Becerra had just joined the Marine Mammal Care Center as a board member in October 2019, when it was discovered the nonprofit was in financial crisis.

“There were four of us women at the time, and that was it,” said Becerra. “When we were faced with this reality, we all sort of looked at each other, and we said, there’s absolutely no way we’re letting this place go down.”

But without any funding, and a yearly budget of \$1.6 million, there was a strong possibility the center wouldn’t survive, said Becerra.

The Marine Mammal Care Center was initially founded in 1978 as a part of Marineland of the Pacific, a public oceanarium and tourist attraction founded in Los Angeles County in 1954.

When Marineland ultimately closed in 1987, its hospital remained.

A couple of years later, it became its own facility, officially opening at its new site at Fort MacArthur in 1992, a former military base in San Pedro, where the center has remained since.

Marineland’s original investors continued to finance the hospital until 2015 when they decided they no longer wanted to be in the marine space at all, said Becerra.

The next year, the center was incorporated as a nonprofit and continued operating with a sum of money granted by the original investors.

By the time Becerra joined the board three years later, the funds had dwindled almost entirely.

“We had to make the decision between paying our staff or buying



Courtesy of Marine Mammal Care Center

The Marine Mammal Care Center was at a point of financial crisis but stabilized after a successful fundraising campaign that generated \$1.4 million in six months.

fish for our patients,” said Becerra.

Without any funds to pay the existing staff, Becerra took on the role of president as a volunteer, pulling the organization afloat as her top priority.

“I went to the public and said, ‘We’re facing closure. We’re a nonprofit. We rely on public support entirely, and we have no funding. Please help us,’” said Becerra.

With the goal of raising \$1 million in six months, Becerra and the board had no idea if this was achievable.

“If you had looked at it objectively, you probably would have said, ‘There’s no way you guys are going to succeed,’” said Becerra. “But the universe had a better plan.”

Not only did the center reach its goal, but it exceeded it, raising \$1.4 million in just six months.

“The fact that we were able to do

that, that the community rallied around us and stepped up and not only came to the rescue in that moment, but has continued to support us on an ongoing basis ... has been pretty incredible, and almost nearly impossible,” said Becerra.

As the organization began to stabilize, finding a permanent president proved to be a challenge given the recent crisis, said Becerra.

“At the time, I was doing like six people’s jobs, so it was quite an ask to find a new CEO that wanted to step into that position,” Becerra said.

Becerra agreed to remain as CEO for another year, with the goal of moving the center closer to stability before finding her replacement.

Since then, the Marine Mammal Care Center has flourished, and visitors from around the world come

to the center to witness animal care with the goal of release back into the wild, unlike a zoo or aquarium that provides an experience based on animals in captivity, said Becerra.

“It really does feel like we are remediating some of the disastrous environmental harm that’s happening out there, in a tangible and effective way, which is really powerful,” Becerra said.

As one of the busiest marine mammal hospitals in the country, covering 70 miles of coastline, and as the only marine mammal facility open 24/7, 365 days a year in L.A. County, the hospital cares for an average of 350 patients a year.

During years of unusual mortality events (such as during El Niño years), the nonprofit may see upward of 700 animals, said Becerra. Many animals come to the hospital due to parasites, littering, fishing line entanglement and malnourishment.

While patients aren’t typically named, some become an exception, such as Bjorn, a 400-pound adult male sea lion who was brought to the hospital with a shark bite as well as a gunshot wound that had caused blindness.

“Probably most facilities would have just given up on that animal,” said Becerra, but instead, the Marine Mammal Care Center continued to monitor him.

Due to his blindness, he was unable to be released back into the wild, so the hospital embarked on a mission to find him a home in a zoo or an aquarium—a usually impossible feat for adult male sea lions, who are typically aggressive and territorial, explained Becerra.

But this was not the case with Bjorn. The staff trained him how to hand

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Budget

Continued from page 16

addition of four new officers, the city would double its quality of life team.

Measure A funding is being proposed to support a coordinated response team in the city (\$1 million) with an emphasis on gun-related crimes and to pay for the city’s share (\$609,333) of a federal grant that it applied for last year to keep an East Long Beach fire station open.

Within the five-year Measure A spending plan proposed alongside the annual budget, the city also identified over \$23 million in improvements to fire and police stations and academy buildings over the next five years.

Measure A spending

A new five-year spending plan for Measure A showed the city pledging about \$238 million in spending over the next five years to improve city streets, parks and other facilities through Measure A, the 1% sales tax increase made permanent by voters in 2020.

The city’s infrastructure plan includes an estimated \$284 million in other state and local taxes and grants that ballooned the city’s total spending plan to \$521 million over the next five years.

The plan calls for over \$217 million being spent to fix city streets, \$48 million to improve playgrounds and other park infrastructure as well as funding to trim and remove defective city trees.

To speed up street repairs, the city is proposing issuing about \$150 million in bonds that will be paid back over the course of about 20 years. But city officials say that issuing the bonds will allow the city to fix city streets before they fall into further disrepair and potentially cost more money to fix down the road.

However, starting this year, the funds are expected to be reduced by about a quarter as the city’s share of the 1% sales tax increase is reduced to .75%, with the remainder being paid to Los Angeles County for the city’s share of Measure H, a decade-long tax approved by voters in 2017 to help fund efforts to combat homelessness.

Long Beach residents have yet to pay that tax because the city’s local tax rate is at the limit, but the city has continued to receive funding generated by Measure H from the county.

A new climate office

Long Beach is looking to create a new Climate Action Office within the City Manager’s Office to help direct the city’s future efforts to combat climate change. Garcia said last week that the office would include about nine positions and would combine the existing Sustainability Office with four new positions dedicated to climate action.

The City Council is expected to vote this week on the city’s Climate Action Adaptation Plan that outlines the city’s broad actions going into the future, including winding down



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A line of people awaiting services stretches along the outside of the Multi-Service Center in West Long Beach.

oil production in the city, something it said should be done by 2035.

The new office will include a planning position to help implement the CAAP once it’s approved by the City Council. The office wouldn’t have the authority to make the City Council adhere to recommendations, but city officials said that it would help direct the city in how it can be greener in the future.

A looming budget deficit

An infusion of hundreds of millions

in state and federal COVID-19 relief funding and the local economy performing better than expected the past two years has allowed the city to continue to put off a major funding deficit by using COVID-19 money to plug budget gaps.

A budget deficit this year of \$20.2 million will be filled with one-time COVID-19 relief funds (\$14.5 million) and other sources.

The city is projecting a roughly \$25.6 million shortfall for the next fiscal year starting in October of 2024.

City officials are optimistic that the total could shrink as it has in past budget cycles, but it’s likely that the city will have to close that gap without the aid of pandemic relief funds. The projected shortfall also aligns with the negotiations for new contracts for city employee unions, including the LBPD, which makes up over 40% of the city’s general fund in a given year.

One thing that made the hole bigger was the city’s legal loss earlier this year when the Supreme Court of California declined to hear its appeal over the Measure M transfers from the Water Department to the general fund. That resulted in the city having to transfer \$30.8 million back to the Water Department this year and will result in the general fund being about \$8 million less going forward.

The Long Beach Water Commission voted earlier this year to return all of that money to city water customers in the form of bill credits. The city still needs to send about \$21.8 million to the department by next month, and officials said last week that it would likely accomplish that by borrowing from the city’s fleet services fund to avoid paying interest on municipal bonds and instead would pay interest to itself. The plan still needs City Council approval and could be brought before it for a vote in the coming weeks. ■

Rocket Lab puts another U.S. spy satellite in orbit

By Brandon Richardson

After multiple delays, Rocket Lab successfully launched a second spy satellite into orbit last week—just three weeks after delivering another.

The mission, dubbed “Antipodean Adventure,” blasted off from Rocket Lab’s New Zealand launch complex at 10 p.m. local time Aug. 3. The firm’s Electron rocket carried and delivered the NROL-199 spy satellite designed, built and operated by the U.S. National Reconnaissance Office.

“We’re proud to be delivering responsive space capability to the national security community and we’re grateful to the NRO for entrusting us with their missions once again,” Rocket Lab founder and CEO Peter Beck said in a statement.

Rocket Lab launched a companion satellite, NROL-162, on July 12.

Both missions were in partnership with the Australian Department of Defence.

The two national security missions, combined with Rocket Lab’s successful June 28 NASA moon mission launch, mark a major milestone: three successful missions in just over five weeks, a record launch cadence for the firm.

The turnaround between the NROL-162 and NROL-199 launches was the shortest between national security missions by a small launch provider, the company stated, “setting a new standard in responsive space.”

The time between the two spy satellite missions was slated to be shorter, but “Antipodean Adventure” faced several brief setbacks. The



Courtesy of Rocket Lab

Rocket Lab’s “Antipodean Adventure” mission blasts off from the firm’s New Zealand launch complex.

mission first was slated to launch July 22 but was postponed as more preparation was needed on the satellite. High winds on Aug. 1 delayed the flight another couple days.

“Our team is focused on relentless execution for our customers and delivering three successful Electron

missions in just over five weeks [is a] testament to this,” Beck said. “That the team delivered two flawless back-to-back national security missions only days after our most complex mission yet, the CAPSTONE mission to the Moon for NASA, is phenomenal.” ■

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With many refusing to take housing vouchers, Long Beach aims to educate local landlords

By Jason Ruiz

There are hundreds of homeless people in Long Beach who have housing vouchers that could cover their rent—if only they could find landlords willing to take them. Because of that, city officials are now trying to convince landlords to take the guaranteed rent by hosting a workshop this week designed to dispel misconceptions about the voucher program.

Housing choice vouchers are issued through the federal government’s Section 8 program for very low-income households to help cover their monthly rent through subsidies paid directly to landlords. In Long Beach, the value of those vouchers are calculated based on the ZIP code of the unit being rented and how many rooms it has. For the current fiscal year, voucher values range from \$1,595 for a one-bedroom unit in West, Central or North Long Beach to \$2,334 for a unit in southeast Long Beach.

City officials have tried to stress that vouchers mean guaranteed money for landlords every month, and they’ve even offered to pay for empty units if landlords will hold them open for people with vouchers, but it’s still been a struggle to pair people with units.

With that problem as the backdrop, Councilmember Suzie Price will host a workshop for landlords on Aug. 12 at her field office near the Colorado Lagoon. There, landlords will get to meet with city housing officials who will explain how the housing vouchers work and the process of accepting those tenants.

Price said the idea to have the

workshop came from conversations she’s had with landlords who expressed concerns that the city is difficult to work with or that they might somehow lose certain property rights if they accept voucher tenants.

“I think it’s important to debunk some of the myths, which is what we did with Motel 6,” Price said, referring to a new supportive housing project at a motel in her district.

Los Angeles County purchased the Motel 6 as part of Project Homekey and turned it into supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. Price held community meetings in advance of the project so the site’s operators could answer questions directly from the community.

She’s unsure how many people will show up to the voucher workshop, but Price is hopeful that getting landlords in the same room with representatives from the city’s Housing Authority, which oversees the voucher program, can help get some people housed.

“It’s not so much the number of people that show up but the number of doors they manage,” Price said, noting that people sometimes manage multiple properties.

The focus right now, Price said, should be on creating affordable housing by using existing units, such as accessory dwelling units and apartments, instead of waiting for new construction that could take years to complete.

John Edmund, the executive director of the Apartment Association California Southern Cities, said that landlords are interested in Section 8 vouchers, but current eviction moratoriums could be discouraging them. A general suspicion of government and a view that



Marie Tennyson hands a care package to a homeless woman as volunteers take part in Long Beach’s annual homeless count earlier this year.

the process is complicated both breed reluctance, Edmund said, but there is a larger issue on landlords’ minds.

An extension of a countywide eviction moratorium earlier this year made the lowest income tenants the most protected and bars landlords from evicting them until at least June 2023. Edmund said landlords are unclear who that moratorium covers and some don’t want to get into a situation where they take on a new tenant whom they might not be able to evict if problems arise.

“Every day is more and more complicated for what the rules are because there are many layers of government in this space,” Edmund said.

Long Beach’s annual homeless count was conducted in February, and the results shared last month

showed a 62% increase in people experiencing some form of homelessness in the city, with about 700 additional people living on the streets compared to 2020.

Health Department officials said that about 400 people who are currently unhoused have housing vouchers that could help pay for their monthly rents, but the city has so far been unsuccessful in pairing them with a willing landlord to rent them a unit.

Those vouchers are typically good for 90 days but can be extended for as long as 270 days to give the person time to find a unit that will accept them. After that, they could have to reapply and potentially join a waiting list.

The workshop for landlords will run from noon to 2 p.m. on Aug. 12 at Price’s field office at 340 Nieto Avenue. No RSVP is necessary. ■

Marine Care

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feed and how to listen to certain commands, and he became almost a surrogate mother to the many pups who’d come to the facility.

“He would help them get fish, he would be protective over them, just really an incredibly sweet animal,” said Becerra.

While finding him a home still proved to be difficult, as it was the middle of the pandemic when zoos and aquariums were closing down, eventually, Bjorn found a home at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington.

“He manages to get around his exhibit, despite the fact that he’s blind, and he’s a really special animal that can teach people, as an ambassador of a species, about sea lions and the

threats that face them, like being shot, being preyed on by sharks, and hopefully just inspire people to want to try to help these animals as much as they can,” Becerra said.

Inspiring ocean conservation is a key mission of the Care Center, and since stabilizing, it has expanded from more than just a seal and sea lion hospital to offering a robust educational program and research branch as well.

The education department now not only has its own staff but earlier this year, introduced an Equity and Education program, with the goal of bringing students of color from under-resourced communities to the facility, said Becerra.

Students participate in a fish dissection, learn about the food chain, and see how that connects to the work at the center, she said.

“We’re really able to reach children that are not typically getting access to this type of science

education, and a lot of students that have not even seen the ocean before coming out to our facility and getting this hands-on learning,” said Becerra. “That’s been an amazing program to launch and kind of beyond my wildest dreams when I first started.”

This year alone, around 12,000 students have visited the Care Center in person.

“There’s something about our center and the work that we do that’s extremely impactful and can be life-changing,” said Becerra. “The fact that we’re changing lives and truly are inspiring the next generation of scientists and conservationists and folks that are going to actually be out there trying to help and change the world themselves is one of the most powerful things that we’re able to do.”

This year, the Mammal Care Center celebrates its 30th anniversary, and Becerra is ready to move on from her

role as president, recently announcing her plans to return to the board in a volunteer capacity.

“Things are looking up for the Marine Mammal Care Center for sure, and we’re really hopeful that a new leader will take us into a growth phase now that we’ve hit a point of stability,” she said.

The search for the next CEO is expected to take five or six months, said Becerra, who hopes that the Marine Mammal Care Center’s future will include either an expansion or a move to a larger location, to accommodate all of the animals that need care.

“I really enjoyed just thinking as big as possible, dreaming, and not letting anything get in the way, or a fear of failure prevent us from being the best possible place that we can be, which is kind of a big deal when you consider we were about to close our doors,” Becerra said. ■

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