

June 13, 2023

LONG BEACH
BUSINESS JOURNAL

An edition of the Long Beach Post

Queen Mary

Long Beach city leaders are working to develop a formula to turn the historic ocean liner into a bustling hub for community and tourism.

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The Queen Mary has partially reopened for tours and hotel stays, but more work remains.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

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Food 19

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Epic Wings opens in Bixby Knolls



An order of medium buffalo wings at the new Epic Wings location at 4494 Atlantic Ave. in Bixby Knolls.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Foodologie bakery gets brick-and-mortar in Belmont Shore, slated to open this summer

Long Beach Rascals Teriyaki Grill to relocate to Carson in July, owner says

Hof's Hut kicks off school backpack fundraiser with ways for customers to donate

Get restaurant recs from the people you trust most with Beli

Simone's Donuts named a top 10 donut shop nationwide

Chicken University expected to open soon in Bixby Knolls

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monday morning coffee

&

Biz Brief

FREE email newsletters about issues, events and meetings for the week.

Monday Morning Coffee is sent out at 7 a.m., and BizBrief is news of the day, sent out Wednesday and Friday afternoons.

From prison to clippers: How Andre Cobbs transformed his life to become a celebrity barber

By Jackie Rae

In 2009, Andre Cobbs should have been planning his trip overseas to play basketball with the Philippines National team. Instead, he was facing a 16-year prison sentence for robbery and assault.

Cobbs claims he was sentenced for a crime he didn't commit. Still, he said he had to humble himself, learn from others who had been incarcerated for decades, and try to be better.

That led Cobbs to join the fire crew while in prison.

"Some inmates did lose their lives," Cobbs said reflecting on his time with the fire crew. While he admits seeing friends die in the line of duty for \$1 per hour was difficult, he said there is a positive aspect.

"When you get out after being on the fire crew, you change for the better."

Part of being better while in prison meant falling back on a skill cultivated by his grandmother; as a young child, Cobbs' grandmother bought him a set of clippers, and he began cutting hair.

Cobbs said he "messed up" several



Jackie Rae / Business Journal

Andre Cobbs cuts a client's hair at Juniper Beach.

haircuts before getting better. Once he took classes, he began to perfect his craft, but says he is always practicing, and he managed to improve even more while in prison.

Then, in February of 2022, Cobbs was released from prison after serving 13 years of his 16-year sentence.

Because of his time with the fire crew, he was able to find a job fairly quickly, but it was a friend in prison who encouraged him to continue his craft of cutting hair after he was released.

So, shortly after his release, he headed to the beach to cut hair for anyone who was interested. People

who were unhoused would get free haircuts, and those who were able to pay would do so. Soon, Cobbs was able to grow his clientele and slowly build up a name for himself.

Eventually, one client introduced him to Winnie StaCkz, a celebrity stylist who has worked with Missy Elliot, Megan Thee Stallion and Saweetie.

Not only has StaCkz made Cobbs his preferred barber, he has also invited Cobbs to be the celebrity barber for the BET Celebrity Runway Show on June 24.

"Him believing in me has made be a better person," said Cobbs, who added that he is determined to give back and provide the same opportunities he has received.

Although he might not be at the beach as often as his demand grows, Cobbs encourages everyone to reach out to him for a beach cut when needed.

"If I'm a celebrity barber, I'm still coming back. I'm not going to change for nobody."

Anyone interested in getting a cut from Cobbs can book him through his Instagram page: @drecutzb. ■

Long Beach could soon join 2 new park districts

By Jason Ruiz

Long Beach is in the process of becoming a member of two new park improvement districts that could help raise funds for open space acquisition, development and park maintenance for areas abutting the Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers.

The city has adopted resolutions to join the Lower Los Angeles River Recreation and Park District and the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Parks District, which could include areas within a mile of each river.

Once the districts become active, they could raise funds for improving park space for their member cities through increasing property taxes, applying for grants and other outside funding, charging fees for using their facilities or shifting existing property taxes to help pay for parks.

In Long Beach, that could mean more funds to pay for maintenance in the city's largest park, El Dorado, and the potential to fund the expansion of open space in North, West and Central Long Beach, areas of the city that have significantly less park acreage

than more affluent communities elsewhere in Long Beach.

How will the districts work?

The districts would have 15- and 17-member boards of directors that would include an appointee from each member city. For the LA River district, the larger of the two, that would mean cities like Vernon, South Gate and Pico Rivera would join Long Beach on the park district board.

For the smaller San Gabriel board, Long Beach would be joined by cities like Artesia, Hawaiian Gardens, Bellflower and Santa Fe Springs.

Tyler Bonanno-Curley, Long Beach's manager of government affairs, said that the city is pushing for greater representation on the board because it makes up a large share of both proposed districts.

Long Beach makes up about one-third of the lower LA River area and about one-fifth of the lower San Gabriel River area. Having a larger voice could be achieved by Long Beach having more than one vote or having a weighted-vote system to account for the population and size of each city's share of the district.

Bonanno-Curley said the district would raise funds and vote on how

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2 container terminals at Port of Long Beach shutter amid work slowdown

By Brandon Richardson

After a series of work actions and terminal closures, operations at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have “generally improved,” the Pacific Maritime Association said June 9.

The statement came after a week that the Marine Exchange of

Southern California described as “confusing,” noting that the week started with an anticipated 14-28 delayed container ships but ended with only three anticipated delays.

The impacts came after two container terminals at the Port of Long Beach closed on June 5, according to port officials, following an intentional slowdown by workers

the week before as negotiations over a new labor contract dragged on.

Total Terminals International on Pier T, the largest container terminal in Long Beach, and the Pacific Container Terminal on Pier J did not move containers during the day on June 5, port spokesperson Lee Peterson confirmed to the Business Journal.

When asked if the closure was a continuation of recent work actions by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Peterson said, “decisions to close were made based on operational needs.”

The two terminals reopened for the evening shift, according to Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero.

TTI sent out a notice June 4 that all gate appointments at the terminal the following day were canceled, according to an email obtained by the Business Journal. The operator did not give a reason for the cancellations.

Neither terminal operator responded to requests for comment.

Pacific Container Terminal, owned by Carrix Inc’s SSA Marine, was closed on June 5 for normal operational reasons having nothing to do with labor, terminal general manager Randy Galosic told Reuters.

The closures came two days after the ports of LA and Long Beach saw slowdowns due to work actions by the ILWU. On Friday, June 1, rank-and-file longshore workers staged a wildcat strike that created labor shortages at container terminals, slowing down cargo movement.

The action was the latest in a series that have taken place up and down California as the union negotiates a new contract for workers with the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents terminal operators and shippers.

“Over the weekend and continuing today, the ILWU has continued to stage concerted and disruptive work actions that have slowed operations at key marine terminals at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and elsewhere on the West Coast, including the Ports of Oakland and Seattle,” PMA said in June 5 a statement. “Union leaders are implementing many familiar disruption tactics from their job action playbook, including refusing to dispatch workers to marine terminals, slowing operations, and making unfounded health and safety claims.

“The ILWU’s coast-wide work actions since June 2 are forcing retailers, manufacturers and other shippers to shift cargo away from the West Coast in favor of ports on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts,” the statement continued. “Much of the diverted cargo may never return to the West Coast.”

As the twin ports experienced work slowdowns on June 2, ILWU Local 13 leadership stated workers took it “upon themselves to voice their displeasure with the ocean carriers’ and terminal operators’ position.”

The statement pointed out that PMA members accumulated upward of \$500 billion in net profits

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Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A group of cyclists rides along Queensway Drive near the Queen Mary.

With the Queen Mary back in city’s hands, officials eye new development plans

By Alicia Robinson and
Brandon Richardson

Instead of a deteriorating ocean liner surrounded by a sea of asphalt and nestled in a maze of port operations with semi trucks whizzing by, what if the Queen Mary were a polished historical gem providing the backdrop to a vibrant waterfront promenade, where residents could grab a coffee or sit down to a meal, hear an outdoor concert or enjoy a unique view of the city skyline?

With a recent infusion of cash to fund continued repairs on the neglected ship and renewed plans to explore shore-side development, Long Beach city leaders are hoping they’ll finally find the formula to turn the tide in creating a bustling moneymaker that draws locals as well as tourists.

The latest efforts follow a string of failures by companies hired to both operate the 1930s ship and develop around it, and the obstacles to success are considerable: a dilapidated vessel that needs at least tens of millions of dollars in maintenance and has so far rarely turned a profit, and adjacent land

with limited access and restrictions on how it can be used.

Johnny Vallejo, the city’s deputy economic development director, pointed to the difficulties of accomplishing both tasks simultaneously.

“Nobody was able to successfully maintain and manage the ship as they tried to work through the development process,” he said.

So the city has taken on maintenance and operation of the vessel, with the help of contractor Evolution Hospitality, and officials are hoping development proposals will follow.

“We want the ship to be the crown for not just this site, but for the city,” Vallejo said.

“We want someone to come to the site and think, ‘Wow, that view, that ship—we want to build something out here.’”

A history of failure

Whatever development gets pitched, it won’t be the first try.

In the past few decades, ideas that failed include Disney’s plan in 1990 for a development that would have included an amusement park with replicas of historical ships, a “Mysterious Island”-themed area,

a massive aquarium and a working research lab.

The \$2 billion park and accompanying resort—including five hotels and hundreds of boat slips—would have covered 350 acres, much of which is underwater and would have been filled in.

Faced with a tangle of regulatory issues and lukewarm reception from residents, Disney deep-sixed the idea and instead built a second attraction next to its flagship Anaheim park.

More than two decades later, Urban Commons—which held the ship’s lease from 2016 to 2021—revealed a \$250 million plan for Queen Mary Island, a 65-acre entertainment district with a 2,400-foot boardwalk, a 200-room hotel, shops and restaurants, and “adventure” entertainment such as an ice climbing wall, zipline and skydiving simulator.

But by 2019, the ship’s longtime inspector was reporting critical repairs had been neglected and that the vessel could soon become unsalvageable; the city later fired him. In 2021, Urban Commons was in bankruptcy court and the city was scrambling to complete urgent maintenance on the Queen.

Some of the earlier proposals

were so grandiose, it seemed unlikely they’d come to fruition, said Kam Babaoff, whose Ensemble Investments LLC operates two hotels about a half mile from the Queen Mary.

“It needs to be more realistic,” Babaoff said. “It’s challenging developing down there, but it can be done.”

For previous operators, the work of keeping the ship from falling apart likely took their focus away from the land side, said Geraldine Knatz, who held high-ranking jobs at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles for more than 25 years before her 2014 retirement.

“I suspect that the ship was always the challenge for them in terms of how that property was going to be developed,” she said. “It’s not like a clean slate.”

That’s why the city’s current plan is to handle Queen Mary operations itself and keep that separate from land-side development, Vallejo said (though he left the door open for a great proposal or alternate direction from the City Council).

“Our emphasis since the city took control is to stabilize, maintain and improve the ship,” he said.

“My belief is that by stabilizing the

Continued on page 16

Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies

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Photo by John Calambokidis

**Global shipping companies reduced speeds
to 10 knots or less in 2022**

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Thanks to: COSCO Shipping, CSL, Evergreen, G Shipping, Hapag-Lloyd, "K" Line, Maersk, MSC, OOCL, ONE, Swire Shipping, Wallenius Wilhelmsen, Wan Hai, and Yang Ming for declining their financial awards to support continuation of the program!

*The 2023 program runs May 1 through December 15, 2023
For more information, visit bluewhalesblueskies.org*



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Passengers board Long Beach Transit's AquaBus at Dock 4 near the Aquarium of the Pacific.

AquaBus returns after more than 3 years

For \$1 each way, the 35-person AquaBus ferries people between the Queen Mary, the Aquarium Docks and Shoreline Village.

By Brandon Richardson

After halting operations at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020, Long Beach Transit's AquaBus is ferrying passengers across Queensway Bay and through Rainbow Harbor once again.

AquaBus operations resumed at the end of May, with service seven days per week between the Queen Mary, Aquarium Dock 4 and Shoreline Village Dock 9 from 11 a.m. to 6:20 p.m. A one-way fare is \$1.

The larger AquaLink water taxi

has been operating on weekends in the wake of the pandemic, but it's now offering expanded service seven days per week between Alamitos Bay Landing Berth 3 and Aquarium Dock 4 from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. A third stop at the Queen Mary is expected to return in two to three weeks, spokesperson Mike Gold told the Post.

A one-way AquaLink fare is \$5. "Currently, the plan is to operate through Labor Day," Gold said, "and LBT will evaluate whether to operate weekend service in the fall and beyond."

Unlike AquaLink, the smaller AquaBus does not serve snacks or beverages—alcoholic or otherwise.

The AquaBus can carry a maximum of 35 passengers on a first-come, first-board basis with limited availability for strollers and bikes. The AquaLink, meanwhile, can carry up to 70 people, also on a first-come, first-board basis.

Both services are subject to weather conditions. ■

New report shows how colleges hurt and help students' mental health

By Tess Kazenoff

A global pandemic, economic uncertainty and racial injustice have all contributed to an overall decline in mental health across the country and globe in recent years, studies have shown. And according to a new report, co-authored by Cal State Long Beach professor Lindsay Pérez Huber, students on college campuses are mirroring that trend.

"Degrees of Distress: How Higher Education Institutions Hurt and Help Student Mental Health," commissioned by College Futures Foundation and written by Pérez Huber and UC San Diego professor Sam Museus, explores how college students, particularly students from marginalized groups, are impacted by mental health challenges, and the role that higher education institutions can play in both helping and harming mental wellness.

The report cites one particularly poignant statistic: In 2021, about 60% of college students reported experiencing at least one mental health challenge that year.

"That statistic was really striking, because it shows that the vast majority, or a large portion of our college students, are experiencing mental health challenges," Pérez Huber said.

When examining the way that higher education institutions play a role in perpetuating these challenges, there were a couple of key findings: "One is that institutions by their design, by their competitive and individualistic cultures, can promote social isolation," Pérez Huber said.

Although it is a common experience for college students in general to experience feelings of not belonging

particularly while transitioning into a college environment, students of color, who oftentimes are coming into predominantly white institutions, are disproportionately impacted, said Pérez Huber.

Even students at institutions such as Cal State Long Beach, for instance, which serves many students of color, can still find that the school "prioritizes dominant culture," Pérez Huber said.

"This sense of not belonging is a very common experience for many students of color, even when they're in institutions where they see a lot of students around like them," she said.

Students of color typically do not see their experiences reflected in college curriculums unless they are taking an ethnic studies or gender studies course, and oftentimes do not see professors who look like them, Pérez Huber said.

Of course, other societal issues have exacerbated the sense of isolation many college students are experiencing, according to the report.

After the uprisings around racial conflict in the summer of 2020 in which people demanded a recognition of racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy, students entering higher education are still trying to grapple with what that means, Pérez Huber said.

Plus, there are the everyday experiences of racism on campuses, and more subtle experiences such as racial microaggressions, which can "take a psychological and physiological toll on students who experience those as a daily part of their campus cultures and experiences," Pérez Huber said.

Nationally, the privatization of higher education has had an impact on students' wellbeing and has led to economic performance measures

Continued on page 13



Lindsay Pérez Huber.

Courtesy photo

Studebaker Road project, now estimated to cost \$38M, could break ground in 2024

By Jason Ruiz

A long-planned revamp of Studebaker Road in East Long Beach has gotten more expensive, and its start date has been pushed back, which has led the city to seek funds to pay for repairs that were more complicated than expected, city officials said on June 6.

Studebaker runs from Second Street to Los Coyotes Diagonal within the city and is one of four major corridors the city has identified for major renovations, which include Market Street and Artesia Boulevard in North Long Beach, both of which are currently under construction.

The Studebaker project was originally projected to cost about \$18.5 million, but Public Works Director Eric Lopez told the City Council on June 6 that the figure was a mistake and the new projected cost is about \$38 million.

"When we do get started with construction, this will be the largest major corridor project that we will have undertaken," Lopez said, noting that the stretch of road is about 5 miles long.

The Artesia "Great Boulevard" project that the city broke ground on earlier this year is about 3.25 miles long and is expected to cost at least \$36 million. Lopez said in December that the Studebaker project was expected to start at the end of 2023.

A number of issues were discovered as teams began to assess the road in the design phase, Lopez said, like a need to build in stormwater diversion elements to keep rain runoff from entering the wetlands areas near Second Street and Pacific Coast Highway.

The city is also looking to lay fiber optic cable along Studebaker to connect that portion of the city to the city's fiber network.

A \$5 million request to Congress for funding to pay for pavement improvements and things like a transit boarding island, separated bike lanes, updated signals and fiber-optics along Loynes Drive and Studebaker has been submitted to the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee.

Lopez said that the city is also pursuing about \$17 million more from a variety of local and federal sources, including \$2 million from Measure W, since the stormwater element is being incorporated into the updated plan, and \$6.5 million from a settlement the city reached with the Orange County Transportation Agency in 2017.

The \$13 million settlement was originally planned to be used on streets near the 405 Freeway interchange with the 605 Freeway,

where a bottleneck was created where the widened Orange County portion of the freeway meets the Long Beach portion with less lanes.

In 2017, the city identified Bellflower Boulevard, Los Coyotes Diagonal and Willow Street as roads that could see improvements because they were expected to absorb additional traffic, but Lopez said the city is working with Caltrans to divert some of the settlement funds to the Studebaker project.

The city currently has about \$24.7 million allocated for the project.

"There will be impacts to the schedule, but those impacts outweigh what we get from getting these federal dollars into the project," Lopez said.

Councilmember Daryl Supernaw, who requested the update at the meeting on June 6, asked the city to assess alternative designs if all the funding needed to complete the project as designed can't be secured.

"If this is not doable, if we don't have the funding, what is Plan B?" Supernaw said.

The new expected timeline is for the city to put the project out to bid



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Drivers speed along Studebaker Road at Seventh Street in East Long Beach.

in the fall of 2023 with a potential contract award being approved by the City Council in the spring of 2024. Construction would start sometime after that.

Studebaker Road conditions have continued to deteriorate as the city secured funds to move forward with the project. Some sections of Studebaker have a pavement condition index score—the metric the city uses

to grade road conditions—in the 20s and 30s. Roads with PCI scores below 40 are considered poor or very poor and can require a full reconstruction.

The improvements are expected to add protected bike lanes, shorter and safer crosswalks for pedestrians, updated traffic signals and medians with new landscaping that are intended to slow traffic down along the busy corridor. ■



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The YMCA of Greater Long Beach will offer on-the-spot interviews at today's Career Fair from 10am-2pm at the Expo Arts Center.

4 community groups receive \$182,000 to support children in Central Long Beach

By Tess Kazeoff

Four new community projects in Central Long Beach are slated to receive a total of \$182,000—all in the name of supporting young children and their families.

The projects, led by Long Beach Community Table, the Long Beach Public Library Foundation, Long Beach Residents Empowered and M.O.R.E. Mothers, were selected to receive the money as part of an initiative known as Best Start Central Long Beach.

Best Start Central Long Beach was launched through First 5 LA, an organization that uses Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds to support children in their first five years of life. The group provided the funds for the four projects, with the support of The Nonprofit Partnership and Long Beach Forward.

But while the organization is providing the money, First 5 LA didn't choose how to spend it. Instead, Long Beach parents,

Continued on page 18



LIBRE, or Long Beach Residents Empowered, received \$50,000 in community change funds, voted upon by Best Start Central Long Beach members.

Courtesy of LIBRE

2023
Career Fair

Long Beach Career Fair Seeks Job Finders, Keepers

The best candidates looking for the best places to work in Long Beach will be at our first-ever Long Beach Career Fair on Tuesday, June 13. The Long Beach Business Journal and Long Beach Post are proud to host this exciting event to support job seekers and the companies hiring. A wide variety of local businesses have partnered with us for the day to share their knowledge and build connections.

Seminars

11 AM - 11:30 AM

How to Tell Your Story During Your Job Search
- Brad Pollak, Director of SBDC

12 PM - 12:30 PM

Unlocking Your Potential
- Rodrigo Garay, Admissions Counselor, LB Job Corps

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COLUMNIST: TIM GROBATY

A Los Cerritos La Linda classic updated to resort quality, listed at \$2.5 million

Four bedrooms are upstairs, including a large primary suite with vaulted wood beamed ceilings, a wood-burning fireplace and a sitting area.

The tract of La Linda Drive in Los Cerritos is a quiet and stately neighborhood nestled within the already quiet and stately neighborhood in the old-money area near Virginia Country Club and Rancho Los Cerritos.

The gated neighborhood still has a strong historic feel to it, largely due to the fact that it's anchored by the Bixby Mansion, or Bixby Ranch House, at 11 La Linda Drive. The cavernous home was built in the late 19th century and George and his wife Amelia moved into the home in 1890, making a huge addition that fairly doubled the home's size in 1904, making it large enough for the parents, their seven children and seven workers as well as serving as the headquarters for farming operations of Rancho Los Cerritos.

The 10-acre ranch site that surrounded and included the mansion was bought in 1922 by oilman and banker Thomas Gilchrist, who subdivided the land into the parcels that eventually became today's La Linda neighborhood, 35 beautiful and mostly large homes that line the oval La Linda Drive just off Bixby Road a block west of Long Beach Boulevard.

The house stood in various states of disrepair over the decades, but it was brought back to life in later years by its last owner, the late Duane Rose, a florist who had bought other lots on the site, including today's featured home at 51 La Linda Drive, which Realtor and home restoration artist Alison White has on the market now at \$2.499 million.

White, who has recently moved to Long Beach, has done remarkable work with the dozens of homes she's purchased and restored perfectly back to their original condition—or, in many cases, much better. I wrote last summer about a home at 4131 Cedar Ave. with which she did a thoroughly meticulous job in rescuing and restoring.

White isn't a mercenary house-flipper; she doesn't do quick, superficial work like many



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

The East Coast Traditional home at 51 La Linda Dr. in Long Beach.

flippers and, while a big payday is always nice, she's mostly concerned with making the house better in every way, often at a cost that eats into any appreciable profit.

"I won't make much on this house," she said, noting that she paid \$1.65 million for the large East Coast Traditional home and has spent some \$700,000 putting it in its current resort-style condition. Much of the money went to the outdoors, including a swimming pool in the property's huge backyard that is basically divided into two parts, the pool/barbecue area and a huge, grassy area—throw in another \$10,000 for installation of new sod.

The 1938 home has five bedrooms and three baths in 3,504 square feet on an 11,000-square-foot lot.

Aside from the landscaping and pool, there wasn't as much renovation work as was required on White's Cedar Avenue home. Still, her touches are tasteful and elegant. She finished the formal dining room with deep blue grasscloth wallpaper, a Serena and Lily chandelier and a bay window and French doors that lead out to the backyard.

The modern and spacious kitchen with a prep station, an island and bar seating opens to the

family room with its large glass sliding doors leading to the yard, and the sole downstairs bedroom may be best used as an office with its wood-burning fireplace and a bathroom.

Four bedrooms are upstairs, including a large primary suite with vaulted wood beamed ceilings, a wood-burning fireplace and a sitting area. The ensuite bath has dual vanities, an arched bathtub and a Carrara marble shower with rain showerhead. The three additional upstairs bedrooms share a renovated full bath. A full laundry room completes the second level.

There's a palpable sense of living in a little village within the gates of the La Linda community, with occasional neighborhood-wide parties and get-togethers. The community has an HOA of \$900 a year; its members are currently embroiled over the potential removal of a beloved or hated eucalyptus tree. The late florist Rose was of the tree-hating school who was so anti-eucalyptus that he put into his will a \$100,000 bounty on the tree that would go to the HOA; the buyers of his mansion, then, offered the same amount for the tree, on community grounds, to be kept.

At press time, the tree was still standing. ■



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

The Bixby Ranch House at 11 La Linda Drive was built in 1890.



Listing photo

Alison White installed this pool in the backyard as part of her improvements to the home at 51 La Linda Drive.



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

The wine cellar in this 1938 remodeled home at 51 La Linda Drive in Long Beach.

Commissioners discuss hikes to Long Beach water rates; vote expected June 22

A staff-recommended hike of 10% for water rates next year would amount to a \$5.69 monthly increase for the average customer.

By Jason Ruiz

Long Beach Utilities commissioners met again last week to discuss a potential rate hike for water, which could be as high as 10% next year as the department deals with declining sales due to customer conservation, increasing costs and an expanding capital investment plan that could, in the long term, increase the city’s supply of less expensive groundwater.

A staff-recommended hike of 10% for water rates next year would amount to a \$5.69 monthly increase for the average customer, according to the department. However, an alternate increase of 9% that was requested at the commission’s last meeting would add about \$5.13 to the monthly bill.

The commission is expected to set rates for water, sewer and gas at its June 22 meeting, but only water rates

are expected to increase in the new fiscal year that begins in October.

“It’s very jarring, but let’s talk about what happens when you decided to forgo a higher rate increase in ’24, you’re more or less kicking the can down the road,” said Brandon Walker, the Utility Department’s director of finance, told commissioners.

Walker has presented scenarios for rate increases for the upcoming year through 2028, which show that a smaller increase in 2024 would likely require larger increases in the following years in order for the department to get back to its minimum reserve level, which is about \$30 million.

A 10% increase could be followed by an 8%, 7%, 6% and 5% increase over the next five years under the department’s current projections, while a 9% increase next year could be followed by increases of 8%, 7%, 7% and 5% increase over the next five years.

The hikes are necessary because the department is projected to receive about \$9.3 million less in water sales due to customer conservation efforts and wet weather, but it’s also planning on investing tens of millions in groundwater projects and other repairs.

The department has about \$8.9 million in reserves currently and would drop to \$4.1 million without a

rate increase in October, Walker said. The reserve minimum is the amount of money the department would need to operate for 90 days or make emergency repairs.

Walker said having a healthy reserve allows the department to get better terms on credit that it uses to fund large investments into its network.

The projected increases are also necessary, Walker said, because the department’s costs continue to grow. Pensions, benefits, replacing vehicles, pipes and other materials are getting more expensive and could continue to grow because of inflation.

Even imported water, which the city is trying to reduce its reliance on, is getting more expensive. So while it becomes a smaller piece of the pie of where the city gets its water from, it is expected to become a more costly piece.

“With inflation, inputs are going up, they have to be balanced and borne somewhere, and unfortunately, they’re on the backs of the customers,” Walker said.

If inflation or other costs start to decrease, the projected rate increases for future years could decrease or go away altogether, Walker said.

Commissioners asked if there were ways to minimize the increase for customers for the coming year by transferring funds from more financially healthy arm

of the department, like the gas utility, but California law limits how utility revenue can be used, typically tying it to the source of where it was generated.

But commissioners could look at other ways to conserve water utility money.

While the city’s loss of the Measure M lawsuit early last year means the Utilities Department can no longer transfer up to 12% of water and sewer revenue to the city, the department still must pay the city for repairs on any infrastructure that’s impacted by the department’s projects—the amount that the department owes the city is known as the “nexus” amount.

And the utility will owe the city a nexus of a few million dollars because of road work that will be necessary after water pipe maintenance is completed. But rather than that money coming from the water fund, the commission is exploring whether the gas fund could cover the bill.

However, it’s unclear if that would be legal. Details on that are expected to be presented to the commission at the June 22 meeting.

Once the commission approves the proposed budget, it will go to the City Council for final approval, which is expected to happen before the new fiscal year begins in October. ■

Mental Health

Continued from page 6

of student success, which focuses on how quickly students graduate, what kinds of jobs they get, and other “return on investment” measures, rather than focusing on meaningful experiences students can have, and the opportunities they’re exposed to, Pérez Huber explained.

Apart from that, financial precarity is “a huge issue” for college students, particularly as the gap in working class and affluent groups have drastically increased over the past couple of decades in the U.S., adding to increased anxiety, stress and mental health challenges.

Many who enter higher education don’t have the financial resources to pay for it. “They’re leaving college with tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars in student debt, depending on what university they attended,” Pérez Huber said.

Some students are coming into college not only unable to afford tuition, but without having their basic needs met—which could mean not having housing, food, or other necessities, Pérez Huber added.

While schools typically have services available for struggling

students, complex bureaucracies in higher education can create barriers to accessing resources, the report details.

For example, many institutions can have a relatively small counseling staff serving a campus of thousands of students, making initial and then consistent access a barrier, Pérez Huber said.

Despite the negative impact that colleges and universities can

“The first step is to really recognize that institutions play a role in the harm that can be done,” Pérez Huber said. “so they must have a responsibility also for the positive mental health outcomes of their student populations.”

Culturally relevant mental health services, and creating more of a tenure track or opportunity for long-term counselor positions

“The first step is to really recognize that institutions play a role in the harm that can be done so they must have a responsibility also for the positive mental health outcomes of their student populations.”

- Lindsay Pérez Huber, Cal State Long Beach professor

sometimes play when it comes to students’ mental health, on the flipside, they can be a powerful tool for positively impacting mental health as well, the report found.

While the report frames mental health as a systemic problem, rather than an individual problem facing students, mental health is typically discussed outside of student success, rather than being seen as an institutional responsibility, said Pérez Huber.

(which are oftentimes temporary), can help affirm college students—but ultimately, it will take looking beyond just counseling programs to becoming a campus-wide effort, in order to make meaningful change, according to Pérez Huber.

Higher education institutions have the power to create structures and spaces of affirmation— through everyday forms of validation that acknowledge the integrity and identity of students of color, a

concept known as racial micro-affirmations, Pérez Huber explained.

“The concept of racial micro-affirmations has been helpful in allowing us to think about what are the ways that an institution can acknowledge the assets of our students, of their origin communities, of their cultures, and to really allow them to feel like they are valued ... that we, as an institution of higher education, are really fortunate to have students on campus from diverse backgrounds,” Pérez Huber said.

Particularly since the pandemic, which has exacerbated so many challenges and has had lasting impacts on mental health, institutions need to recognize the urgency of the issue, Pérez Huber said.

“If we’re going to really talk about student success—and include student wellbeing as a part of student success—we also have to be looking upward at the systemic forces that influence the experiences of our students in mental health and in other aspects of their of their lives as well,” Pérez Huber said, “and that is to understand student wellbeing as integral to student success, that we’re not just focused on the kind of academic meanings of success, that we’re really interested in the ability for students to thrive both academically and personally.” ■

Sea otter pups make their debut at Aquarium of the Pacific

By Alicia Robinson

Three young sea otters, all found stranded on California beaches, can now be seen feeding, frolicking and generally looking furry and cute at the Aquarium of the Pacific.

The otter pups, named Elle, Bee and Cee (for Long Beach’s nickname, LBC), are all less than a year old (two are around 5 months old) and were deemed unable to be released by federal wildlife authorities, said Megan Smylie, the aquarium’s sea otter program manager.

The aquarium announced on June 8, which is World Ocean Day, that the pups had arrived and can be seen by visitors in the otter habitat.

Southern sea otters like the three youngsters in Long Beach are considered a threatened species and only live along California’s Central Coast, where their population is about 3,000, Smylie said.

Young otters may become stranded after being separated from their mothers by extreme weather,



Courtesy of Robin Riggs via the Aquarium of the Pacific

The Aquarium of the Pacific welcomed three new sea otter pups on June 8.

or becoming orphaned due to boat strikes, net entanglement, pollution or predators such as sharks. Smylie said the moms take care of feeding and grooming their babies, so

their absence can quickly result in dehydration and other problems for the young.

When a stranded pup is found, experts will evaluate whether it

can be reunited with its mother or be paired with a surrogate mom through a program at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. If that can’t be done, young otters are placed out at facilities such as the Aquarium of the Pacific where they can be with other otters—and that’s important, Smylie said, because they’re very social animals.

Elle, Bee and Cee join the aquarium’s three resident otters, two adult females and a juvenile male, Smylie said. Because the species is so inquisitive and playful, “they are one of our most popular animals,” she said. “They’re just naturally charismatic.”

Ultimately, the goal is to prepare as many otters as possible to be sent back into the wild, where they help keep the marine ecosystem in balance by eating sea urchins—which could otherwise decimate kelp forests.

“Anything that we can do to support the wild population is the best thing that we can do for our local ecosystems,” Smylie said. ■

In the top **10%** of universities that provide the greatest ROI

(Georgetown University, 2022)

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TO THE STRENGTH OF A BEACH DEGREE

Queen Mary

Continued from page 5

asset, and showing potential investors that the Queen Mary is not an albatross but should be an incentive to shoreside development, that that's where we're going to end up."

Questionable financials

Operating and maintaining the hulking steel octogenarian remains a challenging and expensive task, and turning a profit from it has been mostly an aspirational goal.

City staff believe the ship is capable of generating upward of \$57 million in gross earnings annually. Financial records do show two years when the most recent operator, Urban Commons, reported grossing more than \$57 million, but the firm also booked millions in net losses both years.

From 2007 to 2019, under two different operators, only three years ended in net profit; over that time, their combined losses totaled \$31.4 million.

A big obstacle has been the ship's costly and unending maintenance needs—and after previous operators fell behind on (or neglected) upkeep, it's not clear how much the city must invest to keep the vessel afloat.

The ship was already suffering from deferred maintenance when, in 2016, the city issued \$23 million in bonds so Urban Commons could pay for critical repairs. But the money was gone before the work was finished; the city auditor later found that fewer than a third of the proposed projects were completed, and the costs for some of those

ballooned beyond original estimates.

A 2021 city-commissioned report estimated that after an initial investment of \$25 million to \$50 million, the ship would require \$5 million annually for upkeep. The two operators that held the lease between 2007 and 2019 spent, on average, less than \$3.4 million a year on repairs, according to financial audits obtained by the Post through a public records request.

(Older Queen Mary financial records were not provided prior to publication.)

Since taking control of the ship after Urban Commons' bankruptcy, the city has spent at least several million on what it has described as critical repairs, but officials had not provided a total amount or inventory of the work at press time.

The ship will get a fresh infusion of \$12 million from a land swap deal between the city and the port, but city leaders have not laid out in detail how it will be spent.

Vallejo said he hopes to get the Queen out of the red by the end of 2025 and reinvest any profits into the ship, and the city does get revenue from Pier H (where the ship sits) beyond the money people spend on admission, food and drinks on the ship.

Hotel taxes on the ocean liner's more than 300 staterooms bring in millions each year, passengers who go through the adjacent Carnival Cruise Lines terminal pay a surcharge on their tickets that goes to the city, and all revenue from concerts and other events at the nearby Harry Bridges Memorial Park will now be collected by Long Beach rather than a ship leaseholder.

'Hollywood Bowl by the sea'

Despite its administrative and maintenance headaches, some people truly love the Queen and want to see it prosper.

Among them is Danny Rangel, 36, a Long Beach resident who was devastated to be laid off in early 2020 after spending nearly eight years as a tour guide on the ship. He was one of at least 125 former employees, some with decades under their belt, who were thrilled to return to their jobs as the management company ramped up hiring to reopen the ship earlier this year.

As an actor, Rangel enjoys the performance aspect of giving tours, he said, but also "it's the history of the ship, what she means to not only Long Beach history but world history, getting to run into all walks of life, people who had traveled on board, former employees, people related to families who worked on (building) the ship."

His favorite fact about the Queen Mary is that during World War II, a voyage with 16,683 troops and crew members set a record for the most passengers carried on one vessel; the record still stands.

With the storied ship as an anchor for shore-side development, some observers said they're optimistic the area could be transformed into a success. (Land-side, up to 43 acres could be available if the cruise ship terminal is included; without the terminal, it would be closer to 25 acres.)

In 2013, an economic firm studied the site and proposed a multi-phase project including a large yacht marina, boutique hotel, apartments, retail shops and public open space.

A task force the city convened in 2015 to gather input and make recommendations suggested mixed-use development with a public promenade and an amphitheater with about 5,000 seats, said Michael Bohn, an architect with Studio One Eleven who chaired the group.

"At the time we were looking for a pretty rich mixed-use environment that would take advantage of the views of Downtown" but keep the Queen as the central focus, Bohn said.

"What better place than to sit near the Queen Mary and look back at our city and see a performance—it could be the Hollywood Bowl by the sea."

Bohn said the city's plans should be bold, but he and Babaoff agreed that finding the right developer will be crucial and that the city should limit its involvement with the project.

Any project would need to consider a convenient way to get to and from the site, which has limited access (via the 710 Freeway and Queensway Bridge), Knatz said. She suggested water taxis, something Vallejo said city staff have begun to discuss.

New possibilities

A new study of development possibilities for the Queen Mary and its environs could come in 2024. Vallejo said the task force's recommendations will be considered, but he also wants to know how the market has changed since they were made.

For now, the focus is on fixing up the ship—Vallejo and Managing Director Steve Caloca said the state rooms are being spruced up, carpet is being smoothed out or replaced, and the sun deck is set to be restored.

Caloca said weekend brunch service will be back this summer, and 2024 will see the return of Sir Winston's restaurant and the popular Halloween-time Dark Harbor event. He also said he and his staff are carefully analyzing the ship to determine how it could be more profitable—such as adding new tours or staging for different types of events.

The ultimate goal is to make the Queen Mary self-sustaining, though Vallejo said he couldn't put a dollar figure to that yet. But whatever decisions are made going forward, the ship's finances will be more transparent than under previous operators and their sometimes "creative" corporate accounting, he said.

"I think we really are in a proof of concept here. In some ways, I'm taking part of my career on it, just because, you know, this is different," he said, adding that since the 1970s the ship was operated under a master lease, with the city in a more passive role.

Rangel, the tour guide, just wants more people to have the chance to hear the stories the Queen Mary has to tell.

"I really want future generations to experience what I've gotten to experience over the years," he said.

"The ship will always own a piece of my heart." ■

Stanford Middle School to get HVAC upgrade

By Tyler Hendrickson

Continuing the Long Beach Unified School District's efforts to have air-conditioned classrooms on all of its campuses, Stanford Middle School will be the latest Long Beach school to receive an HVAC upgrade starting this summer.

The \$35 million project is expected to be completed prior to the start of the 2025-26 school year and is being funded by Measure E bonds, which were approved by voters back in 2016. According to district spokesperson Evelyn Somoza, the timeline on HVAC installation was moved up after a heat wave at the beginning of the current school year, which prompted demands from parents for more action to protect kids from the blistering temperatures inside classrooms.

"The planned installation of air conditioning systems at LBUSD schools was accelerated in response to last fall's heat wave and the increasing frequency of extreme heat and poor air quality days," Somoza said. "The

health and safety of our students remains the district's highest priority; we'll continue to implement heat mitigation measures at schools that aren't yet fully air-conditioned."

The LBUSD's current timeline calls for air conditioning on every campus within the next four years. The lone exception will be at Poly High School, which will undergo a major campus renovation and is slated to have AC installed in 2028.

Somoza said that 12 portable, air-conditioned classrooms will be installed at Stanford to accommodate students during construction. Once the project is complete, the campus will have full HVAC capabilities in all buildings.

"As with the district's other HVAC projects, Stanford's renovations will include new, high-efficiency air conditioning systems in all permanent buildings, technology and accessibility upgrades, and infrastructure updates, among other improvements," Somoza added.

In addition to the new construction planned at Stanford, there are



The exterior of Stanford Middle School.

other HVAC projects currently underway or starting soon across the district. The HVAC project at Birney Elementary started back in April, and construction is scheduled to begin at Emerson and Gompers this summer.

During the 2023-24 school year, HVAC projects are expected to begin at Millikan High, Tincher Prep, and Minnie Gant Elementary. Additional

campuses will begin construction over the next two years, with a targeted completion date for all schools (other than Poly) set prior to the start of 2027-28 school year.

Poly's multi-year renovation project will begin during the 2024-25 school year, along with the campuswide renovations at Washington Middle School. ■

Queen Mary Financial Records, 2007 - 2019



Source: City of Long Beach • Visualization by Dennis Dean

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Community Groups

Continued from page 10

caregivers and community leaders with the Best Start Central Long Beach network got to vote on the winning projects, all of which support at least one of the group's four priorities in Long Beach:

- Building community knowledge about child development and parenting skills;
- Preventing child abuse and neglect;
- Increasing access and quality to affordable child care; and
- Increasing access to affordable housing and economic security.

"These community change funds help support and grow work that is already being done by community organizations," said Long Beach Forward associate director Nubia Flores.

With \$42,000 in community change funding, Toi Nichols, founder of M.O.R.E. Mothers, hopes to expand services in Central Long Beach. While the organization serves families across the city by providing essential items such as diapers and wipes, feminine hygiene products and even car seats depending on availability, and also by offering workshops and other resources, Nichols has found

that many of M.O.R.E. Mothers' participants have come out of the Central Long Beach area.

"This grant allows us to really continue to spread our arms around the families in Central Long Beach," Nichols said. "When you get the news that the community said, 'Hey, we want this,' it's great, you know, it just really lets us know we're on the right track, and that impact is there, and they see the potential to grow this program that's needed in the community."

Eligible voters were Best Start Central Long Beach members, which included any community member who participated in a Best Start program in the previous six months. Voters were able to cast their votes online in the two weeks leading up to the organization's May community partnership meeting, or during the meeting itself, which included presentations from 18 of the 19 applicants.

Each voter was able to rank the top five projects they hoped to see funded, Flores said, and in total, 65 votes were submitted.

"I think it's really powerful that this continues to be a priority area, and it also reflects on the need for more affordable housing, the need for more housing stability, and also this energy there that tenant voices should be the ones

leading the fight for housing justice policies," said Sylvana Uribe, communications director of Long Beach Residents Empowered, or LIBRE. The organization will utilize its \$50,000 in funds to expand its tenant organizing efforts through neighborhood-based tenant councils, with plans including developing additional educational materials as well as offering interpretation in Tagalog and Khmer.

"We're hoping that together, we're able to empower residents to challenge the status quo in Long Beach and reclaim the right to stay in their homes and communities, not only for their families, but also future generations of Long Beach renters and Long Beach residents," Uribe added.

In addition, \$40,000 will support the Long Beach Public Library Foundation program, "Dive into Learning," which provides early childhood education and literacy through workshops, resources and activities, and prepares children for kindergarten.

Lastly, \$50,000 will support Long Beach Community Table's fresh produce distribution program, allowing the organization to shift more toward sustainability, with a focus on developing gardening projects to empower residents to grow their own food, said executive director

Kristen Cox. Cox also hopes to expand the organization to be able to offer showering and laundry services to the city's unhoused residents.

"We'd like to work ourselves out of a job, but first you have to make sure that everybody who needs it knows about it, and then make sure that no one else is hungry," said Shannon Thomas, fundraiser and grant writer for Long Beach Community Table. "If you can remove the barrier to having good, healthy, nutritious food for families, you just give everybody a leg up."

Particularly amid the food shortages that have been impacting mutual aid and food distribution organizations locally and across the state, the funds will be "such a blessing," this year, Thomas said.

"At the end of the day, we want community to have a say on how these funds are spent because we believe that that's ultimately like how we get the best outcome, it's that a community that is the most impacted have a voice in the process, and then ultimately on how the funds are used," Flores said.

Best Start Central Long Beach's next community meeting is on July 27 at First Congregational Church, 241 E. Cedar Ave. The leadership team for the next two years will be voted on at this time. Follow Best Start Central Long Beach on Instagram for more information. ■

Ike's opens 2nd Long Beach location inside The Hangar

The new sandwich shop celebrated its grand opening on June 7 with free food, shirts and discounts.

By Brandon Richardson
Caitlin Antonios

Ike's Love and Sandwiches, the popular sandwich chain founded in the Bay Area, is continuing to expand, with the opening of its second location in Long Beach.

The shop, located in Long Beach's food hall The Hangar at LBX, had a soft opening on Tuesday, May 30.

Grand opening festivities on June 7 presented the first 50 attendees with an opportunity to get a free T-shirt and sandwich. Plus, guests entered to win free sandwiches for a year no one entered for this. he was just there chatting people up. All sandwiches were discounted at \$7.97 for the entire day.

The company's headquarters relocated from the Bay Area to Long Beach at Clark Avenue and Spring Street in 2021, three year after the opening of the first Ike's in Long Beach on Pacific Coast Highway near Bellflower Boulevard in 2018.

"Long Beach has been so great to us. This part of Long Beach is such a fun part of town and The Hangar is such a cool spot," Shehadeh told the Business Journal at the grand opening event. "If it wasn't for the support at the first [location], there wouldn't be a second."

The sandwich shop gained popularity during the rise of Yelp, and its first location in San Francisco opened in 2007 and became a travel destination. Its menu has a large variety of options, including accommodations for gluten-free diners, vegans, vegetarians and those who eat halal meat.

"I love Long Beach as a city," Shehadeh said. "[It] has a spot in my heart."

Ike's Love and Sandwiches' new location can be found at 4150 McGowan St., #5. ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal
Employees of the new Ike's shop inside the Hangar at LBX make sandwiches for a customer during a training day.



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal
Customers offer real-life training for employees of the new Ike's sandwich shop inside the Hangar at LBX ahead of its soft opening.

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Epic Wings opens in Bixby Knolls

By Caitlin Antonios

Epic Wings, a beloved San Diego-based chain, has landed in Long Beach, with a new location recently opened in Bixby Knolls.

After owner Lewis Khashan waited months to open amid a long permitting process, the store hosted an official grand opening on June 10.

Khashan, an attorney, used to live and attend school in Long Beach. He owned a business in the city in the mid-2000s, before deciding to move to the Inland Empire to open his personal injury law firm, Khashan Law Firm, in Murrieta. Now, he's back in Long Beach as a franchisee for Epic Wings—and a new law office in Bixby Knolls, down the street from the restaurant.

"I really love the community, it's so outgoing, friendly," Khashan said. "We also wanted a place that had a big patio, and it all worked out."

Khashan considers himself a foodie and is always on the hunt for new places to try—the first time he

tried Epic Wings was in Murrieta, and he just kept going back.

"I got hooked," Khashan. "There's no freezers, no microwaves. Everything is cooked to order."

The restaurant's menu features freshly baked, buttered and salted bread, salads, fries and, of course, wings—with 10 sauce options like garlic parmesan, lemon pepper, and zero-calorie atomic sauce.

Despite only having been open for a short time, Khashan has been paying staff for a while as he waited for city permits to come through. His manager has been on payroll for four months, and the rest of his staff, which he hired two months ago, were paid for an entire month while they all waited, Khashan said.

"I felt so bad," Khashan said. "I didn't want to lose them, so I said, 'Let's just pay them, and they can enjoy a month-long vacation.'"

But the store is finally open, and Khashan is considering bringing more Epic Wings to the area—if the process isn't so difficult.

Epic Wings is located at 4494 Atlantic Ave. ■



Medium buffalo sauce is drizzled onto chicken wings at the new Epic Wings location at 4494 Atlantic Ave. in Bixby Knolls.



Epic Wings' new Long Beach location is now serving customers at 4494 Atlantic Ave.



Breadsticks are brushed with butter at the new Epic Wings location at 4494 Atlantic Ave.



Epic Wings cashier Bobbie Shaffer takes a customer order at the chain's new Long Beach location at 4494 Atlantic Ave. in Bixby Knolls.



A row of sauces at the new Epic Wings at 4494 Atlantic Ave. in Bixby Knolls.

Foodologie bakery gets brick-and-mortar in Belmont Shore, slated to open this summer

By Caitlin Antonios

It took \$20 for Maria Leyesa to see her future.

Leyesa had been working as an occupational therapist for three years when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Her Instagram account, Foodologie (the study of food), at the time was dedicated to highlighting restaurants and food she had made for fun. But working three different jobs didn't give her a lot of time to be active on the account.

When the world shut down, she decided—like many others—to learn how to bake.

"I've always had a huge sweet tooth," Leyesa said. "At the time we didn't really know when things would re-open, or if, and I was worrying, like, 'What if these places close? I need to learn how to bake.'"

She documented her journey baking one chocolate chip cookie a day (and sometimes more than one a day on weekends) on her Instagram account, a tangible marker of her improving skills. Leyesa was baking so much that she shattered her oven door from overuse and was giving away tons of baked goods to her friends, family and co-workers.

They expected her to start selling them, but Leyesa didn't feel she had the right to.

"Call it imposter syndrome, but I didn't feel like I had the right to sell with no baking experience," Leyesa said.



Owner Maria Leyesa stands out front of her soon-to-be bakery, Foodologie, as she remodels the Belmont Shore location.

account, which had steady audience growth since she began posting her baking journey, that she would begin selling her baked goods, and people were immediately receptive.

"It's been constant orders since that day," Leyesa said.

Foodologie will mainly be a cookie and brownie bakery, featuring staples like The Chocolate

"That moment, walking back (to my apartment), looking at money—the cash spoke volumes. I made money on something I made with my very own hands."

- Maria Leyesa, Owner of Foodologie

But when a friend of a friend asked to buy a vegan, gluten-free chocolate tart in May 2020, she said yes.

Her first customer pulled up to the street of her small studio apartment, lowered her window, and paid the \$20 Leyesa charged, despite the cost of materials and labor being much more. But despite the financial loss, that \$20 set Leyesa on a path that led her to leasing a small, roughly 500-square-foot shop, just off Belmont Shore's famed Second Street.

"That moment, walking back (to my apartment), looking at money—the cash spoke volumes," Leyesa said. "I made money on something I made with my very own hands."

Leyesa posted on her Instagram

Chip, The Churrodoodle, Salted Toffee Chocolate and Ube Brownie. Leyesa hopes to include a rotating cookie of the month and a baked good of the week. She plans on adding a strawberry and matcha brownie to the menu.

And while the term "small business" can mean different things, Foodologie fits the bill. Leyesa runs her own social media account, which—up until signing for a physical space—served as her storefront. And, until recently, she was the only employee. She now employs three women to help her meet demand.

The decision to open a physical store was not a desire; it was a need.

"Multiple people said don't (get a

Continued on page 25

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Long Beach Rascals Teriyaki Grill to relocate to Carson in July, owner says



Customers line up inside Rascals Teriyaki Grill during the lunch rush.

Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

simultaneously so (employees) can move over—we can keep them employed and working,” Kiokane said, noting that he has a lot of long-time workers at the Long Beach location.

The first Rascals location opened in Gardena in 1987 as Phil and his brother Wayne partnered to launch the fast-casual joint that has served teriyaki chicken, beef and curry to the South Bay for nearly 40 years.

The new location in Carson has been in the works since 2019 as Kiyokane sought a new spot after the YMCA in Long Beach told him it was looking to expand.

The Los Altos Family YMCA is located next door to Rascals, and its website shows a proposal for a new two-story, 25,000-square-foot fitness facility the organization wants to build next to its Bellflower Boulevard location. The facility could have a renovated pool, rooms for group activities and fitness classes and a child watch center, according to the site.

Kiyokane said the YMCA has worked with Rascals as it started seeking permits to build out the new location almost four years ago, but it’s taken longer than expected to complete.

Construction was held up by the pandemic, and then there were issues with the soil that needed to be remediated. Now, he’s working to get all the utilities connected, he said.

“We were looking all over Long Beach, in Lakewood for a new location, but this one is closer to our other shops,” Kiyokane said.

As the last few weeks of operations of the Long Beach location wind down, Kiyokane said there is an element of sadness. Many of the employees and his general manager have gotten to know customers who frequented the location. Now those regulars will have to drive to Carson, Gardena or Torrance to get a “Teri Plate” or “Teri Burger.”

“It’s been a good 17 years,” Kiyokane said.

The new Rascals Teriyaki Grill will be located at 205 E. Carson St., Carson. ■

By Jason Ruiz

The popular Rascals Teriyaki Grill near Cal State Long Beach will soon be closed as owners prepare for a long-planned move to Carson, according to Phil Kiyokane, one of the South Bay chain’s owners.

Patrons have filed into the location near the corner of Bellflower Boulevard and Atherton Street for 17 years to fill up on teriyaki bowls and the chain’s beloved Chinese chicken salad.

However, the location could close as soon as next month, Kiyokane said, depending on when the new location near Carson Park (the park in Carson—not to be confused with the East Long Beach neighborhood) is ready to open. The original plan was to close the location at the end of June.

“I was trying to do it



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

After 17 years next door to the Los Altos Family YMCA on Bellflower Boulevard near Cal State Long Beach, Rascals Teriyaki Grill is slated to close in early July.



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

All three Hof's Hut locations, including Bellflower Boulevard in Long Beach, are taking part in a summer fundraising effort for the Boys and Girls Club of America.

Hof's Hut kicks off school backpack fundraiser with ways for customers to donate

All three locations—Long Beach, Seal Beach and Torrance—will participate to help provide students with new backpacks before fall.

By Caitlin Antonios

Hof's Hut restaurant has launched this summer's fundraiser to help get students new backpacks with school supplies.

The restaurant will partner with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach, the Los Angeles Harbor and Greater Anaheim-Cypress.

Until June 30, dine-in guests can round up their checks at the end of their meals as part of their donation. If a donation of at least \$3 or more is

given, diners will receive a coupon for a free individual pie or slice of pie that can be redeemed the next month, from July 1 through July 31.

For diners who order online and donate a minimum of \$3 with their order, the coupon will be available when they pick up their meal, and it will be redeemable in July as well.

In the month of July, aside from being able to redeem the coupon, any purchase of a chicken pot pie or breakfast pot pie will result in the restaurant donating \$1 to help members of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach get new school backpacks. Hof's Hut plans to match up to \$1,000 of funds raised.

According to data from the Boys & Girls Clubs, 90% of club members across America are considered low-income.

All three locations of the restaurant—Long Beach, Seal Beach and Torrance—will participate.

Hof's Hut's Long Beach location is at 2417 Bellflower Blvd. ■

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Get restaurant recs from the people you trust most with Beli

By Caitlin Antonios

The first thing most people do when they want to try a new restaurant for dinner is Google, “best restaurants Long Beach.”

But there's a problem with that method: How can you trust that those restaurants would actually cater to your specific tastes?

Judy Thelen and Eliot Frost were questioning just that when they started dating.

“Too often we were going to places with good critic reviews or high ratings and ending up disappointed,” Frost said.

They documented all the restaurants they would go to on dates on complicated spreadsheets, a process that eventually led to a marriage—and the creation of Beli, an app that centralizes restaurant tracking.

The app launched in 2021, and

it's now approaching 10 million restaurant rantings. In Long Beach, the top five highest rated restaurants are: Nick's on 2nd, Manaow Thai, Little Coyote, La Parolaccia Osteria, and Ammatoli. The most bookmarked restaurant in Long Beach by users is Phnom Penh Noodle Shack.

But unlike Yelp or Google, anyone who uses the app would never see that list. Instead, the recommendations are all personalized based on your own past experiences at other restaurants.

When the couple began searching for more reliable recommendations and a place to track their restaurant adventures, they saw an opportunity to fill a need that internet searches had yet to satisfy. They found that lots of people were like them, keeping lists of the restaurants they go to, but not necessarily leaving public comments on crowd-sourced review websites like Yelp.

Continued on page 26

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Simone’s Donuts named a top 10 donut shop nationwide

The family-owned business offers custom orders and other desserts, like cronuts. It’s also open 24/7.

By Caitlin Antonios

Long Beach had good reason to celebrate National Donut Day on June 2.

Ahead of the countrywide celebration of the fried treat, Yelp released its second annual list of the Top 100 Donut Shops in America. The top 10 spots were dominated by California spots, and Long Beach’s Simone’s Donuts ranked No. 9.

The family-owned business, near Cal State Long Beach, is open 24/7. While there are plenty of ready-to-go donuts for an impromptu stop by the shop, those looking for custom donut shapes and decorations for a special occasion can order in advance. Examples of custom orders, like “Go Buckeyes” spelled out in donuts, can be found on their Instagram account.

Simone’s also sells other desserts, like cronuts and apple fritters, and drinks like green Thai iced tea, lattes and smoothies.



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A customer orders a box of doughnuts from Simone’s Donuts on the corner of Stearns Street and Palo Verde Avenue.

“I’m definitely grateful for all our loyal customers that love Simone’s,” manager Melissa Eap said.

Yelp frequently puts out Top 100 lists. Businesses that identified as donut shops were ranked by Yelp using total volume and ratings of reviews since January 1, 2022, among other factors.

The No. 1 spot went to Rocklin Donuts & Cinnamon, in Rocklin, a city near Sacramento. JD Flannel Donuts and Coffee in San Juan Capistrano took the No. 3 spot, and Munchkins Donuts in Covina took fourth.

Simone’s Donuts is located at 6400 E. Stearns St. ■

While the arrangement worked for a while, it didn’t allow her time to experiment with new recipes, and with the amount of orders she had coming in, she outgrew the kitchen and reached a plateau in the business. The brick-and-mortar was the clear next step.

“People love eating a cookie a week old,” Leyesa said. “I can’t imagine how much they’ll love it fresh out of the oven. That became my dream.”

It was a dream that for a while didn’t seem real. Leyesa immigrated with her family from the Philippines at just 2 years old in 1993 to Glendale before eventually settling in Rancho Cucamonga. She moved with her husband, Tony, a carpenter, to Long Beach two years ago.

Filipino families, especially immigrants, tend to push their children into the medical field, Leyesa said. While she genuinely loved being an occupational therapist, the cultural pressure to pick a career that’s stable and financially secure—which the food industry is notoriously not—felt scary.

But her culture, which momentarily felt at odds with this decision to give up her previous career to pursue her business, is also a huge part of the business itself.

Her ube (a purple yam that’s sweet with a mild, but familiar vanilla, nutty taste, pronounced “ooh-beh”) brownie was created with her mom in mind, who tends to gravitate toward Filipino flavors. And the homage was a clear success; her mom began sharing the brownies with coworkers and friends, and at Leyesa’s pop-ups like the one she had at 2ND & PCH, she was excited to introduce customers to the Filipino staple—a gateway of sorts to Filipino cuisine.

Aside from the success that has allowed Leyesa to open a physical store, her online presence caught the attention of Magnolia Network’s (owned by Warner Brothers and Chip and Joanna Gaines of “Fixer Upper” fame) Silos Baking Competition.

Leyesa filmed in Texas for five days as a contestant in the competition. The episode can be watched on Max, Magnolia Network or Discovery Plus. She didn’t win, but the experience was one more marker that she is exactly where she needs to be.

Foodologie is expected to open in July. ■



Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

Two people ride bikes past the future Chicken University fast-casual restaurant at 3851 Atlantic Ave. in Bixby Knolls.

Chicken University expected to open soon in Bixby Knolls

The fried chicken joint, which made a name for itself at its first location in Fullerton with its menu of both Korean and American spins on the classic dish, will open a second spot in Bixby Knolls this summer.

By Caitlin Antonios

The fried chicken joint Chicken University, which made a name for itself at its first location in Fullerton with its menu of both Korean and American spins on the classic dish, will open a second spot in Bixby Knolls this summer.

The brand new building, with almost 10,000 square feet of space, sits across from Philz Coffee on Atlantic Avenue. Founder Sam Chun looked for a year and a half before settling on the location.

“There was no fried chicken place by that area,” Chun said, also noting that the space was near a residential neighborhood.

Chun hopes the restaurant will be open sometime in June—or July at the latest. In the meantime, the restaurant will be updating its menu.

Korean fried chicken has become more and more popular in the U.S. in recent years. The batter and marinade is different than traditional American fried chicken, although the restaurant serves both to cater to different tastes.

Asian flavors like spicy Thai basil, gochujang (a fermented red chili paste pronounced go-chew-jang) are on the menu, but traditional American fried chicken flavors like lemon pepper or garlic parmesan are also found.

Guests can also get non-chicken Korean specialty dishes like tteokbokki (pronounced tok-bo-key, which are rice cakes cooked in a spicy, gochujang-based sauce) or fish cake soup.

The re-design of the menu will mainly be a change in portion sizes, and less about the actual items on the menu. The changes will affect the Fullerton location’s menu as well.

“We’re targeting one person meals,” Chun said.

Since the opening of the Fullerton location, Chun noticed guests would come in groups, but they wanted different items or flavors and wanted to pay separately. In Asian culture, it’s less personalized, as everyone will order, eat and pay together, Chun said.

The restaurant’s menu was designed for large portions for a shareable, family-style meal. The new portion sizes will be changed to reflexed more personalized, individual meals for people to enjoy. ■

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Brandon Richardson / Business Journal

A selection of cake donuts with sprinkles at Simone’s Donuts.

Foodologie

Continued from page 21

brick-and-mortar),” Leyesa said.

So, at first, she worked out of a shared kitchen space, which meant she had to pay to make and bake the orders in the kitchen by the hour, and she had partnered with local businesses, like the Hi-Lo Liquor Market, where customers could buy her baked goods in stores.

While the arrangement worked for a while, it didn’t allow her time to experiment with new recipes, and with the amount of orders she had coming in, she outgrew the kitchen and reached a plateau in the business.

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Foodologie is expected to open in July. ■

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Beli

Continued from page 23

To help cater to a user's specific tastes, Beli doesn't rely on a star-rating system. Instead, the app uses a comparative question—did you like this restaurant more than that restaurant—to assign a restaurant score, which forms a personalized stacked ranking list.

Essentially, it's a game. And the app leans into the social media element by creating a leaderboard for restaurant rankers that even Thelen and Frost were surprised people took so seriously. The key to the app lies in the comparative question, which forces the user to think critically about the dining experience—for foodies, it's addicting. It also allows a user to be surprised by their own choices and the way their list comes together.

Full disclosure: I was a user of the app before I began reporting this story. And no matter how many wonderful, critically acclaimed restaurants I go to, a hot pot chain restaurant has yet to be superseded for my top spot.

"Taste is subjective," Thelen said. "Beli puts all the opinions that matter into one place."

Users can also indicate which restaurants they want to try, and with enough data (at least 15

ranked restaurants), the app can then begin to suggest personalized recommendations.

Beli looks for users from all over with similar taste for those recommendations—not just people nearby or a friend's ranking (although those help). Restaurants are then assigned a score for the user to see, which tells the user how much Beli thinks they will like a place.

"It's both a utility and social app," Thelen said. "Dining out in itself is social."

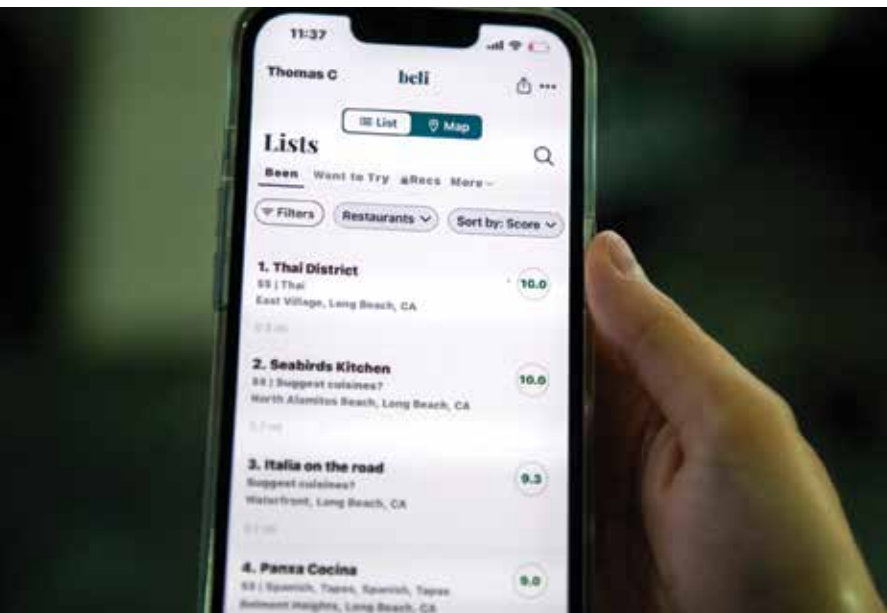
The app is meant to help users from the beginning to the end of their restaurant journey—from hearing about a restaurant to then documenting the experience, Frost said.

"We don't work with restaurants," Thelen said. "Our main goal is to match the perfect pair (of user to restaurant)."

The only people who can see someone's ratings are a users' followers, a decision that was very intentional to avoid the type of public shaming that can appear on review websites, Frost said.

If a user and someone they follow both bookmark the same restaurant to try, the app will suggest they get together for a meal.

While anyone can download the app, the experience is technically invite-only—a decision intended



Thomas R. Cordova / Business Journal

Restaurant app Beli ranks your favorite restaurants in your area.

to foster the social element of the app. Users who download it without getting an invite will automatically be "invited" by Thelen after they sign up. But the ideal way for people to learn about and access the app is still through an invitation from someone they know—it allows users to build their community, and their recommendations, based on the people they trust most.

"The number one trusted recommendations are from your friends," Thelen said. "That's not going to go away, even with A.I."

The app still has more to do, the couple said. They hope to add dish recommendations at a restaurant, answer most questions that come up in the restaurant journey (like making a reservation) and expand beyond just restaurants to other types of food establishments. The app already has lists ranging from Michelin restaurants to coffee shops—ice cream shops are next to be added. ■



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