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Aerospace firm bets on a new industrial boom: capturing asteroids

ExLabs, which moved here in 2023, wants to build a spacecraft that will intercept a passing asteroid.

By John Donegan

It's like shooting a bullet with another bullet.

Except the two — one the size of a trailer and the other as tall as the Empire State Building — are thousands of miles apart and moving at 7,000 miles an hour.

It's a gamble of millions of dollars and the professional reputation of the Long Beach-based ExLabs that it doesn't miss.

The company, which operates out of a 30,000-square-foot warehouse near Long Beach Airport, is scheduled to design a spacecraft set to be launched in April 2028. Its target: a passing asteroid.

The launch will take place when the asteroid is as close as it will come to Earth — about 32,000 kilometers away — when it dips below satellites and near enough to be seen by the naked eye.

It will take a year from the point



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

James Orsulak, co-founder of the aerospace company ExLabs, stands in the ExLabs workspace in Long Beach, on Friday, Feb. 6, 2026.

of launch for the ship to catch up with the asteroid, named Apophis, as it shoots past the planets and loops back, with the goal to make contact on April 13, 2029.

The asteroid, originally found in 2004, isn't expected to return again until 2036.

"We just chose that because it's such a unique time and moment in human history," said ExLabs co-founder James Orsulak. "We can't miss that."

The operation, given that it takes place so far from the planet (some *ExLabs page 5*)



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

A speed limit sign at Seventh Street in Long Beach

Traffic jam

Why is it so hard to get a new stop sign or left-turn signal?

By Jacob Sisneros

Long Beach resident Kelsey Wise has been asking for a speed bump on her street for months. After multiple close calls on Orange Avenue just north of Seventh Street, she spent hours building a PowerPoint to lobby her City Council member to get behind the idea. Her efforts earned her a meeting with the Long Beach Public Works Department, which manages street safety improvements. There, she finally got her chance to make her case and is now waiting to see what happens.

Few people go to the lengths Wise did, but she's far from the only person with frustrations about how difficult it is to make local streets safer.

With fatal traffic collisions at their highest point in more than a decade, that dissatisfaction bubbled over last month at a Long Beach City Council meeting, where members and residents took turns voicing their irritation.

Council members told city staff to come up with a plan to speed up safety measures, but it raised the question for us: What's taking so long to begin with?

We put those questions to City Traffic Engineer Paul Van Dyk. Here's what we found out.

Traffic page 4

Grand Prix CEO Jim Michaelian dies at 83, weeks before race

By Staff and Wire Reports

Grand Prix Association of Long Beach president and CEO Jim Michaelian died March 21, just four weeks before the street race was scheduled to roar again along the city's shoreline, association officials said. It was to be the last race he would oversee before passing the reins to incoming CEO Jim Liaw.

Michaelian was 83. His cause of

death was not released.

Michaelian wore increasingly larger hats during the past 51 years of the annual race, serving first as the Grand Prix Association's controller, chief operating officer and then being named president and CEO in December 2001.

"Jim didn't just lead the Grand Prix—he lived it," Mayor Rex Richardson said in a statement. "His passion, warmth, and dedication turned an event into a tradition, and a tradition



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Jim Michaelian on the racetrack ahead of the 2022 Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach

into a source of pride for generations of Long Beach residents. Under his leadership, the Grand Prix became a global event and a defining part of Long Beach's identity."

Michaelian page 11

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STAFF:

Chief Executive Officer **Melissa Evans**

Executive Editor **Jeremiah Dobruck**

Development Director **Frankie Morales**

Operations **Isamar Morin**

Visuals Editor **Thomas R. Cordova**

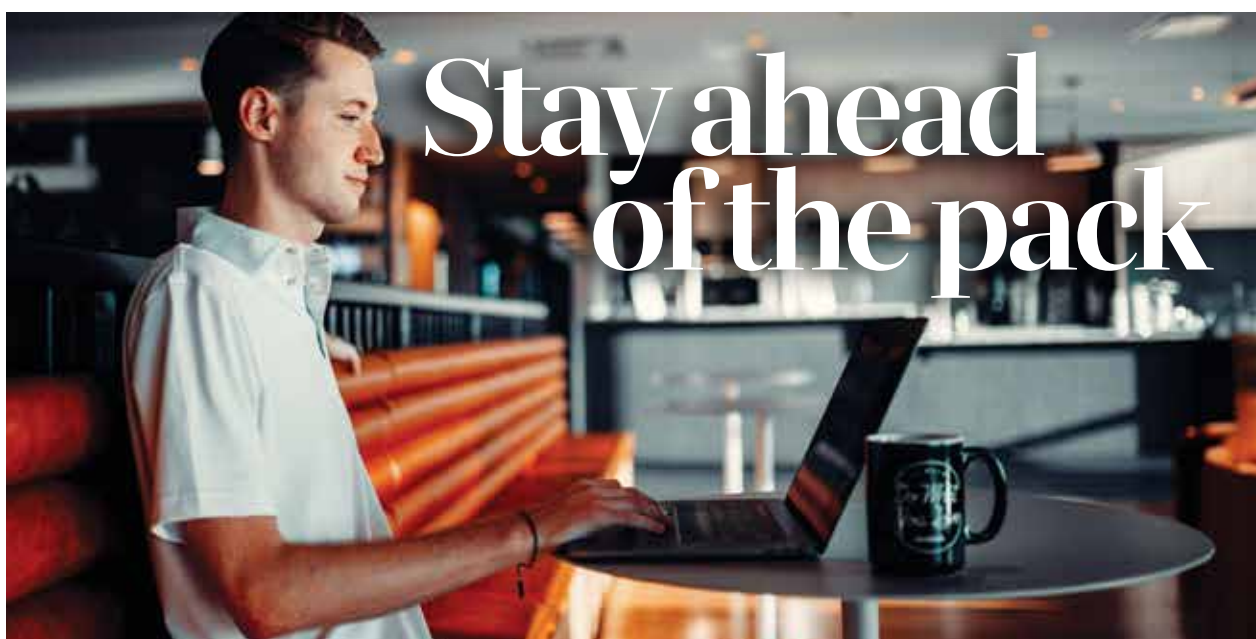
Staff Writer **John Donegan**

Staff Writer **Kate Raphael**

Staff Writer **Jacob Sisneros**

Publisher Emeritus **George Economides**

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ON THE COVER

Traffic from page 1**What happens when residents ask for a new safety measure?**

When the city receives a request to evaluate a street for a potential measure to influence traffic behavior, Long Beach sends out city staff to observe drivers along that section of roadway.

In general, a street must clear three specific benchmarks for the city to begin designing a measure to impact traffic behavior. More than 26% of drivers must be observed speeding on a certain stretch of roadway, that stretch must have at least one crash per year and the street must average more than 2,000 vehicles per day.

There are outliers to these rules. For example, Sixth Street between Almond and Orange avenues averages 790 cars per day on less than a tenth of a mile. Fewer than 2% of drivers speed on that stretch, but it's seen a half dozen collisions recently. City traffic engineers are lowering the speed limit on that stretch from 25 mph to 15 mph to limit future crashes.

Asking for a change is no guarantee that something will happen quickly.

Public Works is dealing with a backlog of requests. It received 220 over the past two years and still has 40 it needs to evaluate, and new requests are rolling in, with this year already outpacing prior ones.

And of the 180 requests Public Works finished evaluating, only 17 were selected for new traffic-calming measures. Once a road is selected for a traffic-calming measure, it takes anywhere from two to four months to install, according to a Jan. 20 presentation from Public Works.

Stop signs

The state has strict rules on where and when a stop sign can be installed. To meet the threshold, an intersection must have five or more reported crashes in 12 months. Furthermore, it has to be clear that a stop sign would directly prevent similar crashes from occurring, and there must be a minimum vehicle and pedestrian volume through the area.

Stop signs are effective when "there's an equilibrium" in traffic flow, said Van Dyk. If someone pulls up to a four-way stop sign and there's never anybody at any of the three other directions, it makes the driver less likely to obey the sign, he said.

"The hard part is not putting up a sign," Van Dyk said. "It's convincing people to actually listen to the sign. To follow what the sign says and make it make sense to them."

Speed bumps

Speed bumps are different than speed humps. Speed humps can include speed tables and raised crosswalks, while speed bumps are concrete mounds that require drivers to slow down to cross.



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The aftermath of a crash at Carson Street near Palo Verde Avenue on Wednesday, June 11, 2025

“

The hard part is not putting up a sign. It's convincing people to actually listen to the sign. To follow what the sign says and make it make sense to them

—Paul Van Dyk

"Typically, speed bumps are most effective if we're seeing significant amounts of people going at high speed," Van Dyk said.

If people typically travel between 25 and 30 mph down a street, speed bumps "really aren't going to make a noticeable difference in behavior," he said.

They are reserved for areas where people typically travel at 35 to 40 mph, Van Dyk said. However, even if a traffic engineer deems it a viable solution to slow speeding traffic, Long Beach requires a petition signed by neighbors to install them. The approval percentage ranges from 50-75%, depending on the type of speed hump or bump the neighborhood is seeking.

New left-turn signals

From January 2023 through the end of 2025, Public Works received 133 resident requests to check the timing of existing traffic signals. When that happens, Public Works

sends out a traffic engineer to "test all the different detectors around the light to make sure that they are accurately detecting when a car goes by."

They check to make sure the magnetic sensors underground are working properly and observe traffic during rush hour to make sure the light is "flushing the left turn pocket every time," Van Dyk said.

Van Dyk acknowledged the danger of trying to make a left turn at a green light instead of a green arrow. "All of the liability is on the driver in making sure that I'm doing this safely," he said.

Long Beach is in the process of adding more left-turn arrow lights, but "traffic signals are probably one of the most expensive projects that the city undertakes" as far as traffic-calming measures, Van Dyk said.

Adding a signal at one intersection costs "more than half a million" dollars once you factor in the costs of building the light and making sure everything is hooked up properly underground without disturbing the existing utility lines, Van Dyk said.

"It's a lot of steel, it's a lot of engineering," he said.

Low-cost fixes include changing the signal timing "to give pedestrians a head start" when crossing the street.

Crosswalks

Long Beach plans to install 39 new crosswalks throughout the city, including 25 with a button that activates rectangular rapid flashing beacons for pedestrians crossing the road.

Among those to be installed: two will go along Seventh Street, five will be installed on Anaheim Street and three will be installed on Atlantic Avenue.

Those with specialty beacons are

placed on marked crosswalks that see elevated levels of speeding cars, traffic volume or crashes. They are also installed in areas that don't have a marked crosswalk, but are on roadways where pedestrian deaths and injuries are common.

How do speed cameras and limits fit into this?

This fall, speeding drivers caught at 18 spots throughout Long Beach will begin receiving fines from automatic cameras. The program is part of a state pilot in seven cities that mandates the ticket revenue pay for new traffic-calming measures.

Proceeds from the fines "can't be spent on enforcement, general police or fixing potholes. It's spent on neighborhood traffic calming," said City Manager Tom Modica.

In January, the City Council also approved lowering speed limits on 77 streets throughout the city. A majority of those reductions restored the state standard of 25 mph on streets with three or fewer lanes that had speed limits of 30 to 35 mph.

In nearly two dozen locations, speed limits were dropped to 15-20 mph to match "existing driver behavior." A dozen streets had speed limits dropped to 25 mph within 500 feet of a park playground.

Until 2021, state law limited a city's ability to set its own speed limits. This round of speed reductions is the second the city has undertaken since the law changed. The city conducts speed surveys on its streets "on a rotating multiyear schedule" and adjusts speed limits based on that data.

To request a speed survey on your street, email goactiveb@longbeach.gov. ■

ExLabs from page 1

100 million kilometers away), will be largely autonomous. Crews will give orders based on data sent back to Earth, though there will be a delay.

Once in contact, the payload items will be launched from the craft onto the asteroid and will, over time, study the hurtling rock for its composition, origin and other data. It's a one-way flight; the spacecraft will stay for the remainder of its lifespan (3 to 5 years).

The company's funding comes from a mix of grants and contracts through the U.S. Space Force, Air Force, NASA, and JPL. They also have several design contracts through their robotics team.

Financing their missions, explained co-founder and chief finance officer Freyr Thor, comes from a patchwork of business partners and customers, clients and civil agencies that pay to send "payloads" that can collect data on their behalf during the mission's operation.

It's the hope of ExLabs' dozen or so employees that this will be the earliest model for a burgeoning industry of capturing, studying and mining asteroids.

Their business would delve largely into the first category. There's a lot a telescope can't tell you about a planet or asteroid. For the longest time, scientists have used the reflection of light to judge composition.

"We're looking to understand what is the internal structure, and specifically, what is the internal structure, and what are the changes happening as it passes through Earth's gravity field," Orsulak said.

Within the next decade, the company hopes to develop spacecraft to capture and retrieve asteroids that can be studied or prospected for rare earth materials, which are vital to medical devices, hand-held electronics and computers.

The models, they say, would be standardized, built using 3-D printers within a matter of months and scaled up to 10 times as large.

Unlike comets, asteroids are iceless, rocky bodies left over from the creation of the solar system. Most are so-called main-belt asteroids, moving in nearly circular orbits between those around Mars and Jupiter. But there are also asteroids whose orbits bring them close to Earth. It is these — about 41,000 so far known — that most intrigue Orsulak.

While Apophis is expected to be made of some nickel and rock, other near-Earth asteroids are potentially packed with valuable minerals like cobalt, gallium, platinum and chromium.

It's an industry that could one day total billions of dollars and put an end to mining on Earth, Orsulak thinks, as privately managed companies could scour space as the first real example of human exploration into the solar system and tow their bounties back to the moon's orbit.

Asteroids would be mined in the moon's orbit as part of a scientific and commercial park, by spacecraft that

are meant to stay in space for all of their needs, from refueling to gathering water.

"It's the beginning of a reversal of Earth's supply chain," Orsulak said. "There's no reason to mine Earth when you have access to truly infinite resources in space."

It's an idea that, since the early 1970s, has captured the imagination of scientists, engineers, politicians and writers, touted as the answer to the world's increasing hunger for diminishing resources.

It's also a personal mission for Orsulak, who began his career with

Planetary Resources, a similar but short-lived venture in the early 2000s that drew an A-list of investors and advisers, including Google Chief Executive Larry Page and Chairman Eric Schmidt, "Avatar" director James Cameron and Microsoft's former chief software architect Charles Simonyi.

"They succeeded in establishing the legal framework to work on asteroid resources, [such as] how do you own resources captured from an asteroid under U.S. law," Orsulak said.

There is also the matter of defense

against asteroids. Orsulak is among the scientists who believe that it was a large asteroid, perhaps six miles in diameter, that did in the dinosaurs when it struck the Yucatan Peninsula 65 million years ago, plunging Earth into cold and darkness.

He's not too keen on letting that moment repeat itself.

"When you have an asteroid that's threatening the planet, how do you move it? How do you redirect it?" Orsulak asked.

"Humanity has the opportunity to start to do kind of bigger, harder things in space." ■

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Left: A land mover works on the open lot where Long Beach's former City Hall once stood. Above: A rendering included in city planning documents for a pair of eight-story apartment buildings at Ocean Boulevard and Chestnut Avenue. The Port of Long Beach headquarters on Ocean Boulevard can be seen in the background.

Plans for apartment buildings on grounds of old City Hall come forward after years of delays

By John Donegan

After years of delays, developers have brought forward plans they hope will reanimate efforts to build a pair of eight-story apartment towers on a massive dirt lot in the heart of downtown Long Beach.

The 4.6-acre site at Ocean Boulevard and Chestnut Avenue once housed the old Long Beach City Hall but has sat empty since its demolition was completed in 2022. Plans to build have been plagued by false starts and stops, protracted financing struggles and revisions over the scope of construction. The site has been in escrow with the project company since 2016. In the interim, it's mostly been a home for runoff and overgrown vegetation.

Rising material costs and an inability to secure funding ultimately doomed original designs that called

for 580 units, 40,000 square feet of retail space, a metal panel facade, and a two-floor underground parking garage shared by either building.

Officials on the city Planning Commission recently reviewed revised plans that include some major differences from the previous concept, ones the developer says should ensure its financial viability.

Under the new proposal, the towers will hold a combined 729 apartments — including ground-floor units — and only a 2,650-square-foot retail space in the northern building due to “a continuing weak retail market.”

Once built, they will be the final piece in an elaborate, yearslong effort approved in 2015 to replace the city's keynote buildings in downtown, including the aging city hall, courthouse, port administration building, library and centerpiece park.

Each apartment building will

have a courtyard, pool, sky lounge, gym, inside parking and a half of the promenade that will cut between the two with a view of City Hall and the Harbor Department headquarters.

Parking will be separate and above ground — down from 885 to 817 parking stalls — and there will be far fewer studio units, to make room for more profitable apartments with bedrooms.

There would also be 365 bike spaces between the two buildings in the proposal.

Apartment size, on average, will be smaller than originally planned. Studios will lose about 50-square feet, while two-bedroom units will be cut down by about 300 square feet.

Apartments would range in size from 499-square-foot studios to 1,211-square-foot townhomes.

Citing a jump in the cost of labor and materials, the buildings will have a stucco facade and lobbies lined with

porcelain tile and wood composite.

The proposal plans for 11 studios and 62 one-bedroom apartments designated for affordable housing.

Developers are also requesting the city to honor a 2016 agreement that requires only 10% of the units to be affordable homes, priced at a moderate income rate, or between 80% to 120% of the area's median income.

Current local housing laws would typically require that a project like this have 12% of units priced at low- or very-low income levels.

City planners say this would address the city's growing need for moderate-income affordable housing, and have entitled only 6.2% of the units it needs in this price category — the worst of any housing type. According to the proposal, the city has seen 21.3% of housing the state says it needs built by 2029. ■

Construction starts on affordable housing project at historic National Guard armory

By John Donegan

Having outlived its usefulness as a National Guard station, the 96-year-old Seventh Street Armory is set for reincarnation.

A groundbreaking was held March 17 to begin the reconstruction of the historic structure, once used to quarter troops and weapons during World War II, into affordable homes for seniors.

According to planners, the five-story building will hold 56 one-bed-

room apartments and eight two-bedroom units, meant for those 55 and older who earn 30% to 70% of the area's median income. Project-based rental vouchers will be provided by the Housing Authority of the City of Long Beach.

The multimillion dollar facelift was paid for using \$6.5 million from the Long Beach Community Investment Company, a \$5.2-million city loan and \$6.2 million from the state's Multifamily Housing Program, among other donor support.

Armory page 19



Photo courtesy of Linc Housing

Dignitaries from the city of Long Beach and Linc Housing dig in with ceremonial shovels outside what will become senior housing at the former National Guard armory on Seventh Street near Alamitos Avenue in Long Beach on Tuesday, March 17, 2026.

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City demolishes two blighted North Long Beach buildings

By John Donegan

Like a ravenous Tyrannosaurus rex, the backhoe tore again and again into the ramshackle structure, quickly reducing it to a pile of snapped lumber, wires and twisted metal.

David Esperanza, who lives on a nearby street, found the feeding delightful. Coffee in hand, it was breakfast and a show, one he'd hoped for years to see.

Crews gathered early in the morning on March 30 to bulldoze two abandoned properties on Long Beach Boulevard just north of Victoria Street that city officials and neighbors say had become a crime magnet and shelter for squatters and stray animals for nearly two years.

Starting at 7 a.m., crews quickly leveled the first structure, a former Chinese food and Louisiana Fried Chicken restaurant.

A couple of hours later, the second building — previously a gas station — was razed, after police checked the property for any lingering unhoused people who may have been still sleeping inside.

As the dozer ripped off the front walls, the inside was revealed: stained walls smeared with graffiti and floors carpeted with trash, human excrement, busted appliances and grungy bedding.

Within a couple of hours, a two-



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

A backhoe loader rolls over a pile of debris, crushing below it the former site of a Chinese food-Louisiana Fried Chicken restaurant that was ordered for demolition on Monday, March 30, 2026.

year period of frustration for nearby residents was reduced to two truckloads and a wafting cloud of dust.

"This couldn't happen soon enough," Esperanza said.

A rare sight in Long Beach, officials say it's very difficult to bulldoze pri-

vate property in city limits.

It often requires undergoing a bureaucratic process to prove the building has become a threat to public safety before inspectors will push for demolition. There must also be a lengthy search for owners, which some contend is too time-consuming. Long Beach has recently tried to strengthen penalties for absentee property owners.

An estimated 250 abandoned lots exist within Long Beach city limits, according to a city spokesperson. Officials say about 90% of their owners cooperate with abatement orders, stressing this operation was incredibly rare.

This lot, officials say, has been the source of complaints starting as early as June 2024, with spikes to 911 calls to the address over vandalism, uncontrolled fires and criminal activity. Code enforcement declared the site substandard in May 2025, after inspections found, among other issues, the buildings were being occupied by homeless people.

They described the boards ripped from doors and windows, windows smashed, trash, including wine bottles, strewn around the property and walls covered with graffiti. Crews, in preparation for the demolition,

entered the building to find needles, liquor bottles, spilled gasoline, oil and some hazardous waste that one worker said would be shipped to a facility in Yuma, Ariz.

One worker named Eddie said those squatting there had at some point tapped into a dead SoCal Edison power line to siphon power. "I don't know how they didn't all blow themselves up," he said.

The city filed at least three notices and offered a number of extensions to give the owner ample time to abate the property.

Records show the buildings are owned by Golcheh Developments and Investments, a Los Angeles-based developer focused on gas stations and discount stores. The group has properties across the region, including listings in Compton, Santa Ana and Hawaiian Gardens.

The city will spend about \$300,000 for asbestos testing and demolition of the structure. A lien will be placed against it, barring any sale or transfer of ownership without payment.

After the lot has been cleared, the property will be enrolled in the city's Vacant Lot Registry and monitored until a buyer develops it. ■

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Photo courtesy of Voyager Technologies

Mayor Rex Richardson, left, and Matt Magaña, president of Space, Defense and National Security at Voyager

Defense and spacecraft manufacturer Voyager opens local facility

By John Donegan

Voyager Technologies unveiled a 140,000-square-foot facility last month in Long Beach that will be used for designing and producing parts for missiles and commercial spacecraft.

The company wrote in a news release that the facility, which will employ 150 to 200 people, will be used to advance a number of the company's ventures into aerospace and defense for the U.S. military and other clients.

"We are standing up capacity at Space Beach for one purpose: to deliver for our customers," Matt Magaña, president of Space, Defense and National Security at Voyager, wrote — using a nickname for Long Beach's burgeoning space industry.

The Denver-based company, which launched in 2019, has nearly a dozen locations across Ohio, California, Colorado and Texas. This announcement comes two months after it opened a 150,000-square-foot facility in Pueblo, Colo., also focused on missiles, defense and weaponry.

Through a network of former companies it has purchased, Voyager has researched and designed a variety of parts for spacecraft or rockets, from long-range radios and GPS guidance systems to commercial airlocks and propulsion systems.

It's known for its Starlab project, a venture propelled by a \$217 million NASA contract to replace the International Space Station, which is slated to retire in 2030.

But a majority of the company's business is in defense. The net sales last year for its defense and national security program jumped 59%, making up \$123 million of the \$166 million it made. In the last quarter of 2025, the category made up nearly two-thirds of its sales.

By contrast, the company's sales for "Space Solutions," which designs spacecraft for commercial and research purposes, declined by 36% in 2025.

The company is working with Lockheed Martin to develop a new missile interceptor system — coined the "Next Generation Interceptor" — and has contracts to build parts for hypersonic missiles and military-grade payloads. Top officials at Voyager say they have a strong interest in competing for contracts on Golden Dome, a 10-year, \$151 billion missile defense program.

It's unclear whether the Long Beach facility will focus on a particular program or take on work as it is needed. In a release, company officials wrote it will help design AI software and other parts for "next-generation propulsion and defense systems and integrated sensing, communications and autonomy technologies."

The company said it is working with neighbors Anduril Industries and True Anomaly, who recently set up facilities in Long Beach, to meet some contracts, but did not specify the venture.

It's the latest in a wave of space tech companies to join "Space Beach" by moving to the 430-odd acres of industrial and warehouse space once used to build cargo planes outside Long Beach Airport.

In January, Anduril, an AI-backed weapons manufacturer, announced that it was building a \$1 billion campus nearby to make drones and other AI-enabled weapons.

It's an industry where successful businesses often curry favor with the federal government and military, and local representatives are eager to attract defense tech firms to create high-paying jobs.

Voyager page 19

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HEALTH CARE

To better prevent veteran suicides, CSULB researchers seek to clarify their scope

By Kate Raphael

Researchers at Cal State Long Beach are undertaking a project to understand how veteran suicides are identified, recorded and reported across California.

In a multiyear initiative funded by the California Department of Veterans Affairs, CSULB faculty, alongside UC Berkeley researchers, are examining inconsistencies in data collection across California's 58 counties — with the hopes of creating uniform protocols and improving data quality.

California is home to the second-largest veteran population in the country, behind Texas. And a recent report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs found that about 35 out of 100,000 veterans die by suicide — more than double the suicide rate of the overall adult population in the U.S. Yet, depending on resources, geography and relationships with local organizations, California counties vary in how they document veteran suicides, the research team said.

"When data are not standardized or aligned across systems, it does become difficult to fully understand the scope of the problem or design targeted prevention strategies," said Jeremy Ramirez, a principal investigator on the project.

The research team aims to change that. They've begun visiting county coroners, medical examiners and others involved in the death and identification process across the state, collecting data through interviews and questionnaires. While the process for



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

The VA Hospital in Long Beach on Thursday, April 2, 2020

investigating deaths is standardized, there's variation in how counties determine veteran status, a challenge in the wake of any death, said Gino Galvez, another PI on the project. For example, a county coroner who has close relationships with local VA offices may be able to pick up the phone to determine veteran status, while other counties may get routed to a larger VA hub, Ramirez said.

Though the initiative is focused on understanding how counties identify and report veteran suicides, the re-

searchers learned through their conversations that county officials had a large appetite for information on suicide prevention. The team is now gathering information on prevention efforts underway across the state and plans to disseminate the information to counties.

Many county coroners and medical examiners are veterans themselves, so they understand the challenges of transitioning from military service to civilian life, said Erlyana Erlyana, one of the project PIs. In interviews, coroners

and medical examiners have disclosed to the researchers the personal toll of investigating veteran suicides.

That is precisely why veterans themselves are involved in the research efforts. Ramirez served eight years as an Army combat medic, and another member of the UC Berkeley team is a Marine. Ramirez said he approaches the work with profound gratitude and respect for "our former service members who have taken on this responsibility."

The Cal State Long Beach team has been immersed in research around veterans for years. Ramirez and Erlyana had already been working with organizations across the country training service dogs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

This existing work, combined with the expertise of other researchers in medicine, policy development, mental health and data and information science, positioned them well to dive into this work, Ramirez said. As the research progresses, he hopes to develop a clearer picture of any patterns in the mortality data, which could in turn drive policies, resources and interventions.

Every state in the country should be following California's lead to more accurately report veteran suicide data "so that decisionmakers and legislators have the information they need to be able to respond more effectively to this crisis," Ramirez said.

Help is always available. If you or someone you know is exhibiting warning signs of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. ■

Lara Khouri named new CEO of Miller Hospital

Miller Children's & Women's Hospital in Long Beach has appointed Lara Khouri as its new CEO, putting her in charge of operations and long-term growth for the hospital's pediatric specialty and maternity care services.

Khouri said she plans to focus on expanding specialized programs, improving access to care across the region and preserving the hospital's physician-led, community-based model.

She also emphasized innovation as a priority, including the use of AI, advanced analytics, research and digital tools to strengthen care while keeping patients and families at the center.

"What distinguishes Miller Children's & Women's is not only the depth of clinical expertise, but the

intentional integration of pediatric and women's care under one model," Khouri said in a statement.

Before coming to Long Beach, Khouri served as president and chief operating officer at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, where she oversaw strategy, growth and clinical transformation for more than a decade. She also held leadership roles at Boston Children's Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

MemorialCare President Dr. David Kim said Khouri's experience positions the hospital for its next phase of growth in both pediatric and women's health.

A former Long Beach resident, Khouri called the new role a "full circle moment" for her family. ■



Brandon Richardson/Long Beach Business Journal

Miller Children's & Women's Hospital at the Long Beach Medical Center campus



Maison Tran/Long Beach Business Journal

Artist and patient Sergio Ramirez stands next to his piece, titled "Faith," made for the CARE Center at St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach.

Innovative CARE program at St. Mary marks 40 years

Officials at St. Mary Medical Center are marking 40 years of care through the hospital's CARE Center, which has served people living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections in Long Beach since 1986.

Over the years, the CARE Center has grown into a key part of the city's public health system, offering HIV and STI testing and treatment, as well as preventive services like PrEP and PEP. The center also provides mental health support and dental care, reflecting a broader approach to helping patients manage their health.

Hospital leaders say the anniversary is a chance to recognize both the center's history and its continued role in the community, particularly for LGBTQ+ patients seeking specialized and affirming care.

"The 40th anniversary of the CARE Center is a profound moment for Dignity Health—St. Mary Medical Center and the entire Long Beach community," Carolyn Caldwell, president and CEO of St. Mary Medical Center, said in a statement. She said the program's long presence and evolving services have helped support patients and

strengthen public health in the region.

In addition to direct care, the CARE Center has also focused on education, outreach and prevention, including emergency HIV and STI testing and quick access to post-exposure medication through emergency room settings. Community events such as the annual Easter Walk also help raise awareness and support for its work.

St. Mary Medical Center, a 360-bed nonprofit hospital founded in 1923, said the CARE Center's 40-year milestone reflects decades of service to Long Beach residents. ■

Michaelian *from page 1*

The race has had multiple sponsors; the most recent is Acura.

Michaelian graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's in physics and an MBA. He was a competitive sports car racer for more than 25 years and competed in endurance events at tracks including Le Mans, Daytona, Nürburgring, Dubai and Sebring.

Penske Entertainment acquired the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach in November 2024.

Penske Corporation chairman Roger Penske reflected on Michaelian's contributions.

"Jim was a leader of a small, passionate group who believed in the concept of bringing elite open-wheel competition to Long Beach in the 1970s, worked tirelessly to make it happen despite steep odds and then helped nurture the Grand Prix of Long Beach into becoming America's premier street race," Penske said. "His vision and energy surrounding this great event remained boundless for 50 years, as no task was too small for Jim even while he served in numerous leadership roles."

Michaelian is survived by his wife, Mary, and sons Bob and Mike.

"A loving and devoted husband, nothing meant more to Jim than his family," the Grand Prix Association said in a statement. "He especially treasured the time he spent with his two boys, creating memories that will be carried forever."

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EXPERTS JOIN THE CONVERSATION

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Ethics in leadership is good for business, investment and the economy

By John Keisler and Harry Saltzgaver

“Trust is one of the greatest economic forces on Earth.” — Charlie Munger

Charlie Munger (1924–2023) was an American investor, businessman, attorney and philanthropist who became famous as Warren Buffett’s longtime partner and vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway.

It may be surprising to some to hear that some of the most successful investors in American history believed that trust was at the heart of their success in business. It makes more sense, however, when you consider that risk is priced into everything we do on a daily basis — mortgages, car loans and insurance premiums — so reducing uncertainty and risk can actually lower the cost of doing business and lead to more investment in our economy!

Valuable Trait

How much is trust worth? How about a value of \$1 trillion, and about \$700,000 a share? According to the latest available quotes, Berkshire Hathaway’s market value is about \$1.03 trillion, and its Class A stock (BRK.A) is around \$718,231 per share.

Trust is core to the Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership and its vision of integrating ethics and core values like trust into the curriculum throughout California State University, Long Beach. A look through the recipients of the annual Nell and John Wooden Ethics in Leadership Award given by the Ukleja Center shows how trust is a bedrock principle to those who make a difference — starting with Coach Wooden himself.

A Transparent Approach

“Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”

That bit of courtroom formality is a noble pledge. It’s also something that is not as easy as it sounds.

In the courtroom, the pledge is enforced with the threat of perjury. In business and society, there is seldom a legal punishment for not telling the whole truth. But that’s exactly why full transparency is especially valued. It is how trust is generated.

We ask our government leaders to be transparent about how and why they make decisions — to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. When they avoid that request, or find ways around complete transparency, consequences from losing elections to public scandal can result.

Telling the whole truth can go a long way toward successful negotiations, successful planning and successful living. That’s especially true when all parties are being transparent.

Facts Are Facts

There are several levels where this approach plays out. First, there are the facts. If I tell you all of the facts relevant to our discussion that I know, and you tell me all of the facts that you know, we now have a solid basis for decision-making.

It’s also important to be transparent about the facts you do not know. There’s a difference between a fact and something that you want to be

true, or think it might be true. Something that isn’t certain likely is something to resolve before deciding whether to proceed or not.

Proceeding as though uncertain information is fact is not only unethical, but it can be illegal. Elizabeth Holmes built Theranos on the belief that her scientists could find a way to run hundreds of critical blood tests from just a finger prick’s worth of blood. Internally, engineers warned that the device produced inaccurate results, but Holmes shut them down — it wasn’t what she wanted to be true.

You know the result. Jail time, the collapse of a company, and hundreds of millions of dollars lost. And it’s an eerie certainty that no one will be willing to trust Holmes enough to do business with her again.

Admitting there are unknowns could delay projects or agreements — sometimes even to the point of losing a contract. But doing so maintains your credibility for future negotiations. It builds trust.

Different Motivations

A key to successful negotiations, projects and governance is understanding what motivates the parties involved. If you don’t understand what motivates your customer, what goals that potential partner has, what would make the community you want to lead a better place, your argument stands little chance of success.

If you want to understand your counterpart’s motivations, you must be able to understand your own motivations and be willing to explain them. That is a basis for an honest dialogue. We sometimes call it laying our cards on the table — you show what you have with no attempt to hold back.

That can be a difficult approach. Telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth when it comes to reasons why you want something can make you feel vulnerable. It is that very vulnerability that encourages the other side of the negotiation or discussion to be transparent about their motivation — and builds trust in each other.

Tear the Bandage Off

To be fully transparent, we must talk about not only what is good about whatever the topic might be, but also about what is bad, negative or a potential roadblock. If you hide the pain points of the project or report, that only guarantees a more extreme reaction when they are revealed — and engenders a sense of mistrust that is virtually impossible to overcome.

Leaving problems unsaid means leaving problems unsolved. Jeopardizing the entire project for the sake of sparing some initial discomfort is anything but ethical. When done deliberately, it is an underhanded way to get what you want with no regard for consequences to the other person.

Take this approach just once, and it doesn’t take long for word to get around that you tend to operate in this way — that you are unworthy of trust. Here’s another quote, commonly attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “Reputation is like fine china: once broken, it’s very hard to repair.”

Admit There Will Be Pain

It is also important to be honest about the potential downside of a project or policy. When it is clear there will be winners and losers as a result

of contemplated actions, exploring those issues transparently avoids surprises — and unpleasant surprises tend to upset people.

Transparency is important in one-on-one negotiations, and the same principles apply with public policy. Government leaders must be aware of this approach to be successful when creating policy. Consider this economic development plan conundrum.

In order to build a healthy economy for a municipality, attracting outside industries to create more jobs is key. But a scattershot approach to recruiting businesses is far less successful than a targeted campaign to attract specific industries, creating a cluster of like cultures.

That targeted campaign will, by definition, leave some sectors by the wayside. In Long Beach, the decision was made to emphasize aerospace technology instead of warehousing retail goods. That decision had to be made clear.

From the very beginning in the redevelopment planning for former airplane manufacturing property, city officials engaged Boeing to focus on high-tech manufacturing (and its high-paying jobs). The city updated zoning in the area by creating a new Specific Plan (at its own cost), signaling to space-oriented companies that the city was open for business. The result increased the value of the property for both Boeing and the community.

Explaining the policy was an ethical decision, and it enhanced the city’s reputation for honesty, increasing its credibility and building trust.

Bottom line, transparency and honest communication are essential pieces of ethical business practice. They develop trust.

That’s worth a lot — \$1 trillion or more! That’s also why the Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership is an essential institution. Learn more about it at csulb.edu/college-of-business/ukleja-center-for-ethical-leadership.

JOHN KEISLER is currently the CEO & Managing Partner for Sunstone Investment Group, Inc. and a member of the Ukleja Center’s Governing Council. Previous to Sunstone, John spent more than 20 years in public service, most recently as the Economic Development Director for the City of Long Beach. He earned a master’s degree in Public Administration from the prestigious USC Price School of Public Policy.

With 45 years of experience as a journalist, editor and civic advocate, **HARRY SALTZGAVER** has long used storytelling to illuminate issues of justice, reconciliation, and community resilience. During his 31-year tenure as Executive Editor of the Grunion Gazette, Harry published in-depth coverage of restorative justice programs, youth leadership initiatives and interfaith healing efforts across Long Beach and Los Angeles County.





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EDUCATION

Six LBUSD campuses earn Distinguished School awards

By Kate Raphael

One of the state's highest awards in public education was bestowed on six Long Beach Unified middle and high schools in recognition of their academic achievement and commitment to closing performance gaps.

Millikan and McBride high schools were named California Distinguished Schools for the first time, joining previous winners California Academy of Mathematics and Science, Sato Academy of Mathematics and Science, and Keller and Stanford middle schools.

Awarded schools demonstrated high academic performance for all students and academic progress for students who have been historically underserved, reflecting goals the LBUSD school board is working toward by June 2028. To qualify for the statewide distinction, schools must demonstrate high participation in standardized testing and low suspensions and chronic absenteeism.

Millikan High School principal Stacie Alexander said it was "an exciting surprise" to see her school honored alongside 407 others across the state.

Indeed, given the award's rigorous criteria, it has been more than two decades since any of the district's comprehensive high schools have been recognized. Most recently, Wilson High School made the list in 2005; Poly High School earned the award in 1999.

In recent years, "we've really focused on multiple subgroups of students," Alexander said, pointing to Millikan's strides in math achievement among Black students and English language learner progress.

Underpinning that success are the "structures of support that we build in for both our students and our teachers," she said, which can look like student interventions, focusing on and monitoring students' strengths, and fostering a culture of relationship and community building among Millikan's more than 3,000 students.

For Alexander as a principal, being recognized as a distinguished school is "validation that we're on the right track and that we're focusing on the right things," she said. For teachers, it's evidence



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Elisa Hodgson gives her speech at Millikan High School commencement ceremony with 788 graduates in Long Beach, Tuesday, June 11, 2024. Millikan just won its first California Distinguished School award in March.

that "what they do on a daily basis matters and does have impact," she added.

At McBride High School, which serves over 600 students in specific pathways, principal Stephanie Dunn said she has taken a similar approach of fostering belonging on campus, a key to academic success. "When students are connected to school, they usually perform better, and that collective effort is what's helped elevate our academic achievement," she said.

In the classroom, McBride teachers focus on creating spaces where students feel supported, engaged and safe enough to ask questions, Dunn said. "Students are not allowed to opt out of learning."

That approach has translated to improvements in English language arts and math performance, college and career readiness, and graduation rates, according to the statewide dashboard.

Since Dunn shared the news about McBride's award with her student body, she said the energy on "campus is electric."

Dunn said she and her students take seriously the school's namesake, Long Beach civil rights activist Ernest S. McBride Sr., as well as his legacy of "giving back to the community and leaving things better than you found it." For the seniors in particular, the recognition was a "full circle moment," she said, because they know: "We were a part of this." ■

Thousands who left college without finishing could be given associate's degrees under new bill

By Kate Raphael

Over a thousand Cal State Long Beach students who left school before earning bachelor's degrees may soon be granted associate's degrees through a partnership between Long Beach City College and CSULB.

A bill recently proposed by Long Beach Assemblymember Josh Lowenthal aims to address the "some college, no degree" gap, which affects nearly six million Californians who completed some college credit, yet have no credentials.

"The path to career growth and success is often not linear," Lowenthal said. Many people experience interruptions, whether due to the COVID-19 pandemic, personal financial challenges, family obligations or something else. "It's important the system recognizes

that and provides opportunities for people to get back on track and to grow," he said.

For years, professors and administrators at CSULB have recognized that the absence of a path like this hurts students. "This idea that 30% of our students leave without anything in their hand bothers me," said Dhushy Sathianathan, vice provost for academic planning.

In 2023, Sathianathan and his colleagues proposed that CSULB students who earned at least half the credits toward a baccalaureate degree and maintained a 2.0 grade point average could be awarded joint associate's degrees from the university and a community college.

When Sathianathan and his co-authors analyzed data from the nearly 10,000 students who discontinued their studies in the last decade, they found that 11%, or 1,103,

Degrees page 16



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

A student high-fives a teacher at a graduation ceremony in Long Beach on Thursday, June 13, 2024.

Rising star Poly High alum donates brass during music program's instrument shortage

By Kate Raphael

Poly High School's music directors knew they had a problem when 50 students lined up to borrow instruments at the beginning of the school year.

The school's music program has recently exploded, growing to more than 800 students across over a dozen ensembles. The marching band doubled in size. "We went from one tuba player last year to seven this year," said Tom Terrell, one of the music directors.

It was a good problem to have, but a problem nonetheless. "All these kids are ready to play, and we didn't have the instruments," said Tom Hughes, another music director.

Terrell and Hughes refused to turn anyone away.

Hughes began sourcing instruments from OfferUp and Facebook Marketplace. "I just drove around town buying \$40 used clarinets in people's garages," he said. Many of the sellers were delighted to learn that students would be using the instruments, which Hughes began naming after the people they'd belonged to — and sharing those stories with his students.

Despite these efforts, students still had to share instruments and play on dented trumpets with broken valves, Hughes said. His percussion classes consist of "40 kids in each class banging on five-gallon Home Depot buckets," partially to spare the ears, and also due to the instrument shortage, he said.

In March, they had "a prayer answered," Terrell said. At a recent Poly band concert, alumna Tatiana Tate, now a renowned trumpet player, donated 20 trumpets and three trombones to the school. "We needed this desperately," Terrell said. "This came at a perfect time."

Tate, a Long Beach native and jazz and R&B trumpeter who has played for Stevie Wonder and performed alongside Doechii, launched her musical career at Poly. While a student, Tate served as marching band drum major and jazz combo leader, sought-after roles that took time to grow into. Hughes, an upperclassman at the time, observed that Tate arrived at Poly somewhat stressed out and still finding her place. But over her high school career, he watched her undergo "this incredible progression. She just fell in love with it," he said.

"Anything involving music, I was a part of it," Tate said, adding that her Poly music teachers always "told me I was destined for greatness."

So when the Guitar Center Music Foundation turned to Tate for some-



Above: Tom Terrell, the band teacher at Poly High School, gets his band ready for a competition during an early morning class in Long Beach. Right: Jacob Hummel takes a short break during an early morning class as the Poly High School band gets ready for a competition. Bottom: Demetrious Rossi performs with the trumpet section of the Poly High School band.

where to donate several dozen brass instruments, she knew she would send them to Poly — "the first place I thought of," she said.

"It's my mission to ensure I support the next generation the same way [Poly teachers] supported me," she said.

On returning to Poly, Tate said she was not only surprised by the size of the band (much larger than when she was in school), but by the number of girls playing horn — "something I never really saw growing up," she said, speaking to the fact that jazz, and brass especially, has historically been dominated by men.

At Poly, that is changing, Hughes said. At a recent jazz festival, the school's top combo was made up of girls, he said, and the number of girls playing trumpet at Poly has grown significantly. While Tate's instrument donation offered a solution to a tangible problem, her mentorship of younger musicians, especially girls, is even more impactful, he said.

"For her to be this beacon of light who started in the same place that all these musicians have started, is really, really powerful," he said. "Tati is paving the way." ■



LBCC names performing arts center in honor of Jenni Rivera

By Kate Raphael

Long Beach City College last month dedicated its modern \$102-million performing arts center to alumna and Latin music icon Jenni Rivera in a festive celebration worthy of “La Diva de la Banda,” as Rivera was known.

More than 50 students kicked off the program, performing as Los Vikingos de LBCC before a crowd of Rivera “fanáticos,” as board of trustees member Vivian Malauulu referred to the audience.

Rivera’s “success shines a bright light on Long Beach,” Malauulu said. The dedication of the space not only recognizes Rivera’s contributions as a musician, she said, but creates “an opportunity for our students to see themselves as artists and storytellers,” especially because Rivera’s story, one of hardship and perseverance, mirrors what so many LBCC students go through, she added.

“My mom’s story has always been one, not of perfection, but of resilience,” said Jacqie Rivera, Jenni Rivera’s daughter. “She wasn’t born into privilege. She fought tirelessly,” she said, referencing her mother’s journey through school while parenting and working for her father’s record label.

Jenni Rivera, a Long Beach native who became one of the most decorated Latin music artists before her death in a plane crash in 2012, left behind a local legacy. The city named a park near Chittick Field in her honor in 2015. Last September, LBCC inducted her into its hall of fame, announcing months later it would name the performing arts center for Jenni Rivera, who studied business at the college and went on to earn a degree from Cal State Long Beach in 1991.

After more than two years of construction, the state-of-the-art



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Chiquis Sanchez, right, hugs her sister Jacqie Rivera as they sing together at the opening of the Jenni Rivera Performing Arts Center in Long Beach.

performing arts center opened earlier this semester, giving LBCC students access to a new auditorium and theaters, rehearsal and broadcast studios, editing rooms and classroom space. The sprawling complex, with more square footage than a football field, replaces Music Building G and Theatre Arts Building H.

The facility was paid for through Measures E and LB, bonds totaling nearly \$1.3 billion, which fund construction, renovation and repair at LBCC. Additional funding came from the state of Califor-

nia and the Jenni Rivera estate.

In return for naming the performing arts center, Jenni Rivera Enterprises agreed to donate \$2 million to the Long Beach City College Foundation over a decade. More than two-thirds of the gift will go toward scholarships and programs at the performing arts center and across the college, according to the agreement. Another quarter of the gift will be used to maintain the new facility.

As the first performance in the center’s new auditorium, two of Rivera’s daughters, Chiquis Sanchez and

Jacqie Rivera, performed three songs in tribute to their mother, alongside Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea — the first all-women mariachi group to win a Grammy Award.

Jacqie Rivera shared a message for all current and future LBCC students: “Never let your mistakes hold you back. Use them as a stepping stone for your future,” she said. “Every artist who walks through these doors, every young person who doubts themselves, every student starting over” will see Jenni Rivera’s name and remember she “started exactly where they are now.” ■

Degrees *from page 14*

would be eligible for an associate’s degree. Thousands more could earn associate’s degrees if they took additional units.

When Sathianathan wrote the paper, he “knew it was almost an impossible task” to eliminate the legislative and regulatory barriers to offer these degrees to students who stopped out. But in the time since, the idea of awarding joint associate’s degrees has gained traction, he said.

Now, Lowenthal’s proposed legislation would formalize this pathway, creating a pilot program to retroactively award joint associate’s degrees from CSULB and LBCC to eligible students. These institutions are already bound together through the Long Beach College Promise, which guarantees Long Beach Unified students free and priority admission to higher education in the city.

“This is a way to build bridges between community college and CSU,” Sathianathan said. “We can

work together as one system.”

In order to launch the joint degree, not only does the state education code have to be changed, but the residency requirements would have to be waived, eliminating the mandate that units be completed at the community college as a prerequisite to earning a degree, Sathianathan said.

Additional credits would be required at the community college level only if students had not yet met the 60-credit threshold, a spokesperson for LBCC said. And survey data show that former students are interested in that option, the spokesperson said.

Though the legislation would qualify thousands for degrees, students would still have to opt into the program. CSULB plans to launch a large social media campaign to reach eligible students, rather than placing the burden on them to prove they are entitled to associate’s degrees, Sathianathan said.

There will be startup costs of launching the pilot, especially when it comes to evaluating transcripts, sharing student data, processing degrees and engaging students, an LBCC spokesperson said. But the intention is that no costs are passed onto students, Lowenthal and Sathianathan said.

The legislation, if passed, allows for several other (yet to be named) CSU campuses and community colleges to participate in the pilot. And if the initial program proves successful, “there’s no reason why this shouldn’t be statewide, throughout the entire CSU and [University of California] systems,” Lowenthal said.

The impact doesn’t have to stop there, Sathianathan said. It’s powerful to see institutions working together to solve regional problems, and “if California leads the way,” that model can catch on in other states, he said. ■

Long Beach Unified projects it must make another \$40 million in cuts next year

By Kate Raphael

After a bruising round of cuts this year, the Long Beach Unified School District said it anticipates even more next year to balance its budget and keep the required minimum balance in its reserves.

On top of the \$47 million in cuts the district has already made, administrators warned at a March 18 school board meeting that \$40 million will need to be trimmed next year. They presented a sobering chart of future deficit spending, expected to grow and tempered only somewhat by the district's fiscal stabilization plan.

"We're already hearing from our communities the impacts of these cuts, and this is perceivably just the beginning of these difficult decisions," said school board member Juan Benitez.

The district has pointed to increasing costs, declining enrollment and insufficient state and federal funding that have saddled the district with a deficit of about \$70 million, which is expected to balloon in subsequent years. "Any which way you look at this budget," he said, "it's a bad scenario."

Already, mental health support, library staff, parent-support workers, nurses and hundreds of teachers will

lose their jobs at the end of this year. It's unlikely more staff will be cut before next year, as a key deadline has passed for the district to announce further reductions. And although the school board has placed a premium on avoiding teacher layoffs, hundreds of the temporary contracts canceled in February belong to teachers.

"You're going to have kids coming back to school, and their favorite teachers aren't there anymore," one teacher said. "They're going to show up, and parts of their community are gone."

She and other teachers who spoke with the Long Beach Post requested they not be named because they are awaiting confirmation about whether or not they could be rehired or feared harming their job prospects. (The district has said some of these teachers may be called back, including hundreds of early childhood educators who are paid with federal funding.)

But many K-12 teachers expect they are out of jobs, even if they have decades of experience and accolades outside LBUSD. One, a middle school teacher, taught for years in another district and received multiple awards for her impact. Some of her former students told her they pursued medicine and Ph.D.s because of how she had inspired and encouraged them.

Despite the safety of her previous



Brandon Richardson/Long Beach Business Journal

A teacher at Longfellow Elementary School addresses the Long Beach Unified School District Board of Education on Wednesday, March 15, 2023.

position, she made the switch to Long Beach Unified, which hired her on a temporary contract that must be renewed annually. "I am a firm believer: I want to work in the community that I live in," she said, though she called the move "terrifying."

Now, expecting her job with LBUSD to end, she said, "It makes me wonder: Should I have ever left my previous site or district to support my community?"

Finding new jobs may prove tough for those leaving Long Beach Unified. Districts across the state are experiencing many of the same budget challenges, laying off thousands — though largely cutting nonteaching jobs first, according to EdSource.

One LBUSD teacher librarian, who has spent more than a quarter century working in education and who was told she won't have a job next

Cuts page 18

Lawsuit alleges school board member's husband groomed, abused elementary school student

By Kate Raphael

A Long Beach Unified teacher who is also the husband of a school board member was placed on paid administrative leave on March 19 as the district investigates allegations that he sexually abused a student decades ago.

Rogelio López, who teaches at John Muir Academy, is accused in a recently filed civil lawsuit of grooming and sexually abusing a student between 1999 and 2001 while he worked at Burcham Elementary School, according to the complaint. Spencer Lucas, the plaintiff's lead attorney, said López abused his client multiple times in a classroom while she was in fifth grade.

López has been instructed not to comment on the case pending the investigation, according to his wife, school board member Maria Isabel López. "We believe that these allegations are unequivocally and categorically false," she said. "We look forward to the full investigation to clear his name."

The plaintiff, a 35-year-old woman identified in court documents only by the pseudonym Jane Doe, alleges Long Beach Unified "knew or should have known that [Rogelio] López was a danger to children."

Lucas said his client filed a police report against Rogelio López around 2013 at the age of 22, but nothing came of it. He said he's still trying to determine why.

Without the victim's name and with limited information about exactly when the report was made, the Long Beach Police Department was not im-



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Burcham Elementary School in Long Beach on Monday, March 23, 2026

mediately able to provide additional information.

The plaintiff alleges she suffered severe, lasting emotional and physical injuries as a result of the alleged abuse, and she seeks damages from Long Beach Unified for this harm. She is represented by attorneys from the Panish Shea Ravipudi firm, which has won many large personal injury verdicts and settlements in California. Rogelio López is not named as a defendant.

The district confirmed it was served with the lawsuit on March 18 and placed Rogelio López on leave the next morning.

"We recognize that claims of impropriety are deeply concerning. The Long Beach Unified School District does not tolerate misconduct of any kind

and remains committed to the safety and well-being of all students and staff in a respectful learning environment," the district said in a statement sent to the Muir school community.

Maria Isabel López questioned the timing of the lawsuit, which was filed while she is campaigning for reelection.

Maria Isabel López ran a grassroots campaign for school board District 1 in 2022, defeating a candidate endorsed by the Teachers Association of Long Beach, school board president and several city council members. Since her election, Maria Isabel López has pushed for transparency in the district and is often the lone dissenting voice and vote on the board.

"Will people go after my husband to get at me?" she asked. "Well, I'm questioning it."

She pointed out that the Los Angeles County district attorney's office recently began investigating hundreds of potentially fraudulent sexual abuse claims filed against the county. The county and other government agencies have been beset by thousands of claims in recent years, many triggered by a 2019 state law that expanded the statute of limitations and created a three-year window for plaintiffs to file claims of child sex abuse that occurred many years ago.

Lucas, the plaintiff's lawyer, said the lawsuit "is about getting justice for a child who was molested by a teacher. It's got nothing to do with politics." Lucas was also lead counsel in a lawsuit against Bill Cosby, who was ordered on Monday to pay \$59 million in damages for abusing Donna Motsinger in 1972. ■

Long Beach cuts funding to free cart program for street vendors

By Jacob Sisneros

More than a year and a half after promising to provide up to 40 free carts to eligible street vendors, Long Beach hasn't even made it halfway to that goal and now plans to cut funding for the program.

As of late February, Long Beach had supplied 11 free carts, with six more applicants waiting for final approvals. Health officials say this is because out of the 123 applicants, the vast majority haven't completed all the steps necessary.

Long Beach originally allocated \$429,500 for the free-cart program, but the City Council recently approved reducing that by \$200,201, citing "low participation" and the need to balance a city budget that's facing deficits.

Applications are still open for vendors seeking a free cart, but city officials are reviewing "the application process and overall program," Health Department spokesperson Jennifer Ann Gonzalez wrote in an email.

Vendors, for their part, say the process was plagued by delays and complications.

Anita McCoy, who sells pastrami and hot dogs through her business Lucky Bee, said it took roughly 8 months to receive a cart that was worth about \$17,500. She was grateful but said it took countless emails and phone calls to the Health Department to finally get the finished product.

"I had to be diligent in my pursuit," McCoy said.

De'Mon Tyndell, who runs The Quesadilla Calling, received his cart roughly a year after applying.

At one point, after months of email exchanges and "doing applications on applications," Tyndell told city staff, "I don't even want to do this anymore," he said.

Although he has the cart, Tyndell said he doesn't use it for his various pop-ups throughout the week because the roughly 800-pound mobile kitchen is not "user-friendly" to transport.

Moving it requires a trailer with a winch because the cart's built-in wheels are too small for it to be towed around, Tyndell said.

As a result, the cart has been sitting in storage for the past six months while he uses a flattop grill and tables he can easily load in his van.

The free cart program was aimed at small-time entrepreneurs who needed help complying with new rules the city drafted on street vending. To qualify, applicants needed to live in Long Beach, have no more than two full-time employees and operate only one cart. If approved, they could receive one of four types: fruit carts, grilled food carts, tamale carts and ice cream carts.

But many people trying to run a low-margin



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

De'Mon Tyndell, owner of The Quesadilla Calling, plays a game of pool in the storage area where he keeps the food cart he recently received from the city of Long Beach on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2026.

business don't have time for a complicated application process.

For McCoy, selling pastramis and hot dogs from a corner in North Long Beach is just one of her side businesses. That means she doesn't have to be out every day to bring in enough cash to sustain her operation. That flexibility gave her the time to pursue the free cart with a sense of urgency.

"I was begging them [to give me a cart] because I knew the program was going to be cut," McCoy said.

Meanwhile, since early last year, the city has begun penalizing street vendors who don't comply with its rules.

Health Department officials say it's a necessary step to prevent foodborne illness caused by vendors who haven't gone through a health inspection.

From early last year through Feb. 23, city staff seized and discarded food from 72 vendors and issued 103 administrative citations against vendors without an active business license. In 71 cases, they've also impounded street vendors' equipment.

Penalties for the citations range from \$100 to \$500, depending on how many times a vendor has been cited.

Enforcement is carried out based on complaints. The Health Department says its staff first tries to educate vendors on how to comply, then they issue a notice of violation and finally an administrative citation. If vendors don't heed that citation, a team responds to discard food and impound equipment.

Starting in 2022, California banned cities from outlawing street vendors altogether, but municipalities are still allowed to regulate when, where and how they can sell for health and safety reasons.

Since Long Beach adopted its rules, the city has received 358 applications from vendors seeking a business license to operate legally. As of Feb. 23, the city has granted just 55 (15.4%).

Rather than risk being cited, Tyndell limits his selling to pop-ups at farmers markets, outside bars and various events around the city where he can more easily get permits. Recently, he got a spot selling inside Good Times Billiards — a pool hall in Lakewood — and hopes to add a second location inside another pool hall on Broadway in Alamitos Beach. There, he says, he'll finally use his free cart to serve up gourmet quesadillas. ■

Cuts from page 17

year, said she visits close to a dozen websites daily, applying for other jobs. The uncertainty is straining her family, she said, and even making it more difficult to do her job.

"I'm still 100% in it for the students," she said, but "in the background, I'm disappointed and I'm sad and I'm angry." This might be the reason she leaves public education, she said.

Teachers who spoke with the Post expressed frustration with the district's

approach to hiring teachers repeatedly on temporary contracts, which they said gives teachers fewer protections — such as accruing seniority — and allows for their jobs to be cut without the district calling it a layoff.

The district has said that each year, they hire teachers and other certificated staff on temporary contracts to meet time-limited needs, such as "filling in for employees on leave, supporting programs tied to enroll-

ment or funding" and "addressing short-term staffing needs," according to the district's March budget update.

One in eight of the district's more than 4,000 certificated employees are on temporary contracts, and all of them were told they may not be coming back next year.

Staring down more cuts next year, Benitez said the board would work to preserve positions with the highest student impact, especially for the

district's most underserved students, but he said plainly, "We're going to keep making cuts."

Without further action, district administrators warned of what would be coming down the pike: a projected \$122 million deficit in the 2028-29 school year, when reserves are projected to be fully depleted and annual shortfalls are expected to exceed \$100 million. "It's a downward spiral," board member Doug Otto said. ■

Long Beach Rescue Mission opens youth shelter

By John Donegan

Yishreal Maxwell's 18th birthday was approaching fast.

Homeless since he was 11, Maxwell entered the foster care system last March at 17. He remembers the years between, making a bed of the backseat of a 2006 Saturn Ion with his brother.

With 10 months until he "aged out" of the system, he quickly applied himself. He re-entered high school, and laid out goals of owning a car he didn't have to sleep in and becoming a professional model.

The deck seemed stacked against him: About 40% of former foster children in Los Angeles County, without support, end up homeless.

But Maxwell seems to have beaten the odds.

"What I've always wanted to be known [for] is that we never complained, we never gave up," he said.

He and a number of other young men are the inaugural class of youth aged 18 to 24 who have moved into the newly opened Timothy House at the Long Beach Rescue Mission.

The 12-bed shelter will offer drug and alcohol rehabilitation, agency referrals, counseling and other services to youths who age out of the foster care system.

It's the latest shelter to open at the Rescue Mission; the 15-bed Apostle House opened in 2024. In June, shelter workers hope to unveil another 60-bed shelter for women and children.

At a ribbon-cutting ceremony last month, dignitaries spoke on the importance of the shelter.

"If we can intervene in a young person's life during the transition age, you can prevent an entire lifetime of homelessness," said Mayor Rex Richardson.

About 1,100 youth annually "age out of the system," but the county has only about 700 transitional housing beds.

Of those, fewer than 3% have a college degree, and less than half have gainful employment. They are more likely to enter prison and show higher rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD.

The Timothy House mirrors the Mission's existing New Life Program, which helps the formerly home-



Thomas R. Cordova/Long Beach Business Journal

Yishreal Maxwell receives a hug following the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of Timothy House at the Long Beach Rescue Mission in Long Beach on Thursday, March 5, 2026.

less find work and stable housing in a year's time.

Residents will stay at the center free of charge, getting a place to sleep, regular meals and guidance until they can find an affordable home and a stable job.

In a comfortable, homelike environment, they will be taught basic life skills — how to budget, apply for a job — while also finishing school and looking at future programs in trade education or college.

Service workers at the Mission say such a center is sorely needed.

"We want to be able to equip them with the tools to be able to survive in society," said Justin McWilliams, who will help run the new shelter. "We don't want you to go out here with a chain on your leg and get tugged right back into homelessness."

McWilliams said they have already moved four young men into the new shelter. The other eight

beds will fill up "immediately," he added.

These teens are asked to lay out clear goals. With their sights set on the future, shelter workers say, their dreams might be realized under proper tutelage.

Richardson said the shelter helps in "flipping the narrative" around young men, especially those of color, who are treated as the source of the problem rather than a victim of a dysfunctional system.

"If we fix our systems, then our young people will have the opportunities to thrive in our communities," he said.

Maxwell said his goal is to leave the shelter with a stable job with money set aside, a high school degree and a home large enough for him and his brother. "And then just be stable, be at peace," he said. ■

Voyager *from page 9*

"We're proud to welcome Voyager to our growing Space Beach ecosystem with a 140,000-square-foot facility advancing aerospace innovation, domestic manufacturing, and national security capabilities," said Mayor Rex Richardson. "This investment brings high-skilled jobs, strengthens our local economy, and further establishes Long Beach as a national hub for the industries shaping our future."

These companies are in tight competition to take advantage of a growing national defense budget — \$895 million in 2025 from \$816 in 2023 — while taking advantage of the large pools of talent near existing research and military facilities like JPL in Pasadena, Mojave Air and Space port in Kern County and Vandenberg Space Force Base.

While the budget was shrunk to \$838.7 billion in 2026, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has placed an increased priority on spending on U.S.-made drones and autonomous weapon systems. Buoyed by global conflicts, defense companies in Long Beach and across the region are anxious to accelerate their designs and production of weapons and defense systems. ■

Armory *from page 6*

It's a new chapter for the historic building at 854 E. 7th Street, which was opened in 1930 as one of ten California Army National Guard stations ahead of the Second World War.

It served as home to the 2nd Battalion, 251st Coast Artillery unit, an anti-aircraft regiment, and was called into service in September 1940, over a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In later years, the armory served a number of roles outside its traditional use as a military storehouse, including as a winter homeless shelter and staging area for National Guard troops during the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. The guard decommissioned it in 2018 and relocated troops to the Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos.

The rebirth of the since-abandoned building is typical of the architectural recycling occurring citywide, called "adaptive reuse," which preserves solidly built and often historic structures that carry

a sense of the city's past.

The project, dubbed the Armory Arts Collective, "demonstrates how we can preserve Long Beach's historic legacy while delivering high-quality, affordable homes for seniors who are increasingly priced out of the communities they helped build," wrote Suny Lay Chang, president of developer Linc Housing.

Permutations of adaptive reuse are growing in Long Beach: the 1929-era Walker Building at Pine Avenue and Fourth Street into apartment lofts; two former bank offices, one at 111 W. Ocean Blvd. and another at 115 Pine Ave., that will combine for more than 460 units downtown; a seven-story office tower that will be made student housing; and buildings that once held Verizon and city employees will now host families.

What propels the movement, officials say, is a mix of sentiment and economic sense to save the buildings that remind the city of

its former self. It can also mean the radical updating of a building's original function to satisfy contemporary needs.

At the armory, half of the apartments will be wheelchair accessible, while some will include accommodations for those with hearing or sight impairments. Amenities will include a community room, courtyard, crafts studio, wellness center and storage for bikes.

Officials say the rehab will retain and restore the building's 1930s art deco architectural character. Linc Housing, which manages the site, also plans to pursue a historic landmark designation.

"By reactivating a historic landmark and adding new density near transit, we're expanding affordable housing options for older adults on fixed incomes, while strengthening the long-term livability and economic resilience of the City of Long Beach," wrote Mayor Rex Richardson. ■

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