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Community Hospital admits its first new patient in two and a half years



A medical transport arrives at Community Hospital Long Beach carrying the facility's first patient in about two and a half years, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Community Hospital this month received its first patient in roughly two and a half years after the state gave its operator permission to reopen amid a pandemic that has overwhelmed nearby medical facilities.

The first patient was transferred from College Medical Center on Jan. 5. Additional patients are expected to arrive in the coming days and weeks, though agreements with some

facilities still need to be ironed out, officials said.

The nearly century-old Community Hospital is not accepting walk-in patients and its emergency department is not slated to open until March. For now, the facility will only accept non-coronavirus transfer patients from other medical facilities to free up space for COVID-19 patients.

Though a regional inspector gave the go-ahead for the facility to open Monday, the hospital did not accept patients immediately because

transfers must be approved by hospitals, physicians and in some cases insurance companies, said John Molina, a partner with Community's operator, Molina, Wu Network.

But Molina said more transfers are imminent, with the operator continuing to work with College, St. Mary and MemorialCare Long Beach medical centers. Los Alamitos and Lakewood Regional medical centers, as well as Kaiser and Placentia-Linda Hospital, have also been in contact with MWN regarding

transferring patients to the East Long Beach facility, Molina said.

Administrators from other facilities have said the timing of Community's reopening—nearly 10 months after the pandemic began in March—is critical.

Long Beach in early January reported that close to 600 people were hospitalized in the five facilities that serve the area.

Though Community will initially be able to accommo-

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333 W. Broadway, Suite 312, Long Beach, CA 90802 · DRE #013330395

Long Beach Business Journal

Vol. XXXIV No. 1 • January 12, 2021

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Long Beach's cannabis industry lacks diversity—two men are determined to change that

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

When Edgar Cruz was 15, he was charged with illegal possession of cannabis for the first time. For him, selling cannabis in the illicit market became a means of survival, albeit a risky one.

Twelve years later, he's trying to become an established entrepreneur in the newly legalized industry, a path that has been anything but easy.

Cruz was among the first participants in Long Beach's initial cannabis equity program, which—two years into its existence—has failed to create any new minority-owned businesses. But Cruz is determined to change that—with or without the city's help.

After forming a nonprofit to represent marginalized entrepreneurs looking to enter the cannabis industry, Cruz and his business partner developed an ambitious plan to provide them with business development support, which they're pitching to the city along with their policy suggestions.

City officials are well aware the program has struggled to make an impact, and are collecting and soliciting feedback from people including Cruz to develop new policy suggestions.

"There were some glaring gaps," said Ajay Kolluri, assistant to the city manager and the city's point person for its cannabis programs.

Cruz and others working behind the scenes are pushing the city to al-

low delivery-only retail businesses, among other policy changes, and his group is also establishing an academy for aspiring business owners to gain support and knowledge.

'You just have to stand up'

Like many low-income Angelenos, Cruz's family moved to the Antelope Valley just before the Great Recession, when buying properties in cities like Palmdale and Lancaster promised the American Dream of home-ownership to those priced out of the rest of LA County.

But as a young Black man, Cruz said it was hard for him to earn money in this remote, conservative corner of the county, where economic opportunities were scarce enough already, not even counting racial prejudices. So he started selling weed.

Cruz was lucky. While he was charged with possession several times, the charges never stuck and he was able to stay out of legal trouble—at least as far as cannabis was concerned. But for many Black and Latino Californians, things didn't quite work out that way.

Despite cannabis usage rates being similar across racial and ethnic lines, an analysis of police data from Los Angeles and Fresno by the Drug Policy Alliance and ACLU of California found that both groups were issued marijuana possession citations at higher rates, even after reforms aimed at reducing the severity of cannabis-related charges were implemented.

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Edgar Cruz, left, and Brandon Bolton at Colorado Lagoon. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Nationwide, Black Americans are also arrested for cannabis possession at far higher rates than their White counterparts.

Long Beach's cannabis equity program was supposed to help mitigate the effects of racist practices deployed in the War on Drugs, by providing fee waivers and business development support for low-income entrepreneurs and those with cannabis-related charges on their record.

But after seeing no tangible results for himself and his fellow applicants, Cruz decided it was time to take matters into his own hands.

"A lot of them have given up on the idea of starting a business, because it was just impossible," he said. "At some point, you just have to stand up and say something."

Making an impact

So Cruz began hassling the city's cannabis office, all the while putting together a nonprofit to serve as a voice and a resource for equity applicants. But the real breakthrough came when he connected with Brandon Bolton, a self-taught expert in cannabis equity from Sacramento.

Bolton—young, Black and wanting to start a business like Cruz—had gone through a similar program up north, and was left equally dissatis-

fied.

The duo has had regular meetings with staff at the city's office of cannabis oversight and its economic development department, which has recently been roped in to provide technical assistance to equity applicants.

Their main goal in interacting with city staff is to educate and push for policies that they consider effective in helping equity applicants like themselves get a foothold in the legal cannabis industry, Bolton said.

"I realized a lot of these programs don't know anything about cannabis, and even less about social equity," he said. "They're tired of not having success stories. So if they're tired of that, why aren't they putting in policies that will bring out those success stories?"

The pair has continued to push for delivery-only retail licenses, a license type that is not yet available in Long Beach, but is viewed by many equity applicants as a comparably low-cost path toward business ownership.

Earlier this month, Kolluri presented the option of delivery-only licenses in front of the city's economic development committee. It found support among councilmembers, who voted to move the item forward for consideration by the full city council.

"There's an industry operating within the city that is not inclusive of the people of the city. And that's a problem and we have to fix that," Councilman Rex Richardson, who is chair of the committee, said at the meeting.

Offering delivery-only licenses could not only create more access to equity applicants, he said, but also provide additional tax revenue for the city and stamp out illegal delivery services.

But it's not just policies that Cruz and Bolton are targeting. The two are also taking aim at the practical aspects of the city's cannabis equity program.

Last month, they submitted a detailed proposal for an entrepreneurship academy, which they hope will be selected to serve as part of a grant-funded four-phase pilot program the city is planning to kick off next year.

The program, as proposed, would provide participants with eight weeks of workshops and assignments to help flesh out their business plans.

Each phase is designed to include feedback and support from cannabis incubators and brands, such as the Cookies Social Impact program—attached to the prominent cannabis brand of the same name— and Viola,

a cannabis company founded by former NBA player Al Harrington, who has made it his mission to support Black entrepreneurs in the cannabis industry and beyond.

The program's concept and budget is ambitious, but whether they receive funding from the city or not, Cruz and Bolton said they will do whatever it takes to make their ideas come to life.

Creating not just employment, but ownership opportunities for equity applicants is a personal calling for Bolton, who said he experienced his share of racial discrimination while working in the legal cannabis industry, often being the only Black person on staff.

"I started reading bills, resolutions to see how I could get an opportunity, so I didn't have to work for people who didn't like me, didn't respect me," Bolton said. "This is going to give hope to people who come from communities that are completely disenfranchised from all opportunities."

Having long struggled to make his dream of legal entrepreneurship a reality, Cruz concurred.

"We've recognized the game and now we need to build our coalition and community," he said. "We're doing this for our people." ■

Coalition wants park—not storage facility—on former West Long Beach toxic dump site



A sign outside an abandoned parcel of land near the Los Angeles River in West Long Beach warns residents of the toxic materials located there. Residents are pushing back against a proposed storage facility and are asking for the land to be turned into green space. Photo by Stephanie Rivera.

■ By **SEBASTIAN ECHEVERRY**
Staff Reporter

A former toxic dumping ground filled with lead and arsenic in upper West Long Beach has become the latest flashpoint in a decades-long struggle to create green space in the city.

Developers of an upcoming project at 3701 N. Pacific Place are looking to build a three-story, 152,745-square-foot commercial building for personal storage as well as RV parking space on a plot of land wedged in among the Los Angeles River, 405 Freeway and the Los Cerritos neighborhood. But the Riverpark Coalition, a group of locals living in close proximity to the site, is pushing back against the project and arguing that the space should be used to develop a park along the river.

So far though, the storage project appears to be on track. On Dec. 17, the Planning Commission reviewed the proposal and gave it thumbs up, adding recommendations such as zoning changes from light industrial to commercial storage, which the

Long Beach City Council will have to vote on at a later date. The recommendation from the Long Beach Development Services Planning Bureau determined the empty lot has been a nuisance area with blight and trash that allowed homeless encampments to be established.

“Because of the level of contamination on the site, viable options for appropriate uses are minimal,” according to the recommendation. “The applicant’s proposal to establish a self-storage facility with accessory office space, R.V. parking and a car wash is an appropriate use, considering the site’s environmental issues, as well as its limited access and isolated location in relation to surrounding land uses.”

The commission approved the project with a mitigated negative declaration as allowed by the California Environmental Quality Act, which means that developers are aware of problems the project may have because of toxic chemicals found underground but have determined these problems can be controlled. The city’s Planning Bureau stated that it

had worked with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control for 18 months and submitted a remediated action plan.

“Those measures are expected to keep any potential environmental impacts to a minimum,” according to the bureau.

However, residents argue this isn’t enough, given the number of years that toxic waste has built up at the site, which was used for years as a sludge dumping ground for Signal Hill and Long Beach oil companies. They are asking officials to do a broader study, known as an environmental impact report, on the project site.

Carlos Ovalle, an architectural engineer and a supporter of the Riverpark Coalition, pointed out that the environmental impact report covers more ground while the mitigated negative declarations allow developers to conduct their own environmental tests for potential hazards instead of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

“It’s a case of the fox guarding the hen house,” Ovalle said.

The Riverpark Coalition is currently collecting signatures to bring to Councilman Al Austin, who represents the 8th District, calling on him to vote against the plan as it stands and instead make a recommendation to require an environmental impact report. As of Dec. 30, the petition has collected over 600 signatures, according to the coalition.

Paul Brown, a partner with developers Insite Property Group, said the company had been eyeing the property for 18 months. He said the company is planning to move its headquarters to the location and added that dozens of employees are excited to move into the community to live and work there.

Brown did not comment on the green space concerns some residents had expressed. When asked about the possibility of an environmental impact report, Brown said they stood behind the findings of the mitigated negative declaration.

“We know everything was done properly with great consultants,” he said. “We are confident it will move forward through City Council.” ■

‘Making it less about one-size-fits-all’: Inside Retro Row’s newest cafe, Coffee Drunk



Breezy and Matthew Church in their shop, Coffee Drunk, on Retro Row. Photo by Cheantay Jensen.

■ By **CHEANTAY JENSEN**
Staff Reporter

You know that feeling when you’ve had just a tad too much caffeine: shaky hands, a bit of lightheadedness and the world seems just slightly more amusing?

To Breezy and Matthew Church this jittery rush of caffeine-induced delirium, or coffee drunk as they like to call it, seemed the perfect fit for naming their new café that celebrated its grand opening on Dec. 12.

“When we first started dating, we liked to coffee shop-hop,” Breezy, 28, said. “On like the third or fourth shop we would say, OK, I’m coffee drunk. I can’t anymore. Let’s have dinner, we need food now—that kind of thing. So that was just kind of our playful banter—let’s get coffee drunk.”

Nestled just on the outskirts of Retro Row, an area well known for its independent coffee houses, Coffee Drunk has already hooked a growing

number of regulars.

While first-and-foremost a third-wave coffee spot—the use of Vancouver-based roasters 49th Parallel as their brew and espresso plays a major role in that distinction—Breezy said she designed her menu offerings as a sort of middle ground between the third and second-wave coffee consumer: high quality standards and product, minus the pretension.

Espresso staples like the Americano, macchiato and cappuccino are celebrated in keeping with their pure, original recipes and sizes. But, those who frequent Starbucks (the beacon of second-wave coffee) can feel good about coming, too, with drinks like lattes, mochas, blended iced coffees, nitro cold brew and chai teas available in 12 and 16 ounce servings.

“I think a lot of it has to do with catering to the community. It’s just about finding that common ground,” Breezy said. “We are very much so third wave, but it’s about taking that

foundation and making it less about one-size-fits-all. If you’re going to spend \$5 somewhere, you want to feel good about it and feel like you got your money’s worth.”

Born and raised in Seattle, Breezy’s background in coffee spans about 13 years, managing coffee shops in both her hometown and Long Beach, in-

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Coffee Drunk owners Matthew and Breezy Church celebrated the grand opening of their coffee shop Dec. 12, 2020. Photo by Cheantay Jensen.

(Continued from Page 5)

cluding Peet's Coffee and Aroma di Roma. It was the Peet's Coffee on Second Street where Matthew and Breezy first met.

"He was a customer for years before we dated. I got poached from another coffee shop and started managing over there. He noticed I wasn't there anymore and switched coffee shops," she said. "But he is my really supportive husband who loves coffee equally as much as I do."

Matthew works mostly behind the scenes in back-of-house operations, while Breezy takes the helm behind the counter. With the help of her long-time friend and manager, Johnny Har-

grove, the pair devised the café's menu and original recipes. Designated under "Claim to Fame" the original recipes feature a dark chocolate chai with a light espresso dust, the "Last Call" and "The Instigator" a double shot of espresso, sweetened with a dash of maple syrup and brown sugar, shaken with milk to frothy perfection. Breezy said it's hands-down their most popular iced drink.

"When we created that drink," Hargrove said, "we got extremely coffee drunk."

Coffee Drunk is located at 2701 E. Fourth St. and is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. ■

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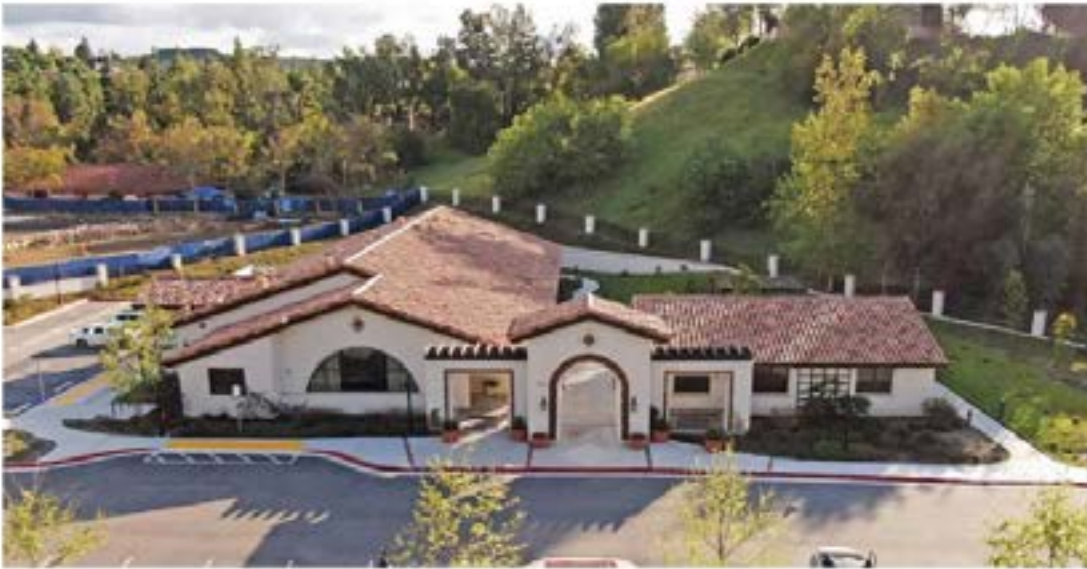
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‘This is the side of it that nobody wants to talk about’: Local funeral homes fill up as COVID-19 deaths surge



Ken McKenzie of McKenzie Mortuary Services stands in front of the freezer door at his business. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Staff Reporter

In the early grip of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, local mortician

Kenneth McKenzie ordered an extra freezer trailer in anticipation of the worst.

He started using that additional space in late December for the first

time this year, as COVID deaths in Long Beach and Los Angeles County hit record numbers.

McKenzie said his business, McKenzie Mortuary Services, typically sees about three to four new bodies a day. Now, in a sad fallout from the fall surge in cases, he’s handling about 10 to 12 each day, including entire families. This week, he received a brother, sister, mother and uncle—all lost to COVID.

“A whole family has been wiped out,” he said. “Their house is empty.”

As the overall number of COVID deaths nears 12,000 in Los Angeles County, health officials fear the first weeks of 2021 could be even worse if cases continue to surge from holiday gatherings. Health officials now estimate that one person in LA County died from COVID every 10 to 15 minutes.

As of Wednesday, Jan. 6, Long Beach had reported a total of 440 deaths.

And while there has been extensive news coverage of hospitals overflowing as exhausted doctors and nurses treat patients, McKenzie said little attention is paid to a grimmer side of the pandemic as bodies fill up in funeral homes across the country.

“This is the side of it that nobody wants to talk about,” he said.

Morticians say the days after Christmas are some of the busiest of the year as the sick and dying will sometimes hold on for a last holiday with their loved ones. With a pandemic on top of the busy season, local funeral homes say they’re now flooded with grieving families and bodies in freezers.

“I’ve never seen anything like this, and I’ve been working in this city for 22 years,” said Jonathon Polk, manager at Destiny Funeral Home and Crematory in North Long Beach.

Polk said the funeral home last year served 257 families. This year,

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Destiny has so far served 452 families. He estimates that about 30-40% of those are COVID deaths.

Polk said he also picks up the deceased for two local hospitals, but freezers are so full that he's been using an additional space in Orange County.

In the beginning of the pandemic, many funeral homes declined to embalm or prepare people who had died from COVID due to health concerns, he said. At that time, Polk, a licensed embalmer, would drive to Los Angeles and other areas to help families who couldn't find anywhere to take their deceased loved one.

"How do you look at a family and tell them you can't do preparation," he said. "I just couldn't do that."

Born in Long Beach, Polk, 39, said he grew up attending funerals with his grandmother, who raised him, and developed a passion for the field. He plans to one day own his own funeral home.

As they pick up bodies and work to comfort families, morticians, he said, are another unsung hero in the pandemic.

"With everything that's going on we try to do the best we can," he said.

McKenzie said many families who have lost loved ones to COVID

struggle to find closure because they can't have the traditional funeral experience.

With many memorial services now virtual, McKenzie tries to personalize the experience with a live camera crew and other touches. Other families have opted to keep loved ones stored so they can have an in-person funeral when health restrictions are lifted.

McKenzie, 54, founded his business in 1994 at the height of the AIDS pandemic when the funeral home where he was working refused to take AIDS cases. He started with a small storefront in Signal Hill and eventually moved to a 7,000-square-foot funeral home on Anaheim Street near Termino Avenue.

He was recently a frontrunner to be on the game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" with a group of first-responders, but wasn't chosen, he suspects, because his profession might be too much reality for some.

McKenzie said he hopes to send a strong message from his mortuary.

"I hope this article slaps people in the face who think they don't have to wear a mask," he said. "I don't understand how people can pretend it's not happening. The numbers don't lie." ■

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Engineering Design Svcs for the Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation & Replacement	RFP	01/28/2021
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Chianina Steakhouse to close permanently, Michael's on Naples to shut doors until outdoor dining resumes

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

After more than six years in business, Chianina Steakhouse on Second Street will close its doors for good, the owner said Thursday, Jan. 7.

Michael's on Naples will be closing temporarily until outdoor dining is allowed to resume in Los Angeles County.

"It's really unfortunate. We're really heartbroken over it," Carl Dene of Michael's Restaurant Group said about the closure of Chianina, a high-end steak house that stood out for having its own herd of Chianina cattle to supply the restaurant.

"We've put six and a half years of blood sweat and tears into Chianina to make it something special, and it's done, it's over," Dene said.

Maintaining a herd of 57 cows doesn't come cheap and with an uncertain future ahead, both in terms of dining regulations and people's ability to spend over \$100 on a steak, Dene said there was no way the business could go on.

"We can't continue with this herd, we can't continue to fund all of this," he added. "There was no way to save that."

While Chianina never opened for takeout during the pandemic—steak doesn't travel well, Dene said—Michael's on Naples had been open for takeout orders throughout the pandemic.

"The PPP loan helped us through some



Chianina Steakhouse in Belmont Shore is permanently closing its doors. Photo courtesy of Michael's Restaurant Group.

of that period of time," Michael Dene, owner of both restaurants, said. "And we had a good flow of customers that kept us going."

But with outdoor dining prohibited once again and a 10 p.m. curfew on takeout operations, Dene said the numbers just

didn't pan out.

"We're going into the beginning of the year, which is a slow time anyways," he noted. "It makes it really difficult."

Michael's on Naples filled its last takeout orders on Saturday, Jan. 9. During the

temporary closure, Dene said the restaurant will undergo some deferred maintenance.

However, he is planning to reopen Michael's as soon as outdoor dining is permitted again. ■

Long Beach officials moving forward with sweeping climate action plan that's been years in the making



High tide in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Staff Reporter

The City Council on Tuesday took a procedural step toward enacting a plan to drastically reduce local greenhouse gas emissions in the hopes of mitigating the worst effects of climate change, including extreme heat and sea level rise that could have a dire impact on Long Beach.

City staff delivered a report Tuesday night about the plan, which has been in the works for years. Staffers said they've devised methods to help lessen the expected impacts of climate change, meet state-mandated greenhouse gas emissions standards by 2030 and put the city on a course for a more aspirational goal of carbon neutrality by 2045.

The presentation moves the Long Beach Climate Action and Adaptation Plan along to the next step, which is a formal environmental impact report mandated by the state. After that, the plan would have to come back to the City Council for a

decision on whether to adopt it.

The 900+ page proposal lays out a pathway for the city to meet the state's 2030 emissions benchmarks by reducing greenhouse gases by 192,659 metric tons. City staff expects a large chunk of that will be achieved through Southern California Edison's switch to an electricity supply that is expected to be 80% carbon free by 2030.

Other sizable reductions are forecast through diverting commercial waste to recycling facilities (45,340 metric tons) as well as a green-waste program that could help divert nearly 40,000 metric tons of potential emissions from landfills. Another avenue is a reduction in local oil production, which could save the city about 41,740 metric tons of emissions.

"We depend a lot on oil," said Mayor Robert Garcia, who pointed out that oil production has been historically beneficial for the city's economy. "But it's also damaging our community and damages the planet and damages our long-term ability to

be sustainable."

Part of the plan, however, will depend on Long Beach residents taking part in the effort. That could range from residents taking fewer trips in cars to them opting to purchase electric vehicles in the future.

Residents could also be nudged to participate in a 100% green rate program through Edison but City Manger Tom Modica said that would likely come after the city has transitioned its facilities to 100% renewable energy.

"That is what we're trying to do in this plan is lead by example," Modica said.

As the plan moves into the environmental impact report stage of approval, it's not expected to return to the City Council for final adoption until the fall.

While many of the changes could take years to implement and could force the city to reallocate large sums of funding to stave off some of the worst projections of climate change, the status quo of greenhouse

gas production could be disastrous for Long Beach.

Naples and the Peninsula, already threatened by tidal activity and storm flooding, could virtually disappear under the Pacific Ocean under some of the worst sea-level rise projections. Homes totaling about \$1.3 billion along the city's coastline could be at risk from rising seas.

Vital infrastructure like the port could be susceptible to flooding, which would have dire impacts on one of the world's largest shipping complexes. Heat waves, water shortages and air quality issues, Things that Long Beach already struggles with, could all worsen without further action.

"You're seeing hotter summers, you're seeing wildfires. All of those things are causing intersectional problems with air quality and other things," said Councilman Rex Richardson. "We have a moral responsibility to accelerate our Climate Action Adaptation Plan. It just makes sense." ■

City set to offer amnesty program letting landlords bring illegal housing units up to code

By JASON RUIZ
Staff Reporter

In an effort to bolster Long Beach's affordable housing stock, the City Council gave preliminary approval Tuesday to an ordinance that would allow property owners to bring certain illegal housing units up to code instead of forcing tenants to vacate them.

The program, which could be finalized as soon as next week, would allow illegally converted dwellings or other unpermitted living quarters to remain in use as long as they're brought up to health and safety standards and the owner agrees to cap rent on the unit for at least 10 years.

To qualify, the rent cap must be set at no more than 30% of the moderate income level as determined by the area median income, which is about \$77,300, according to figures released in April by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

By that metric, a two-person moderate-income household could be charged 30% of their monthly income for rent (\$1,855). The federal government has set 30% of monthly income as the mark at which a person is rent burdened.

If a current tenant makes less than what is considered moderate income in the area, the rental rates would be tied to their income levels. A household of two making \$50,000 per year could be charged \$1,200 per month under the proposed ordinance.

The amnesty would only be offered for units that were in existence and occupied for 30 days straight prior to the end of December 2016. City officials are hopeful that the new program can help meet the city's housing goals of creating 26,000 units by 2029.

It's unclear how many illegal units exist in the city or how many landlords will come forward to take advantage of the amnesty process. City staff said they'd been alerted to about 157 cases of housing permitting issues over the past eight months.

Typically, those cases would end in a punitive fashion, with the housing units being removed to bring the original building back into compliance.

"That's not a good public policy outcome for anyone," said Christopher Koontz, the deputy director of the city's development services department. "We do feel that one of the benefits of this ordinance is that this gives us a relief valve. It gives the owner a way to legalize the unit that doesn't exist today."

Koontz said that the program would be voluntary and that owners of units who wanted to participate would be

encouraged to reach out to a third-party inspector or architect to ascertain how much it would cost to bring the unit into compliance.

That way, an owner could decide whether the cost of bringing the unit up to code was manageable before revealing the illegal dwelling to the city.

"We're trying to design a program that incentivizes bringing units out of the shadows," Koontz said.

The proposed ordinance received unanimous support from the City Council, with members applauding the item's potential to fix possibly dangerous units while simultaneously adding to the city's affordable housing supply over the next decade.

"Most of these units are already built out, occupied and they're substandard," said Councilman Rex Richardson. "They're not safe. This actually brings these units out of the shadows and makes them safe."

The council is expected to formally approve the ordinance at its next meeting on Jan. 12. ■

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4th Street Vine owners announce plans to sell their space to local musician Dustin Lovelis



Jim Ritson and Sophia Sandoval, owners of 4th Street Vine, are selling the business to Dustin and Emily Lovelis, both longtime fixtures in the city's music scene. Photo by Cheantay Jensen.

■ By **CHEANTAY JENSEN**
Staff Reporter

After a long battle to keep their business afloat during the pandemic, the owners of local bar and music venue 4th Street Vine announced their plans to sell the space to local musician Dustin Lovelis and his wife, Emily. The news was announced on the venue's Instagram page Tuesday, Jan. 5.

On the Instagram post announcing the news, the owners stated that while COVID-19 and the shutdowns that resulted hadn't made their choice to sell their business any easier, owners Jim Ritson and Sophia Sandoval had been talking about selling their space for months. Ultimately their decision came down to "personal reasons," namely to spend more time with their 12-year-old son, Diego, and to pursue "other ventures" the couple are involved with, including the Bamboo Club and Ya Sabes.

Ritson said they're still waiting for the paperwork to be finalized, but wanted to an-

nounce the change of ownership so that the Lovelises could begin the transition and formulate their business plans, adding that he expects the deal to "close shortly."

"It was definitely shocking and sad; it's such a great place," Tatiana Velasquez, guitarist and singer of local indie outfit Asi Fui, said. "But, it's on their terms. So I'm happy they're pursuing whatever is next for them in life."

4th Street Vine has been a long-standing fixture in the city's music scene since opening in 2008. For nearly all of its 12 years of operations, the space hosted concerts seven days a week, offering music-loving locals a place to catch an intimate show anytime, and local fledgling bands an accessible platform to perform in a professional setting. Hundreds of bands, like Asi Fui, can say that 4th Street Vine was their first live gig.

"The community that grew inside of our bar was something we never could have planned for," the owners wrote on their venue's Instagram post. "Punk Rock, to Hip-

hop to Blues, to Psyche, to traveling concert pianists to noise bands to freak shows to goth and pop and everything in between. When people asked if their band could play, we always said yes."

Wanting to keep their vision for the space alive, Ritson and Sandoval decided that the best fit for new ownership would come straight from the music community and offered the space to Dustin and Emily Lovelis, who have long been a part of the city's music landscape as musicians, patrons and supporters of the scene.

"We wanted to make sure that whoever bought it didn't let down the community that's grown there. I feel like we've made the right choice," Ritson said. "I'm just gonna really miss being a part of the music scene."

Dustin is multi-instrumentalist known for his work as a solo artist, playing live shows all over the city, including the inaugural Music Tastes Good Festival in 2016 and formerly as the primary vocalist for indie pop-rock band, The Fling, which produced

five studio albums and toured internationally before going on hiatus in 2014.

"I guess the biggest takeaway would probably be that we're not really changing things a whole lot," Dustin said. "We're kind of taking what humans have been built and worked so hard to build. We were so integrated, and part of it that we want to continue that kind of seamlessly and without turning any heads, because we really liked what they built. And I think it's really important for the community to have."

Dustin and Emily said they don't have any plans to open now, but they are currently trying to formulate a plan to open, temporarily, as a bottle shop with delivery, as well as food to-go until able to resume normal operations.

"Once the stay-at-home order is lifted we plan on operating within state guidelines as safely as possible," Dustin said. "Hoping for business as usual in the spring. Come on, vaccine!" ■

LBUSD is set to receive nearly \$100 million in coronavirus relief funding this year

■ By **CRYSTAL NIEBLA**
Staff Reporter

The Long Beach Unified School District is expected to receive \$99.4 million in COVID relief funding meant to be spent on and help with any COVID-related expenses—which could range from anything from personal protective equipment to technology for distance learning, officials announced over the holidays.

Of the \$54.9 billion that Congress earmarked for education, \$6.8 billion of that money is going toward California school districts and charter schools.

This funding came from the \$900 billion COVID-19 relief package President Donald Trump signed on Dec. 27, which included recently distributed \$600 stimulus checks. The package, however, did not include funding for cities or counties this time around.

In late March, the city received a similar federal funding package of \$40 million, some of which went toward hotspots, early childhood education and youth programming. This new package would mark the second time that the district gets help.

“Our school district is awaiting further information on the requirements for using the COVID relief funds estimated to be received in the second round of federal funding,” said LBUSD spokesperson Chris Eftychiou in an email to the Post. “In the meantime, we are continuing to use the first round of federal funding for technology, professional development, nutrition of students, distance learning and personal protective equipment.”

LBUSD qualified through Title I funding, which is a program meant to support low-income and other disadvantaged students. Since Title I is tied to the amount of low-income children in a district, the funding received varies across school districts. At LBUSD, two-thirds of the 70,000 students attending its schools are low-income, according to the district website.

According to an Ed Source report, although the money is distributed by Title I funding, the legislation allows districts to spend the money for students districtwide on a wide range of COVID-related purposes. The deadline for districts to spend this funding is Sept. 30, 2022. ■







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Community Hospital was built a century ago to serve the vast middle class of Long Beach



Community Hospital circa 1920.

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Columnist

When Community Hospital opened in July of 1924, it was a hospital for the largest part of Long Beach's population; it could have used the motto "a hospital for the rest of us."

It wasn't built as a charity hospital to serve the city's destitute, nor was it a private hospital that served the wealthier of the city's residents. It was for everyone in between.

The Long Beach Telegram reported that Community "was built to serve the great so-called 'middle class' of (Long Beach's) citizens, those who are neither rich nor poor, and who comprise from 70 to 80 percent of the population of any community."

While private hospitals, such as St. Mary, which opened a year earlier, or Seaside Hospital, which had been founded in 1907 on Chestnut Avenue and 14th Street (before moving to its current location in 1960 and becoming Long Beach Memorial Hospital), charged up to \$6.50 a day for a room, Community would undercut those rates by two dollars, charging \$4.50. A couple of bucks is pocket lint today, but it was real money in the mid-1920s when a worker's average income was \$2,196 a year.

Community Hospital, from the outset, was a beautiful campus in an ideal location. It was funded largely by businessman-politician and hospital founder Fillmore Condit, who made his fortune in New Jersey through a variety of means,

including inventing the self-latching refrigerator door, and churning the profits into a portfolio of real estate and oil investments before more or less retiring and moving to Long Beach at the age of 64.

Condit had made a brief run for governor of New Jersey on the Prohibition ticket and had written a slim volume titled "The Relation of Saloons to Insanity." He remained active in both politics and in his anti-alcohol stance. He became a Long Beach city councilman in 1921 and then the city's mayor in 1926. And, as chairman of the executive committee of Long Beach's Anti-Saloon League, he made an unsuccessful attempt to cancel a string of appearances by famous booze-hound actor Fatty Arbuckle at the Hoyt Theater on the Pike.

In founding Community Hospital, Condit made a significant \$50,000 to kickstart its construction, and he continued to donate, eventually giving more than \$100,000 to Community. Other money to fund the non-profit hospital came from private subscriptions and donations.

The hospital was an elegantly designed Spanish Colonial structure, designed by Long Beach architect Hugh Davies (who designed many residences and schools in Long Beach, including Poly High, as well as the 1928 Pacific Southwest Exposition in Long Beach), and it was built on an equally pleasing setting on a Termino Avenue hillside just south of Pacific Coast Highway, overlooking the sea, farmland and the city as well as

the mountains to the north and east.

Because the city was growing in size and population so rapidly, construction rushed to keep up with the expansion, so Long Beach was largely a manufacturing town in the 1920s, and Community was almost entirely a hometown project. Its contractor was R.E. Campbell, who had offices on Anaheim Street; E.O. Ross, who had offices in the same building, did all the plumbing and heating; William Buet on Fourth Street did the plaster work; Long Beach Paper and Paint on Pine Avenue did all the painting and decorating; Edmond & Pitchie Sheetmetal Works on Broadway supplied skylights, fireproof doors and all ornamental ironwork; Signal Fixture Co. on American Avenue installed specially designed fixtures for gas and electric lighting for the operating rooms; and Western Surgical Supply Co. on Fourth Street furnished all the surgical equipment for the laboratories and operating rooms, as well as the hospital's beds, wheelchairs and all supplies used in its wards and rooms.

Community had the immediate capacity of 125 beds when it opened, and a full complement of doctors and nurses. A nurses' home was on the campus, adjoining the main hospital. Nurses lived two to a room with a kitchen, dining room and reception area.

The first baby born at Community was Condit's granddaughter, Barbara Condit, and in January 1939, Condit died in his hospital room there from infirmities associated with old age. He was 83.

The hospital, notably, survived the

1933 earthquake, but the quake's ensuing aftershocks caused administrators to quickly evacuate the patients outdoors to a nearby park into tents illuminated with klieg lights borrowed from a Hollywood studio. The quake so badly damaged St. Mary, on the other hand, that it had to be razed and rebuilt.

As the middle-class population skyrocketed in Long Beach in the 1950s—by 1955, Community was averaging 150 births per month—the hospital that was built to serve them grew along to accommodate the increasing demand. In 1959, a six-story, wing was built on the east end of the main hospital with 148 new beds and 34 bassinets, bringing the hospital's capacity to 300 beds.

The following year, Community Hospital made national news when it became the first hospital in the US to offer in-room, first-run movies. Rooms in the new wing had unimpeded views of the nearby Circle Drive-In Theater screen and the hospital, in a novel move, negotiated with Circle to allow General Telephone to install speakers in the third-floor lounge for surgical patients and in the fourth-floor lounge for maternity patients and expectant fathers. The national press picked the story up as another example of wacky California news, with the added angle that the first double-bill enjoyed by patients was "The Wasp Woman" starring Susan Cabot (who you'll recall from 1957's "The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent") and "The Beast from the Haunted Cave," featuring Rich-

ard Sinatra, a cousin of the more notable Sinatra.

In 1971, Community became the first hospital in the area to allow fathers to escape the anxiety- and smoke-filled waiting areas and be present in the delivery room to witness the intertwined joy and horror of childbirth.

Though the hospital had withstood the 1933 Long Beach earthquake as well as many temblors, including the 1971 Sylmar quake, it was strengthened in 1981 to withstand subsequent earthquakes, which it did, surviving the 1987 Whittier Narrows quake, the Northridge quake of 1994 and numerous smaller ones.

In May, 1981, after undergoing structural reinforcement to survive earthquakes, the hospital was declared a historical landmark by the city, not only for its role in serving Long Beach, but also for its notable architecture and beauty.

In the new millennium, Community ran into financial difficulties and MemorialCare took it over in 2011, and as Memorial Medical Center continued to grow, Community fell further into third place as the city's go-to hospital. When a new fault was discovered beneath the hospital, the expense of retrofitting the buildings became overly daunting to MemorialCare administrators and it was announced in 2017 that the hospital would have to cease operations.

That early news sparked an exodus of staff seeking long term employment elsewhere and in July, after state regulators deemed a large portion of the facility unsafe due to its location on the fault line, MemorialCare declined to renew its li-

cense for Community, effectively closing the hospital.

In June 2018, Long Beach selected Molina, Wu, Network, LLC, a health group, composed of John and Mario Molina (formerly of Molina Healthcare) and Dr. Jonathan Wu, chair of AHMC Healthcare, with which to engage in exclusive negotiations. (John Molina is a partner in Pacific6, which is the parent company of the Long Beach Post and Long Beach Business Journal.)

Molina, Wu secured a long term contract with the city and its attempt to reopen Community, though plagued with setbacks, has taken on a greater urgency with the startling increase in COVID cases and the impact the virus has had on other area hospitals.

While seismic retrofits for Community Hospital have not been completed, planning is underway, and Molina has said that it has the capacity for 21 intensive care unit beds and is able to take in over 130 total patients.

On Monday, Jan. 4, Community reopened with 11 ICU beds and space for 40 other patients, with the ability to add more capacity this year. Walk-in patients are not being accepted, however; the hospital, for now, at least, will be used solely to relieve pressure on other facilities.

Molinda, in a statement on Thursday, Dec. 31, said "this is just the beginning" of the future for Community.

"Community Hospital reopens today thanks to the vision of many who didn't want to let this piece of Long Beach's history disappear," he said. ■



Community Hospital founder and Long Beach Mayor Fillmore Condit.

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CHLB COMMUNITY HOSPITAL LONG BEACH

Construction of Children's Village is complete; first patients are expected in late February



Donor Chris Lauhere, left, Miller Children's & Women's Foundation President Sharon Thornton, center, and Miller Children's CEO John Bishop hold a ceremonial key to the Cherese Mari Lauhere Children's Village on the Long Beach Medical Center campus, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Construction of the 80,000-square-foot Cherese Mari Lauhere Children's Village on the Long Beach Medical Center campus has been completed and equipment will be moved into the facility over the next month.

The first patients are expected to be admitted in late February.

"It's a little surreal," said Dr. Graham Tse, chief medical officer for Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach, who was on hand for the steel beam topping off ceremony just over one year ago. "It happened so quickly."

Once open, the new facility will incorporate 36 different specialties currently offered at various facilities around the city, including pulmonology, gastroenterology and metabolic genetics. The facility also includes pharmaceutical services and rehabilitation therapies.

Inpatient care will continue to be based in the main Miller Children's building.

Every year, Miller Children's cares for more than 65,000 children through more than 84,000 visits. Having to travel to multiple offices for necessary care can take a toll on patients and their families, hospital officials said.

The Children's Village includes 67 exam rooms, one blood-draw station and one specialty lab for the hematology and oncology patient care area. Each floor has a shared workspace for staff and a small number of private offices for managers.

Patient volumes are expected to increase 3-5% when the facility opens next year.


About half of the project's \$70 million construction budget was funded in large part through 2008's Children's Hospital Bond Act. The difference was funded through existing Miller Children's funds and

philanthropy, with the largest contribution coming from the Cherese Mari

Lauhere Foundation, for which the new building is named. ■



Executives from Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach and Turner Construction check out the brightly colored interior of the newly completed Cherese Mari Lauhere Children's Village on the Long Beach Medical Center campus, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



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Bringing math to medicine: Long Beach allergy institute plans to add sites, build new campus

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Dr. Inderpal Randhawa still remembers the summer that changed it all.

While on a fellowship at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, he spent a lot of time in the intensive care unit. His focus at the time was on lung transplants, but over the span of one summer, he saw a slew of fatal food allergy cases that left a lasting impression on him.

"These kids, they were totally fine; they were totally normal 30 minutes ago. And now they're brain-dead," Randhawa remembers thinking.

Fast forward 15 years, Randhawa now leads the Southern California Food Allergy Institute in Long Beach, where he and his team offer a unique treatment of food anaphylaxis—or strong allergic reactions to certain foods—that relies on large sets of data and applied mathematics.

In the upcoming year, Randhawa is planning to bring this treatment approach to new satellite sites outside of Long Beach—and unite the clinic's local facilities on one single campus in the Long Beach area.

It all started when the family of a child he was treating approached him about founding an institute dedicated to the treatment of food allergies. Randhawa saw this as an opportunity to show that a treatment approach that relies on data and mathematics could work, and become a case study ushering in a new era of data-based medicine.

With initial funding from his patient's family, he founded a pilot program in 2005. Nine years later he established the nonprofit that operates the institute today.

Although not a mathematician by training, Randhawa has always been fascinated with math and data, an interest he attributes to his father who came to the U.S. from India as a research scientist in the 1950s.

"There's no gray zones in science," Randhawa said. "You're asking for data."

But much of modern healthcare, he said, still treats medicine as an art rather than a science. Instead of collecting large amounts of data on their patients and basing treatment decisions on that data collected from millions of patients over time, physicians largely rely on their training and medical studies with limited numbers of participants to determine treatment options.

"I always found that it's easiest to predict risk when you base it on numbers," Randhawa said. "When I got into the healthcare field, I found that



Dr. Inderpal Randhawa in the patient waiting room of the Southern California Food Allergy Institute in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

most people didn't do it that way."

How does the institute's treatment approach work?

The institute matches up data on the patient's immune system and its responses to certain foods with a massive data bank of food proteins, before slowly introducing individual proteins to the patient's body, in an effort to cure it from the overreaction that is food anaphylaxis.

For example, a peanut contains 17 protein subgroups, some of which the patient might show an allergic reaction to.

"What we do is, we figure out for each patient—and they're all unique—how to crossmatch and condition their immune system to knock off four, five, six, 10 or more of those proteins, before we ever give them peanuts," Randhawa said.

This is done by slowly introducing the patient to other foods that contain one of the proteins that cause an allergic reaction, or giving them custom-made gummies containing the protein in question.

"We convince the immune system to not react as aggressively over time," he said.

Palma Gallegos and her husband helped fund the institute after strug-

gling to receive a diagnosis and find appropriate treatment for their son Matthew, who suffers from severe food allergies.

Allergic to peanuts, tree nuts, dairy, soy, gluten, vegetable oil and myriad other common ingredients, their son's diet and environment had to be meticulously monitored throughout his childhood.

Since entering treatment at the institute two years ago, Dr. Randhawa's approach has knocked soy, corn, beans, potatoes, eggs and tree nuts off Matthew's roster of allergens, with peanuts being next on the list.

"It has changed his life," Gallegos said.

What's next for the institute?

Over the years, Randhawa has developed a growing list of patients traveling from across the world to receive treatment at the institute in Long Beach.

"We have pretty much every continent represented, except for Antarctica," Randhawa said.

As such, the institute has made a significant impact, not just on the health of its patients, but the local economy as well.

An analysis of visiting patients spending activity, institute expendi-

tures and other relevant data by local research firm Kleinhenz Economics found that each year, the institute's operations create or support 190 jobs and \$20.5 million in economic activity for the regional economy.

But to make the institute's treatment approach more accessible to patients, Randhawa hopes to expand its services to several extension sites within the next year.

"All of these people who come here from outside of California to receive treatment would much rather have treatment near their home," he said. "We've got to find a way to take this kind of treatment and bring it there."

San Diego, the Bay Area and the East Coast are among the satellite locations currently under consideration.

Despite these plans, the Long Beach area will remain the institute's home, one Randhawa is planning to expand on by consolidating its manufacturing facility, biobank and research hub on one local campus.

"I do believe that healthcare is ready for its next phase and that phase will involve big data," Randhawa said. "I would like this to be a headquarters of this type of approach." ■



Medical staff unload Community Hospital Long Beach's first patient, a transfer from College Medical Center, in about two and a half years, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Community Hospital

(Continued from Page 1)

date just 11 intensive care unit beds, those beds will be critical as the pandemic wears on.

During a press conference on Jan. 4, county health officials said the worst is yet to come, as frontline workers brace for another surge following Christmas and New Year's Eve gatherings.

At the regional level, Southern California ICU capacity remains critically full and hospitalizations continue to overwhelm Los Angeles County hospitals causing excessive

wait times at emergency departments and the looming threat of rationing care.

Late last week, after months of delays, the California Department of Public Health granted the Community Hospital operator approval to reopen the facility. The hospital ultimately will be able to operate up to 158 beds but opened with the ability to admit 51 patients, including 11 in its ICU. Additional beds will be added in the coming months as additional services come online.

"We've all looked forward to this day for a long time," MWN CEO Virg Narbutas told the Post. "I'm proud of

the entire Community Hospital Long Beach team as we serve the patients who entrust us with their care."

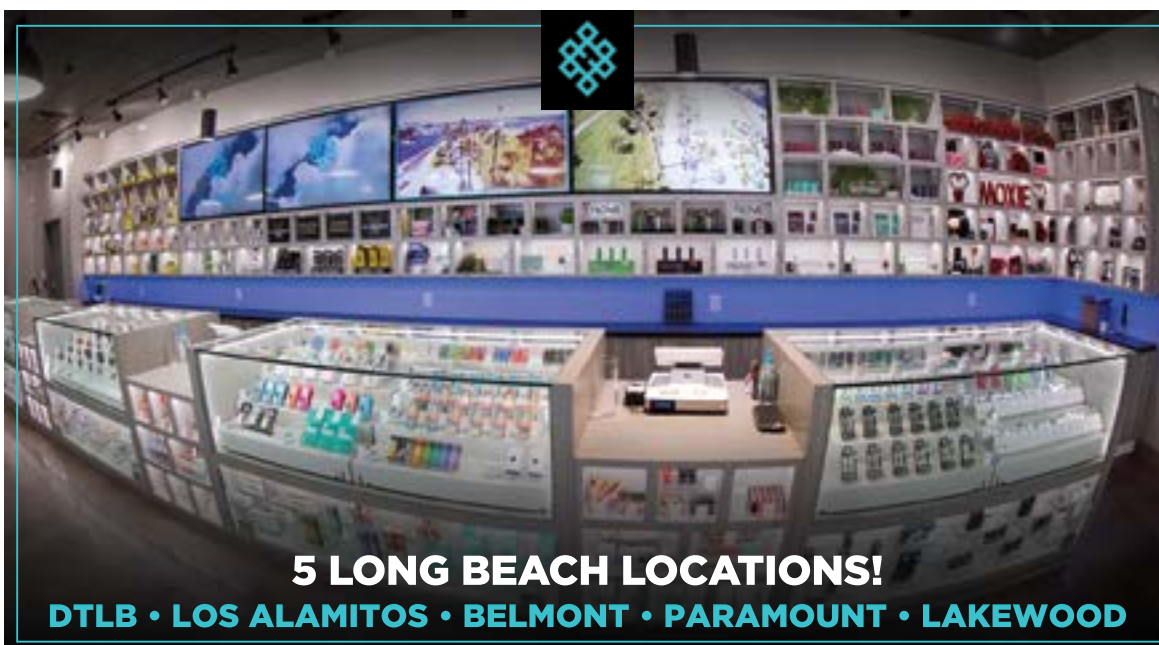
Community Hospital has a staff of about 140, including doctors, nurses, administrators and facilities personnel, according to hospital spokesman Brandon Dowling.

Over the last 18 months, MWN has invested \$6 million in the facility, including deferred maintenance, equipment replacement, supplies, utility system, and facade and interior room updates. Fourth District Councilman Daryl Supernaw's office pitched in \$250,000 for critical elevator repair.

The hospital was shuttered by its

previous owner, MemorialCare Health System, when a fault line was discovered below the facility and the operator deemed the necessary retrofit too costly. While the facility is currently up to code, Molina, Wu, Network is actively working with state regulators to meet more comprehensive seismic standards that take effect Jan. 1, 2025. The city will reimburse MWN up to \$25 million for seismic related work over the next 15 years.

Editor's note: John Molina—of Molina, Wu, Network—is the primary investor in the parent company that owns the Long Beach Business Journal. ■



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Small ridership, big investments: Coronavirus pandemic puts Long Beach Transit in a pinch



A masked man waits for his bus in Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

With ridership down by half in recent months compared to pre-pandemic times, one of Long Beach Transit's most important sources of revenue, fares from passengers, has evaporated this past year.

Meanwhile, the agency is forced to continuously invest in personal protective equipment, sanitation supplies and air-purification technology to keep bus drivers and riders safe—and maintain confidence that using public transportation isn't a health risk.

"Since the end of March, we have not been collecting revenue," said Kenneth McDonald, the transit agency's president and CEO, referring to fare revenues collected from passengers. "In the short term, we're able to withstand that," he added. "But beyond that, my crystal ball could not tell me right now."

Long Beach Transit is far from alone in this challenging situation. Transit agencies across the state and the nation have been reliant on federal relief funds to keep buses, trains and subways moving as passenger

numbers have dwindled.

Those needs have not subsided in the new year, according to Michael Pimentel, newly appointed executive director of the California Transit Association, who emphasized the need for additional funding in his inaugural press statement.

"State and federal lawmakers must take emergency action in 2021 to ensure that all California transit agencies have the funding necessary to continue to provide essential service to communities across our state," Pimentel said.

Long Beach's public transportation provider received \$29 million in CARES Act funding, enough to make up for just over one fiscal year's worth of lost fare revenues, which make up 15% of its annual \$100 million budget, and the costs associated with purchasing pandemic supplies, according to McDonald.

One of the biggest acquisitions for the agency is still outstanding. Long Beach Transit is currently testing a technology that, so far, has only been common in hospitals. Three of its fleet's buses have been equipped with special air-conditioning systems that are designed to filter out patho-

gens as air is circulated through the system.

UV-C air filtration systems have garnered unprecedented attention during the pandemic, as businesses search for ways to make indoor spaces safer. Studies, both by manufacturing companies and third-party laboratories, have shown that the technology can be effective against the airborne coronavirus.

"This is not a new technology, just a new use of the technology," McDonald said. If the test run is successful, the agency is planning to start the acquisition process for units to be deployed across the fleet in two to three weeks, although strong demand for the technology might make this a lengthy process, McDonald said.

Long Beach Transit is also currently testing barriers around the driver cabin, which would allow the agency to resume fare collection, as passengers could once again board at the front of the bus. Currently, passengers board at the back of the vehicle to allow for maximum distance between them and the drivers, effectively eliminating the collection of bus fares.

With mass vaccinations on the horizon, McDonald is confident that public transpor-

tation will return to normal levels at some point and that the temporary experience of the pandemic won't turn passengers away from shared-use transit completely.

"People will have that comfort to get back into normal life," he said. "When that will happen is anybody's guess." Eventually, he added, "you will see that angst begin to ease."

And Long Beach Transit needs its ridership to return. While federal relief funds have made it possible for the agency to retain its full staff throughout the pandemic, another year of financial losses would likely necessitate some structural changes. With 75% of the agency's budget going toward labor, job cuts would be a likely result.

"We didn't lay off anyone, we haven't lost any jobs in the short term," McDonald said. "If it continues, we'd have to consider that." But, he said, it's not something the agency has planned for so far.

In the meantime, McDonald urged Long Beach Transit passengers to do their part in keeping public transit safe for everyone by wearing masks. "We are trying our best to enforce this," he said. "It is one way that can help us stop the spread." ■

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New wave of coronavirus cases means rough seas for Catalina Express



Masked passengers board a Catalina Express vessel in Downtown Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Long Beach mayor will not seek reelection to Metro board

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia announced in December he would not seek re-election to the board that governs Metro, which he lobbied to be part of three years ago.

Garcia's four-year term is up early this year.

"I really love the work, but I have some other opportunities ahead that I would like to pursue," Garcia stated in a Dec. 10 letter to the Gateway Cities Council of Governments, but did not elaborate on what those opportunities are.

Garcia's office did not respond to requests for comment.

There is wide speculation that Garcia will be moving on from Long Beach to either a state or federal position after the election of President-Elect Joe Biden, whom Garcia campaigned for and has since served as a surrogate in state and national media.

The Metro board is made up of 13 members and guides the agency's priorities, projects and activities, including Measure M funds, a tax approved by voters in 2016 to fund county infrastructure related to transportation. While on the board, Garcia pushed for the rehabilitation of the Metro A Line, formerly the Blue Line, which connects Downtown Long Beach to LA.

In his letter to the council, Garcia noted that 9th District Councilman Rex Richardson's recent election to the South Coast Air Quality Management District board ensures Long Beach still has a seat at the table as a regional leader.

"[Richardson's] election yesterday has changed my thinking on Long Beach's role on the Metro Board," Garcia wrote. "While it was my intention to run for re-election to the Metro Board ... I'm going to give another leader an opportunity to represent us at Metro." ■

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

The tides have once again changed for the Catalina Express.

With coronavirus cases on the island rising fast and travel restrictions in effect across the county, the ferry company has once again reduced its trips to two sailings a day and is now hoping for federal relief funds to help keep it afloat.

In the late summer and fall, things were looking up for the ferry service, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

"They had opened up leisure travel and that made a big difference for us," Greg Bombard, president of Catalina Express, said. "It's carried us through until we hit this other wall."

By mid-December, the ferry service had to severely scale down its trips again, transporting mostly islanders with doctor's appointments or business on the mainland, and mainlanders coming to the island to work.

"This is one of the roughest times that we've seen, it's probably one of the roughest times Catalina has seen," Bombard said.

Entirely reliant on tourism, the island suffered significant financial losses during the normally busy summer months. During the first lockdown between March and June, when tourism to the island usually begins to pick up, some hotels saw their revenues drop by over 90%.

Now, that recent history is repeating itself.

"Many businesses on the island have

temporarily closed," said Jim Luttjohann, president and CEO of the Catalina Island Tourism Authority. "Visitation to the island is extremely limited, so there are very few customers to serve."

In addition to the economic impact of the pandemic, the island has suffered one death and 93 cases of coronavirus, a high case and death rate for a community of just over 4,000 residents.

And things aren't looking up, either. Over the past two weeks, the number of cases on the island compared to its population has been the highest in the county, with 26 new cases over a 14-day period.

"I get it, the numbers are crazy," Bombard said. "We all need to do our part to be safe."

But the lack of leisure travelers presents a fiscal challenge for the unsubsidized, privately owned ferry service, which is now hoping for a second round of loans through the Paycheck Protection Program to help soften the blow.

"I don't see us knocked out of business, but I wouldn't want to see this for much longer," Bombard said. "This is very tough."

So far, Catalina Express has had to furlough over 100 employees, about a third of its annual workforce, as a result of the pandemic.

As the only mode of transportation to the island other than helicopters, the ferry service provides a crucial service to both island dwellers and visitors.

"We're a critical line for the people who live on the island," Bombard said. "We're the lifeline link to Catalina." ■

Brian Sholty, magic maker at the Long Beach Convention Center

It's impossible, of course, to distill a man—who he was, what he did—into a single word, and yet so many people use “extraordinary,” when discussing Brian Sholty. That's fitting, of course, considering the other words used to describe him:

“So helpful, so kind” says the professional colleague.

“Always positive, always enthusiastic,” says the workmate.

“Loving,” says the son.

Ordinary terms for ordinary qualities available to everyone but, when wielded with the kind of passion and consistency of someone like Brian Sholty, able to accomplish great things, and, whether it was as a husband or father, coach or as Director of Theaters and Production for the Long Beach Convention Center, he did.

There's a good chance you've never heard of Brian Sholty, but if you lived in Long Beach or had an occasion to attend an event at its Convention Center, Performing Arts Theatre or marveled at the spectacle of some special event like the annual Christmas Tree lighting, Brian Sholty affected you.

Sholty, 50, who passed away Jan. 5, headed an outfit charged with creating, through lighting and staging, the many times extraordinary experiences spanning musical to dramatic, wonder to grief.

When Fire Captain David Rosa was slain in the line of duty, the city of Long Beach turned to Sholty to help construct a memorial service needed by a city in mourning. Jake Heflin of the Long Beach Fire Department knew Brian would be able to create the right feeling, one that would both honor and heal, because “Brian cared, he just cared so much.”

Kelly Lucera, president of the Long Beach Symphony, called him “amazing” “extraordinary” and “kind.”

Jennifer Rivera, executive director of the Long Beach Opera, said he was “helpful” and “kind.”

Charlie Beirne, general manager of the Convention Center and the man who elevated Brian into his director's position—“Best thing I ever did,”—remembers sheepishly asking Brian if he might help him make a dramatic entrance at a charity event by rappelling down about 10 feet from the rafters?

“Sure, but let's make it 20 feet,” said Brian, who then taught Charlie how to rappel.



On Facebook, a man whose son Brian had coached in Little League, perhaps summed things up most recognizably by noting he was “honored” to have known Brian because he “was just a really good dude.”

That comment was left under something Brian's son, Brian—the father went by Sr.—had written to note his father's passing. There were other comments, hundreds, actually, common when someone dies. But Brian had heard these same things about his father when was alive. How beloved he was by colleagues, how he'd affected the trajectory of so many young lives as a coach, some of whom he would ferry to practice, sometimes several towns over, so that they had the opportunity to play.

He'd heard of the big things, the extraordinary things his father had accomplished in Long Beach, in Norwalk where he was Little League president and in La Mirada, where they lived, where he was a coach and a really good dude.

He knows they're true, he says, because he saw it every day in the way his father treated his wife, Tanya.

“He showed me what true love meant every time he looked at my mother,” wrote Brian who said he remembers the first time he noticed it as a boy of 7, strolling through Target with his parents, seeing his father gently take and hold his mother's hand. That moment, that ordinary moment remains the indelible image of love for him now as a young man in his 20s.

It was those things, what some might call little things, that the father demonstrated time and again to his sons, Brian and Jonny, what really lasted: love, dependability, kindness, consistency.

“Unconditional love,” Brian said. “For your family, for your neighbor. For my Dad, that was just being a human being.”

Brian saw it, heard it every evening when his father would call Tanya to let her know he was driving home. Heard it in countless stories, one of his favorites being about his father as a stand-out linebacker at Norwalk High—he set tackling records that stood for years—who told a young girl he'd met and fallen in love with that he would

not speak to her on Fridays, game day, because he was convinced it would somehow weaken his resolve. Still, on each of those Fridays, he had a bouquet of flowers delivered to the girl, Tanya's, house.

“My Dad paid for those flowers himself, his family didn't have money, he had jobs pretty much from the time he was 12,” Brian said. “But it was important to him that my Mom knew he was thinking of her. God knew what he was doing when he put those two together.”

The story is recognizable to just about anyone who has worked with or known Brian Sholty. Going beyond, doing more than expected, traveling beyond ordinary, was at his core.

Steve Goodling, President and CEO of the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau remembers surveying the Performing Arts plaza not that long ago with Brian, knowing that Long Beach's annual Christmas Tree lighting ceremony would be closed to the public this year due to pandemic concerns.

“Brian suggested that where the two stages had usually gone during the evening celebration, we replace those with more, lighted Christmas elements,” Goodling said. “It was another example of Brian thinking outside the box and he was absolutely correct. We immediately ordered more decor and it made the plaza more stunning than the year before.”

Of course, he had accomplished as much the year before. Jeff Forney, of the Convention & Visitors Bureau, remembers walking the same plaza with Brian in 2019, though this time it was jammed with people, decorations and performers.

“I tried to congratulate him,” Forney said, “but he told me it wasn't about him, it was about all those people, about their experience. The success was in the joy we saw in those faces. He created that. That's what mattered to him, he lived that.”

A Go Fund Me has been set up in support of Brian's family during this time.

To donate, please visit: gofund.me/b818ff59

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