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## New Port Director For U.S. Customs And Border Protection On Ongoing Threats, Safety And Commerce

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

**L**aFonda Sutton-Burke is not a person who waits for things to happen. Her career has been a series of strategic steps – volunteering for unwanted positions, growing her experience and

education to advance, and opening doors that others might not even think to approach.

Once a key punch operator at an Air Force base, on July 26 Sutton-Burke is officially taking on the role of port director of the Los Angeles, Long Beach and Hueneme seaports for U.S. Customs

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LaFonda Sutton-Burke is taking on the role of port director for U.S. Customs & Border Protection's Los Angeles/Long Beach/Port Hueneme seaports division on July 26. She is the first African-American woman to hold this position. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

### THE BUSINESS OF WEDDINGS

## How Couples Are Going Sustainable On Their Wedding Days

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

**S**ustainability is increasingly becoming a priority for couples planning their big day, according to local events professionals. In Long Beach, there are plenty of venues and vendors at the ready to help engaged couples incorporate sustainable elements into their weddings.

More couples are opting to have their weddings at scenic lo-

cations during the daytime, thereby cutting back on waste from decorations and energy use from lighting, according to Sofia Riley, president of Long Beach-based Thank Goodness It's Sofia (TGIS) Catering.

"Both ranchos have become so popular because in a garden setting you don't really need to spend a lot or bring in a lot of decor," Riley said, referring to Long Beach's Rancho Los Alamitos and Rancho Los Cerri-

tos. "The setting is really most of the decor."

Riley noted that she has also seen more people being mindful of the impacts of traffic and travel, with fewer couples opting for destination weddings. "The other thing that is really popular right now is the ceremony and reception being in one area so people are not having to drive from one to the other," she added.

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## Focus On Signal Hill

With Numerous Projects Underway And A Balanced Budget, City Officials Optimistic About The Future

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

**S**mack-dab in the middle of Long Beach sits the 2.2-square-mile City of Signal Hill. Considering its size, the old oil town is undergoing massive amounts of development, with three residential projects underway and one more in the works, as well as plans for two parks and a new 12,000-square-foot public library. On top of booming development, the city is well positioned financially.

"I think the city finds itself in a pretty good place both fiscally and economically. We're looking to close out the fiscal year with some budget savings," City Manager Charlie Honeycutt said. "The

(Please Continue To Page 24)

## City Council Okays Support Team For Molina Healthcare

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

**F**ollowing upheaval within the ranks of Molina Healthcare, a Fortune 500 company and one of the largest employers in Long Beach, the Long Beach City Council last week voted to create a business support team to "attract and retain" the firm's operations and services within the city.

As directed by the council, the city manager is now tasked with assembling a business support team made up of "county and state

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## MILLENNIAL PULSE Phantom Phone Syndrome

By Assistant Editor Samantha Mehlinger

When I was a wee middle schooler, my parents had to set a timer to shut down my AOL session after an hour so I wouldn't be chatting with friends and Googling images of cute animals all night. Probably should have known then.

Or maybe I should have known when I was 15

and my flip phone dropped out of my pocket into a Lakewood High School locker room toilet. And I fished it out. I mean, it was flushed, but have you seen a locker room toilet?

I certainly should have known a few weeks ago when I was at lunch with

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## In The News



Vij

**Anu D. Vij** has been named chief operating officer of Ship & Shore Environmental, Inc., a local business specializing in air pollution capture and control systems for industrial applications. The firm has offices in Canada, China and Europe. Vij has more than two decades of experience in the environmental, chemical, petrochemical and air pollution control industries. He will oversee sales, finance, engineering, project management, procurement, production and service groups along with providing leadership for business development in existing and new markets. Vij earned a master's from USC and his bachelor's from Panjab University, India.



Cristiano

**Carina Cristiano** has been named an account executive with American Home Shield Home Warranty. The firm, a division of Service Master, opened in 1971. Her responsibilities include home warranty sales, customer service and education presentations for realtors. Workshops include new agent, home warranty, business development and social media. Until recently, Cristiano oversaw the operation of the family-owned restaurant in Bixby Knolls, Nino's Italian Restaurant, which opened in the city in 1958 and closed about a year ago. She holds a master's from Pepperdine University, a bachelor's from USC and a teaching credential from CSU Long Beach. . . . The American Red Cross Greater Long Beach, Rio Hondo and South Bay Chapter has added the following four individuals to its board of directors: **Mark M. Chung**, medical director and owner of Sleep + Lung MD, who has more than 25 years of clinical medical practice and experience; **Samantha Fabrigas**, an administrator and paralegal at Craton, Switzer & Tokar LLP in Long Beach; **Danita Y. Humphrey**, a long-time volunteer in Long Beach; and **Dale A.**

### Steve Goodling Named One Of 25 Most Influential People In U.S. Meetings Industry

**Steve Goodling**, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, has been recognized by Successful Meetings magazine as one of the 25 most influential people in the meetings industry for 2017. Goodling is the only visitors bureau executive among the list of influencers. Successful Meetings is considered the "bible" of meeting planners across the country. The publication, which announced its list on July 5, considered meetings professionals in five categories: game changers, advocates, strategists, educators and trailblazers. Goodling is honored as "trailblazer," who the magazine editors described as follows: "It takes a special kind of creativity to be a trailblazer. It requires the ability to understand the world as it is, while also being able to see the world as it could be. The individuals on this list have all bridged the gap between these two realities and the meetings industry if far better because of it." In selecting Goodling, the citation states: "Goodling continues to pioneer new ways to meet planners' needs with the ever-evolving Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, demonstrating how a vibrant meetings/conventions market can boost the economic health of an entire city. Under his leadership, Long Beach has been at the forefront of a lot of experiential trends and has served as a model for destinations throughout the country. For example, Long Beach was one of the first to remake the public areas of its convention center into a series of conversation hubs and have flexible configurations that transformed not only the dimensions of its large event spaces, but the ambience of them as well. Taking inspiration from the TED Conference (which Long Beach hosted for five years) the destination has adopted the 'Three C's' of meetings: Connection, Collaboration, and Community as it's undergone a total of \$60 million in renovations. 'We wanted to remodel our Center so we could offer that unique ambience to all of our clients by creating turnkey event spaces at an affordable price, so that everyone could enjoy a TED-like party,' says Goodling. It's an approach many others have been following. And with this month seeing the opening of another turnkey event space, 'The Cove,' as well as the Seaside Way pedestrian bridge, Goodling is also demonstrating another lesson for destination leaders: Never stop improving." To view the entire list of influencers, go to: <http://www.successfulmeetings.com/Strategy/Case-Studies/25-Most-Influential-People-in-the-Meetings-Industry-2017/>.



**Spiegel Jr.**, a former partner and principal with Ernst & Young. The chapter's 2017-18 officers are **Paul Conrad** as chairman; **Tim Sele** and **Braden Phillips** as vice chairmen; and **John Dupuy** as secretary. The local board of directors consists of 34 members, each of whom is elected to three-year terms. . . . **Ten Duong** has been named branch manager of the Long Beach/Bixby Knolls office of Change-MyRate.com, an online mortgage company. She has more than 10 years of experience as an IT administrator in addition to her 14 years of mortgage experience. . . . **DENSO Products and Services Americas, Inc.**, an automotive components sales, remanufacturing and distribution company, which employs 550 people in Long Beach, has opened an original equipment supplier office in Plano, Texas.

### Long Beach Hospitality Alliance Plans Industry Awards

The Long Beach Hospitality Alliance, an organization associated with the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, is accepting nominations for its first annual hospitality awards, recognizing individuals and companies "who have made outstanding commitments to the industry." The Alliance has developed 13 categories for which nominations may be accepted through July 31. These include: rising star award; unsung hero; beyond the call of duty; restaurant award; etc. To see a complete list of categories and criteria, and to learn more about the alliance, visit: [www.lb-hospitality.com](http://www.lb-hospitality.com). Nominees for each category will be announced on August 28, and an awards ceremony is planned for September 27 at the Hotel Maya.

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## Frank Colonna And Bonnie Lowenthal Recommended For Harbor Commission By Mayor Garcia

New Planning, Transit And Economic Development Commissioners Also Recommended

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

On July 14, Mayor Robert Garcia announced his recommendations for new appointments to the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners: former Long Beach Councilmember Frank Colonna and former Assemblymember Bonnie Lowenthal.

Colonna, owner of Colonna & Co Realty in Belmont Shore, was a two-term 3rd District councilmember and served two years as vice mayor. During that time, he served as chair of the Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority, chair of the Central Cities Committee for the National League of Cities and chair of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.



Colonna



Lowenthal

When he ran for mayor in 2006 – a runoff race he lost to former Mayor Bob Foster – Garcia served as his campaign manager. Colonna has been serving on the Long Beach Economic Development Commission since its formation in 2015. He will leave that commission once he is confirmed for the harbor board.

Lowenthal is a former Long Beach Unified School District Boardmember and two-term 1st District councilmember, serving from 2001 to 2008. She also served as vice mayor. She was succeeded as the district's councilmember by Garcia. After serving on the city council, she was elected to the California Assembly, in which she served as chair of the Assembly Select Committee on Ports and chair of the Assembly Transportation Committee. She served in the assembly from 2008 to 2014. She ran for mayor in 2014, opposing Garcia among others, but did not make it to the runoffs.

Harbor Commissioners Lori Ann Guzman, Lou Ann Bynum and Tracy Egoscue continue as members of the five-member commission, which sets policy for the Port of Long Beach.

Commissioner Doug Drummond, who previously announced that he wanted to serve only two years of his six-year term, is being replaced by Colonna. Drummond ran for mayor in 2006 against Colonna and Foster. Commissioner Rich Dines was eligible to be reappointed for another six-year term, but the mayor opted to not reappoint him. Lowenthal is replacing Dines.

“Frank and Bonnie love Long Beach, and their extensive experience in business and government make them great

choices for the harbor commission,” said Mayor Garcia. “They understand how important our harbor department is to our local and national economy.”

The appointments are being presented to the Long Beach City Council for approval at tonight's (July 18) meeting, according to Mark Taylor, chief of staff for the mayor.

### Appointments To The Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission And Transit Board Announced

In his July 14 announcement, Garcia also tapped new members for the Long Beach Economic Development Commission, the Long Beach Planning Commission

and the Long Beach Transit Board of Directors.

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, has been selected as the CVB representative to the economic development commission. He has led the CVB for 16 years. According to the mayor's office, the CVB generates more than \$300 million in regional economic impact annually. In his time at the CVB, Goodling spearheaded \$45 million in upgrades to the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center.

Ninth District resident Josh LaFarga has been named to the planning commission. If his appointment is approved, he will replace Donita Van Horik, who resigned.

LaFarga is the director of public and government affairs and an executive board member at the LiUNA Local 1309 union. He sits on the building rehabilitation appeals board for Los Angeles County, is a member of the South Bay Workforce Investment Board, and serves as co-chair of the legislative committee for FuturePorts, according to the mayor's announcement.

Garcia selected Adam Carrillo, economic development manager for the Downtown Long Beach Alliance, to serve on the Long Beach Transit Board of Directors. He currently serves as president of the Long Beach Commercial Real Estate Council and as a principal at Economic & Business Development Partners. ■

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## Millennial Pulse

(Continued From Page 1)

a friend from college, my iPhone casually placed on the table next to me, as were the phones of many others in the restaurant.

Mid-conversation my friend, subtle as ever, said: "I never have my phone out when I'm with people." I rolled my eyes at him but put it in my purse. I was itching to check it the entire time, wondering why someone I'd texted earlier had not yet responded. All the while I knew it was a dumb thing to obsess over, but I was anyway.

You see, I was experiencing phantom phone syndrome. Because that rectangular, shiny piece of technology, as I should have seen coming, is now essentially an extra appendage.

Over the years, stealthy tech firms have slowly engineered phones from hunks of bricks into sleek, super-powered computers that fit in your pocket. It was so gradual that most of us never noticed the parasitic symbiosis taking hold. After all, most of the artificial intelligence horror flicks tell us it would take walking, talking robots for technology to take control of our lives.

But then phones got "smart."

I'm not as bad as some. I don't typically have it out when I'm with friends (I was having a moment of weakness, OK?) or at parties, and never in a movie theater. And our office is a mostly cell phone-free zone. But at home? Out for a walk? Standing in an elevator, or in line, or as a passenger in a car, or any place at all where I have to wait for anything or my mind has a chance to wander? My first move is to scroll through applications.

I never really understood why people take "social media breaks." Social media is fun. You get to see what your friends are up to and share a bunch of jokes from the nerdiest corners of the Internet. And when friends comment on or "like" what you post, you get the warm fuzzies. It's great.

But I'm starting to get why people take these little vacations.

The problem with cell phones is one that stems from the Internet and social media: instant gratification. Or, more accurately, what happens when you don't receive it.

Millennials, root around back there in your middle school memories. Remember sending someone an instant message or an e-mail and crossing your fingers hoping they would respond before your parents unplugged you?

Now think about texting. At first, no one could do it because it was expensive. But now, not only can you send texts back and forth within seconds, but sometimes you can actually see if the other person

has read them. And now, as opposed to yesteryear's days of the huge battery-block phones, we all know that everyone has their phones with them at all times.

Comedian Aziz Ansari wrote deftly about this in his book about dating in the online era, "Modern Romance." He recounts a time he texted a woman to ask her out . . . and after three hours with no reply, he started to internally freak out:

"What has happened?! I know she held my words in her hand!!"

Did Tanya's phone fall into a river/trash compactor/volcano?

Did Tanya fall into a river/trash compactor/volcano??"

You get the picture.

So, Millennials, how many times have you sent a text and ended up feeling edgy waiting for a response? And how many times have you felt that way after far fewer than three hours had gone by?

This is nuts.

It used to be that when you wanted to talk to someone, you had to pick up the phone and call them. They would either answer or they wouldn't. And you would have to wait. Did you get as anxious waiting for them to call you back as you do for someone to text you? Or did you go about your business and watch some Nicktoons?

A recent study by B2X (a company that manages after-sales service of mobile devices for Apple and Microsoft products, among others) based on interviews with 2,600 Millennials in the United States, Brazil, Germany India and Russia found "digital obsession and compulsive use" of smartphones is growing.

According to the executive summary, a quarter of Millennials look at their smartphones more than 100 times a day and "85% keep it in direct reach at all times."

By contrast, fewer than one-tenth of Baby Boomers look at their phone more than 100 times a day.

The study also had this little nugget of wisdom to offer: "And they have a need for speed. 57% of smartphone users expect friends and family to respond to messages immediately or at least within a few minutes." What the study doesn't say is what happens when that expectation is not met. But I think most of us know that.

So what do we do? We still need phones for emergencies. If we go full Ansari, we may not be able to fully break up, but we should at least institute a series of trial separations.

Break the need for instant gratification. You're not a Pavlov experiment.

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Hampton Inn and Homewood Suites dual hotel is nearing completion in Douglas Park. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

## Development News

### Douglas Park Hotel Nears Completion

The Hampton Inn and Homewood Suites dual hotel is nearing completion on the southwest corner of Lakewood Boulevard and Cover Street in Douglas Park. The project consists of 241 guest rooms, meeting space, a fitness center and a recreation area. According to the project's developer, Nexus Development, the hotel is scheduled for completion mid-September and will be managed by Evolution Hospitality, which also manages the Queen Mary Hotel.

### AES To Break Ground On New Power Plant

The AES Corporation announced it will hold a groundbreaking ceremony this Friday, July 21, for its \$1.2 billion, 1,040-megawatt electricity generator and battery storage facility. The project is designed to replace the current plant on Studebaker Road, which will include the removal of the long-standing smokestacks. The new generator is scheduled to be online by the second quarter of 2020. Construction on the storage battery facility is scheduled for 2019. Demolition of the current facility is

not slated until 2021. The groundbreaking ceremony is by invitation only due to space limitations. For more information, visit [www.renewaesalamitos.com](http://www.renewaesalamitos.com).

Stephen O'Kane, president of AES Alamitos Energy, LLC, sent the Business Journal the following statement: "We're excited to move forward to the construction phase of this important project and look forward to working with the community every step of the way. We'd like to thank the Long Beach community for its support of this project, which will not only provide electrical reliability critical to Long Beach and Southern California, but also generate jobs and economic growth while helping California meet environmental goals."

### Multifamily Development Up For Approval

The Long Beach Planning Commission is considering the approval of a site plan review and lot merger for the construction of a seven-story multifamily residential building. Located at 320 Alamitos Ave., the project includes 77 residential units and a four-level, 105-stall parking garage. The commission meets at 5 p.m. this Thursday, July 20, at city hall.

### New Dog Park In Alamitos Beach

Construction has begun on a dog park (photo at right) in the Alamitos Beach neighborhood. The project is located on the

southeast corner of Broadway and Cherry Avenue in Bixby Park. According to 2nd District Councilmember Jeannine Pearce, the dog park is part of an overall plan to improve public safety at Bixby Park. The project features separate sections for large and small dogs, and it is scheduled for completion within 90 days.

## Real Estate News

### Planning Commission Votes To Recommend Granny Flat Code Change To Council

At its July 6 meeting, the Long Beach Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend the city council approve a zoning code amendment to the Long Beach Municipal Code regarding accessory dwelling units, commonly referred to as granny flats.

Last year, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed two bills pertaining to granny flats that went into effect on January 1. These bills reduced local government agencies regulatory authority if a proposed granny flat meets certain state standards and also streamlined the review process. To keep in compliance with the state, the Long Beach City Council requested city staff to prepare the draft ordinance.

The proposed ordinance focuses on the maximum size of the unit, parking requirements and setbacks. The proposal adopts the state mandates for setbacks, which require no additional setbacks for existing structures other than any required to achieve life safety standards, and a



The AES plant on Studebaker Road in Southeast Long Beach before and after. (Provided by AES)



## Realty Views

### Real Estate And The New Administration



By TERRY ROSS

**D**uring last fall's election season, prognosticators from all corners were trying to predict how each candidate – if elected – would impact residential and commercial real estate. Now, about half a year into the Trump administration, the same question remains. Agents, brokers and others involved in the business of real property are not sure where things are headed when it comes to tax code changes or the larger economy.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has said that the mortgage interest deduction, charitable donations and tax cuts for businesses are part of the plan for the new administration, but details are sketchy on

most of the plan, as are predictions on how they will impact real estate.

The National Association of Realtors (NAR) has stated publicly that proposals like the doubling of the standard deduction for families will reduce the number of people using itemized deductions and, therefore, render the mortgage interest deduction less effective as an incentive to buy a home. In a study by NAR and accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, they predict that this would cause values to be reduced by 8% to 12% in the short term because of the softening of demand for buying homes.

But on the flip side of the price equation, NAR statistics show that the current resale inventory of homes for sale is in its longest downward stretch in two decades, with 11% fewer homes on the market nationally than a year ago. Prices are up by 9% year over year, so the loss of inventory is trending prices upward.

"We have now gone 24 months in a row seeing the number of homes [on the market] drop on a year-over-year basis, the longest streak in more than two decades," said Javier Vivas, manager of economic re-

search at realtor.com, the website for NAR. "More markets than ever are struggling with inventory problems. In 80% of markets, there are fewer homes for sale currently than this time last year."

A lot of this trend has to do with the mindset of today's homeowner, who, coming out of the Great Recession, looks at the fact that selling the home means paying as much or more for a comparable property in the same market and expenses that will likely be higher. Job and/or income uncertainty leads many owners to decide the safe bet is to stay put for now, perhaps remodel, and put off selling.

Another aspect of the new tax initiatives that have been bandied about is the elimination of the alternative minimum tax (AMT), which has been more of a burden on the upper middle class. If this goes away, many predict that the housing deduction could become even more valuable to this segment of the economy that will have more disposable income and would be looking for investments like second homes where they could deduct the mortgage interest, as well as shelter income.

One of the long-standing drawbacks con-

cerning the mortgage interest deduction is that for those that do not itemize, it is of no use. If the elimination of the AMT creates more taxpayers that will likely itemize, then the number of consumers who find the value of housing mortgage interest as a tax write-off would likely increase.

But tax considerations aside, homeowners get many benefits from homeownership, such as equity buildup, control of where they live and stability. In many markets, rents are higher – and in some a lot higher – than the cost of a mortgage for a similar property, and you get the benefits of ownership.

Even though the administration and Congress are likely to go back and forth with a revised tax code and how they treat real estate and the mortgage deduction, the real key for price appreciation is going to be the low levels of inventory that continue to keep values on an upward trend for the foreseeable future.

*(Terry Ross, the broker-owner of TR Properties, will answer any questions about today's real estate market. E-mail questions to Realty Views at [terryross1@cs.com](mailto:terryross1@cs.com) or call 949/457-4922.)*



Long Beach Business Journal • July 18-31, 2017 • Page 7

## Real Estate & Development

five-foot side and rear setback when the unit is located above a garage. In addition to state requirements, city staff included a requirement for a side yard setback that is the same as the zoning district or five feet, whichever is less. Staff's proposed rear setback is five feet for detached structures.

Accessory dwelling units outside of the coastal zone or parking impacted areas do not have a requirement to provide additional parking. However, those within the coastal zone and parking impacted areas are required to provide one space if the unit is 640 square feet or less, and two spaces if it is greater than 640 square feet.

Commissioner Jane Templin made a motion to accept the recommendation as presented, including a maximum size of 1,200 square feet or 50% of the primary dwelling size. However, Commissioner Richard Lewis requested a friendly amendment to reduce the maximum size of the unit to 800 square feet or 50% of the primary dwelling size. Templin countered the amendment with a 1,000-square-foot maximum or 50% of the primary dwelling size, whichever is smaller, and Lewis agreed.

### Stepp Commercial Completes Multimillion-Dollar Sale

Principal Robert Stepp and Vice President Michael Toveg of Stepp Commercial represented the seller, Long Beach-based Northpoint Realty, and the buyer, VMG Properties from Santa Monica, in the \$2.16 million sale of a multifamily residential complex. "This property was purchased as a value-add opportunity, and the buyer is planning on making significant renovations



to improve the property," Stepp said. "As the Long Beach market continues to strengthen, the demand for well-located, improved rental units increases." The nine-unit property is located at 2320 E. 6th St. and consists of eight two-bedroom units and one one-bedroom unit. The sale breaks down to \$240,000 per unit in the two-story building, which was built in 1961.

### Downtown Real Estate Update

Recent office and retail leases by Toliver Morris, president of William Morris Commercial, included the following:

- AlTech Electronics – 211 E. Ocean Blvd., 5,481 square feet, new to downtown.
- Merch Traffic – 435 E. 4th St., 2,008 square feet, new to downtown.
- Blackstone Games – 100 W. Broadway, 5,727 square feet, new to downtown.

Recent retail leases by Catherine Morris, retail specialist at William Morris Commercial, including the following:

- Long Beach Creamery – 222 E. Broadway, 1,650 square feet, new to downtown.
- Waters Edge Winery – 217 Pine Ave., 4,600 square feet, new to downtown.
- Burgerim – 295 E. 3rd St., 2,010 square feet, new to downtown.

- Trademark Brewing – 233 E. Anaheim St., 17,461 square feet, new to downtown.

(Please Continue To Page 8)

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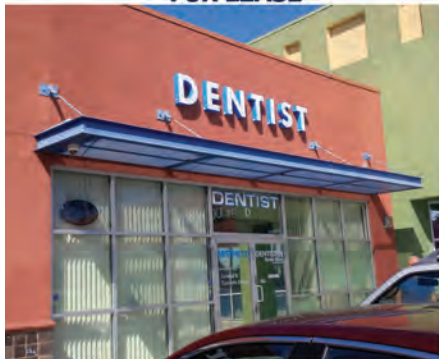
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## Real Estate & Development

(Continued From Page 7)

• Pizza Press – 301 E. Ocean Blvd., 2,800 square feet, new to downtown.

### Update On Bixby Knolls New Business

• 4121 Atlantic Ave. – Edgar & James: A Curated Collection By Goodwill celebrated its grand opening on July 14.

• 4236 Atlantic Ave. – Cheese Addiction is gearing up to open.

• 3630 Atlantic Ave. – Liberation Brewing has begun its building improvements and will get a Pow Wow mural and begin its interior build-out.

• 3900 Atlantic Ave. – West Bistro is remodeling and getting a new food concept.

• 4251 Long Beach Blvd. – Owners of the former Hof's Hut property are seeking a new restaurant concept.

• 4047 Long Beach Blvd. – Summerjax is heavy into their refurbishing of the Killingsworth building.

### Tesoro Leases Space In Downtown

Tesoro Refining & Marketing has leased 17,858 square feet of office space at Shoreline Square Tower in Downtown Long Beach. According to a company spokesperson, about 60 employees work in the space, with a mixture of refining and marketing employees.

### City Council Action

#### City Council To Consider A Housing Development Appeal

At tonight's (July 18) meeting, the Long Beach City Council will consider an appeal by Warren Blesofsky representing Long Beach Citizens for Fair Development. The appeal was filed against



500 W. Broadway mixed-use project.

the development of a seven-story, 142-unit mixed-use residential development at 500 W. Broadway. In the appeal, Blesofsky claimed the environmental impact report does not adequately address potential impacts of the development. Staff recommendation on the item is to deny the appeal.

#### City Council To Consider Two Medical Marijuana Location Appeals

The Long Beach City Council, at tonight's meeting, is considering the denial appeals of two medical marijuana dispensaries. Long Beach Cannabis Club's business license application for 5752 E. 2nd St. in Naples was denied for being within 1,000 feet of a beach and 600 feet from a public park. EZ Greens LLC's business license application for 1355 W. Willow St. was denied for being located within an area zoned exclusively for residential use. Staff recommendation on each item is to deny the appeals. ■

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## Molina Support Team

(Continued From Page 1)

agencies, business leaders, economic development officials and Molina Healthcare executives.”

In May, the founder’s sons, Dr. Mario Molina and John Molina, were ousted by the company’s board of directors from their positions as CEO and CFO, respectively, although both retain board positions. The Molinas have deep roots in Long Beach, where the firm was started, and are known for involvement with local entities such as the Aquarium of the Pacific.

When the Business Journal spoke with a Molina Healthcare representative in March, she indicated that the company had about 10,000 people employed in the city. Earlier in the year, news surfaced that 400 employees were slated to be moved from Long Beach to an office in San Pedro, but spokesperson Sunny Yu told the Business Journal that she believes that move is on hold for the moment.

Yu did not address questions about the city council’s action or about the company’s future plans in Long Beach, including whether more employees or operations might be moved, saying that the company had no comment.

Sixth District Councilmember Dee Andrews brought the item forward in part because many residents of his district are employed by Molina Healthcare, his chief of staff, John Edmond, said at the council meeting. While he said there have been assurances that the company has no inten-

tion to leave the city, he pointed out that when shakeups occur in any company, offers are often made to buy it.

Mayor Robert Garcia said he met with the Interim CEO Joseph White on July 10 and that White was clear that Molina Healthcare is “100% committed to Long Beach.” Garcia told White the city is 100% committed to the company, as well.

Seventh District Councilmember Roberto Uranga took issue with the motion, arguing it would mean spending public money and resources on a private interest when that company had not even asked for assistance. He said that forming a business retention team and perhaps offering incentives “starts a slippery slope where we have other businesses wanting that same assistance.”

Eighth District Councilmember Al Austin also expressed concern, noting that he worked in the aerospace industry in 1995 when the city formed a “red team” to retain about 10,000 industry jobs in the area. “Since then, several red teams have been established. Boeing went from number one employer here in Long Beach. Now they’re number seven,” he said, gesturing at a PowerPoint presentation identifying the employer as such. “And I’m not even sure they are number seven anymore.”

Austin continued, “Private companies are loyal to one thing, and that is their profits. And I am going to end my comments with that because I have experience. I have seen 40,000-plus jobs leave Long Beach, and we had the same model

(Please Continue To Page 10)

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## Newswatch

### Molina Support Team

(Continued From Page 9)

in place to keep it in place. So I am not trying to turn my back in any way on the employees and the good people of Molina Healthcare. . . . I support the jobs here. But I want to make sure that we are smart with how we direct our staff and our resources.”

Vice Mayor Rex Richardson expressed his full support of Andrews’ motion, as did Councilmembers Lena Gonzalez and Jeannine Pearce. Richardson expressed concern that the council would not come across as unified on the matter. Uranga said he took offense to that and that he was not trying to divide the council.

Austin made a substitute motion to instead create a resolution expressing the city’s support of Molina Healthcare, which only he and Uranga voted in favor of. Andrews’ original motion then passed unanimously with all nine councilmembers in favor. ■

### Business Groups Divided On Cap-And-Trade Bill

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

A bill making its way through the California Senate is dividing business groups. Assembly Bill (AB) 398 would

extend the state’s cap-and-trade program, a market-based program aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by capping them and requiring affected private entities to hold emission allowances to cover those emissions. Companies are allowed to buy and sell the allowances.

The bill passed the Senate Environmental Quality Committee on July 13 and was re-referred to the Committee on Appropriations.

AB 398 would also require the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to prepare a scoping plan for “achieving the maximum technologically feasible and cost-effective reductions in greenhouse gas emissions” and to revise it every five years.

The cap-and-trade program was created under the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 but has since been under fire, particularly by the private sector, with accusations of poor oversight and negative impacts to business.

AB 398 includes a number of requirements to address these concerns. It would establish additional oversight via the creation of an Independent Emissions Market Advisory Committee, which would annually hold a public meeting and report to CARB and the Joint Legislative Committee on Climate Change Policies about the performance of the cap-and-trade program.

The bill would additionally create a Compliance Offsets Protocol Task Force to guide CARB in “new offset protocols for a market-based compliance mecha-

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## Going Green

The August 1 edition of the Business Journal will take a closer look at California's proposed cap and trade legislation. The edition will also examine the City of Long Beach's efforts to reduce its environmental footprint.

nism for the purposes of increasing offset projects with direct environmental benefits in the state while prioritizing disadvantaged communities, Native American or tribal lands, and rural and agricultural regions."

Another provision requires that, until January 1, 2031, air districts would be prohibited "from adopting or implementing an emission reduction rule for carbon dioxide from stationary sources that are also subject to a specified market-based compliance mechanism."

The National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) announced its opposition to the bill on July 12. NFIB California State Executive Director Tom Scott indicated in a statement that the bill was rushed by Gov. Jerry Brown and the "Supermajority Party" behind closed doors, and he objected to a lack of outreach to small businesses.

"In a statewide survey to our small business owners in 2014, 91% of NFIB members said they do not support increased fuel costs as a result of California cap-and-trade policies," Scott stated. "Whether the increased fuel costs are 45 cents per gallon under AB 398 or some higher amount under the alternative 'command and control' scheme by CARB, struggling small business owners have been clear: we must reject bad public policy and not settle for cap and trade lite."

Scott also expressed opposition to AB 617, a companion piece of legislation that creates air emissions guidelines and reporting mechanisms.

The California Chamber of Commerce and the California Manufacturers & Technology Association (CMTA) each came out in support of AB 398 during the same week. The CMTA also supports AB 617.

"The balanced, well-designed cap-and-trade program in AB 398 is essential to reducing the costs of California's greenhouse gas reduction goals established last year in SB 32," CalChamber President Allan Zaremborg stated, referencing a revision of the 2006 global warming bill. "AB 398 will provide the least costly path to achieving our climate goals by extending cap and trade to 2030. The measure will help California maintain a healthy economy that produces well-paid, middle-class jobs."

CMTA President Dorothy Rothrock stated the following in a press release: "CMTA supports AB 398 and AB 617 to continue California's responsible leadership role by extending the cap-and-trade program, promoting a stronger economy through protecting manufacturing jobs and providing for local environmental improvements. We urge legislators to support this balanced package that provides compliance flexibility and reduces climate change policy costs on our state's entire economy." ■

## City Staff Hope For Housing Voucher Incentive Program To Start This Year

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

At its July 11 meeting, the Long Beach City Council voted unanimously to receive and file a presentation by city staff regarding an incentive program for landlords to accept subsidized tenants through the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8).

"As chair of our Housing Authority, I had the opportunity to work with [city staff], as

well as a number of landlords, property owners and members of the Apartment Association on ways to modernize and improve our Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV)," Vice Mayor Rex Richardson said during the meeting. "It wasn't particularly easy, but we were able to put together a package of things that we think we can support as a city. The hope is that it will increase participation and adoption to increase our lease-up rates."

The program lays out four key incentives for landlords:

- **Holding Fee** – Provide a holding fee to apartment owners to hold a unit vacant while the HUD-required inspections and approval process take place and families are referred for occupancy.

- **Damage Mitigation Fund** – Provide damage mitigation funding of up to \$2,000 over the security deposit for dam-

ages caused by tenants during the first year of occupancy.

- **Move-In Assistance** – Provide assistance with security and utility deposits or appliances for tenants, as these can frequently delay a tenant taking possession of the unit.

- **Streamline** current city-mandated Proactive Rental Housing Inspection Program with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-mandated HCV inspections.

The incentive plan also included the waiving of various permit and inspection costs for landlords who accept HCV tenants. However, the report states that the number of units that would be exempt from fees would cause a loss of \$286,350 annually in inspection fees – the equivalent of three full-time inspector positions. The loss

(Please Continue To Next Page)

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## Newswatch

### Housing Vouchers

(Continued From Page 11)

of those three positions would have a dramatic impact on mandatory inspections, which are meant to follow a five-year cycle. The impacts were considered too great to include fee waivers at this time.

“The work that you’ve done on this situation here, I think, is going to open a door for so many people out there, trying to get them a place to stay,” 6th District Councilmember Dee Andrews said.

Second District Councilmember Jeanine Pearce asked if there was a timeline for implementation of these incentives, which will be partially funded by Measure H funds approved by voters earlier this year to assist the homeless population in Los Angeles County.

“Frankly, no. The county fiscal year did start as of July 1. There are still some details yet to be determined,” Alison King, Long Beach Housing Authority bureau manager, said. “So we are hoping to hear, and we are one of a few housing authorities that has requested to roll out the program before December. So we are asking for first quarter funds.”

King added that the Housing Authority is setting aside non-federal funds to assist the first 75 clients that already possess a voucher but have been unsuccessful in locating a unit.

During public comment, Johanna Cunningham, executive director of the Apartment Association, California Southern Cities, and local landlord Malcolm Bennett spoke strongly in favor of the incentive programs. They said the program was a good start and a solid example of how the city can come together with property owners to come up with achievable solutions to housing issues in the city.

Local housing advocate Josh Butler, executive director of Housing Long Beach, was less impressed with the program. He stated that the housing vacancy rate in the city is around 2%, which means there are not enough available units to house those in need, with or without incentives. Instead, Butler suggested the city pursue building more affordable units – though he noted some progress has been made on that front – and granting residents renter protections such as just cause eviction.

“If we want to be a world-class city, then we should treat 60% of our population like world-class citizens and give them the same basic rights that they have up in Portland,” Butler said. “It takes more than crosswalks and microbrews and cool coffee shops. It takes a population. It takes a community to make a city, and it takes investing in your current base of residents to make that happen.” ■

## Understanding The Long Beach 10.25% Sales & Use Tax

By **GEORGE ECONOMIDES**  
Publisher

On July, 1, 2017, the sales and use tax in Long Beach increased to 10.25%. Several taxes have been approved by city and county voters during the past year or so, leading to much confusion as to how Long Beach arrived at 10.25%. Here’s the breakdown:

#### State Of California = 7.25%

3.9375%	Goes to State’s General Fund
0.50%	Goes to local public safety fund to support local criminal justice activities
0.50%	Goes to local revenue fund to support local health and social services programs
1.0625%	Goes to local revenue fund
0.25%	Goes to county transportation funds
1.00%	Goes to city or county operations

Source: State Board of Equalization

#### Metropolitan Transportation Authority = 2.00%

0.50%	Proposition A passed by voters in 1980
0.50%	Proposition C passed by voters in 1990
0.50%	Measure R passed by voters in 2008
0.50%	Measure M passed by voters in 2016

Went into effect July 1, 2017

Source: MTA

#### City Of Long Beach = 1.00%

1.00%	Long Beach Measure A passed by voters in 2016. Went into effect January 1, 2017. After six years (January 1, 2023) Measure A is reduced to 0.50% for the next four years then sunsets.
-------	--

Source: City of Long Beach

#### L.A. County Measure H = 0.25%

0.25%	Passed by voters to address homelessness, it goes into effect October 1, 2017. However, <b>Long Beach is exempt until Measure A (above) drops to 0.50%.</b> At that time, Measure H applies and the Long Beach sales and use tax will be 10%. When Measure A sunsets December 31, 2026, the Long Beach tax will be 9% assuming no changes.
-------	--

Source: City of Long Beach

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VMWare Software Maintenance	ITB TI17-106	07/21/2017
Parking Guidance & Wayfinding Systems	R-7105	07/25/2017
Managing Spontaneous Volunteers Training Course	RFP DC17-117	07/25/2017
Debris Management Planning Course	RFP DC17-118	07/25/2017
Rapid Damage Assessment Training Course	RFP DC17-119	07/25/2017
Marine Parts and Supplies	ITB FS17-108	07/25/2017
Upgrade of HVAC System - West Div. Police Station	R-7099	07/26/2017
(3) Ford F-550, CNG, Aerial w/Hybrid System-PW	ITB FS17-101	07/26/2017
(1) Ford F-550, CNG, Aerial w/Hybrid System -TI	ITB FS17-102	07/26/2017
Intersection Improvement of Redondo & Anaheim	R-7093	07/27/2017
Furnish and Deliver Water Meters	WD-21-17	08/02/2017
Transportation and Disposal of Electronic Waste	RFP TI17-097	08/10/2017
Building Seismic Resiliency Program	RFP DV17-111	08/15/2017
Employee Healthcare Benefits Consultant/Actuary	RFP HR17-104	08/15/2017
Develop & Implement Traffic Calming Measures for	R-7053/R-7056	08/16/2017
Traffic Exiting the I-710 into Long Beach		
Qualification and Selection of Peer Reviewers	RFQ DV17-112	Continuous

\*\*Some of the listed projects have scheduled mandatory pre-bid meetings which may have already occurred due to publication lead times\*\*

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Above, U.S. Customs & Border Protection officers at the Port of Long Beach enter a container that has been scanned by an X-Ray device affixed to a truck, as shown here. At right, a U.S. Customs & Border Protection officer reviews the X-ray scan of the inside of a shipping container located outside his van, which the massive X-ray device is attached to, at the Port of Long Beach. (Photographs by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

## U.S. Customs And Border Protection

(Continued From Page 1)

and Border Protection (CBP) – a senior executive service level position that puts her governmental rank just below presidential appointees.

The Los Angeles and Long Beach ports combined are the 10th largest port complex in the world and the largest in the United States. More than a third of the nation's goods come through L.A./Long Beach. In 2016, \$278 billion in merchandise came through the ports. Port Hueneme, located 70 miles north, is a vital port of entry for bulk cargo, particularly agricultural imports like bananas.

For the past six months, Sutton-Burke has been working from the CBP's Long Beach office, spending her time getting to know terminal operators and government stakeholders like port staff and leaders of other regional federal branches like the U.S. Coast Guard, while familiarizing herself with her staff of more than 660 employees.

Ahead of her official start date, Sutton-Burke spoke with the Business Journal in CBP's Downtown Long Beach offices and reflected on her journey from being a low-level government employee to the first African-American woman to serve as the regional CBP port director.

Sutton-Burke began her government career as a key punch operator at Tinker Air Force Base while studying general education at the University of Central Oklahoma.

Laughing, she said, "[I thought] the heavens and the skies were going to open up because I had my degree." But they did not. "Even with a degree, I had to basically reinvent myself. And being from humble beginnings . . . I joined the reserves and went into logistics."

Sutton-Burke volunteered to take part in Operation Desert Shield, a 1990 effort ordered by then-President George H. W. Bush in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. "I went to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and basically retrograded the cargo and the equipment that was in theater back to the United States and Germany. Again, trying to get that leadership managerial type of skillset that I could actually market," she said, noting that she was a second lieutenant logistics officer.

In 1992, Sutton-Burke applied to what was then called the U.S. Customs Service (after 9/11, customs and border protection were combined into CBP). "It was an all-female roster because they were trying to recruit more women to come in. And I was fortunate enough to get an interview and was offered a position in El Paso, Texas," she recalled. "[It was] 130 degrees when I arrived."

"It was amazing, but I have to be honest. I really was just looking for an opportunity, a career ladder," Sutton-Burke said. "I saw a lot of potential when I got into the service, especially on the southern border. And I saw that there were opportunities."

To climb the career ladder, Sutton-Burke volunteered for everything. She views one such move in particular as the decision that set her on the course to where she is today. "I volunteered to go to Laredo, Texas. You



can always see the crossroads, and that was it," she said. "No one wanted to go to Laredo. They were like, there is nothing in Laredo."

In Laredo, Sutton-Burke worked on the development of a customs targeting system – a multi-pronged strategy for determining what cargo and persons entering or exiting the country were in need of more detailed screening. "I worked cargo, and I developed a curriculum for this southern border interdiction training for targeting. It was a passenger analytical and a cargo analytical targeting course," she explained. Doing so introduced her to the manager of Customs' headquarters, who a year later selected her for a role in Washington, D.C.

After advancing through the ranks, Sutton-Burke became director of the nonintrusive inspection division (NII) at CBP headquarters in D.C. in 2012. She served in that role and oversaw \$4.6 billion of NII technology at 320 ports of entry used by 52,000 CBP officers and agents until her selection as port director last year. In that time, she became familiar with the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles through her collaboration with them on capital im-

provement projects such as the Middle Harbor Redevelopment Project for Long Beach Container Terminal.

In a post-9/11 world, CBP's role at the ports is to ensure nothing nefarious or illicit enters or exits the country, while keeping the flow of goods moving safely and smoothly. "I will say 99% of the cargo that comes in is legitimate trade and travel. And that has always been our mission – to facilitate legitimate trade and travel," Sutton-Burke said. "But also, we have that balancing act of national security."

Every container entering and exiting the port complex is screened for radioactive isotopes, considering "everything that's going on in the world today," Sutton-Burke noted.

The biggest threats to national security that the CBP encounters are illicit activities by transnational organized crime, according to Sutton-Burke. "Transnational crime could be anything from [infringement of] intellectual property rights [to] pirated goods. Those funds are then used to fund criminal organizations," she explained.

Intellectual property rights violations

(Please Continue To Next Page)





LaFonda Sutton-Burke, the new port director for U.S. Customs & Border Protection's Los Angeles/Long Beach/Port Hueneme seaports division effective July 26, is shown at a truck facility that scans all containers that come into the Port of Long Beach. At right, work continues on the new Gerald Desmond Bridge. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

## U.S. Customs And Border Protection

(Continued From Page 13)

often include counterfeit goods such as designer purses, textiles, cigarettes and more. "Then also, there is an export aspect of this operation because there are organizations that are also exporting currency and weapons," Sutton-Burke said.

"We also have a bio-agricultural issue where . . . companies can bring in agriculture products that could actually shut down our whole agro economy," Sutton-Burke continued. "We just intercepted khapra beetles coming in on a shipment of, I think, kiwis. . . . And the impact to the economy would have been devastating." Khapra beetles are an invasive species that pose a great risk to seeds and grains.

In addition to funding criminal organizations, these threats pose economic risks to the United States and affect the competitiveness of American businesses, according to CBP. And in some cases — for instance, with toys made with lead — they pose health threats to the American public.

Narcotics are also always a concern, and a growing opioid-abuse problem in the United States is playing into that, according to Sutton-Burke. "We are seeing narcotics being a major issue," she said.

"The number one concern definitely is ensuring that terrorists and implements of terror are not entering," Sutton-Burke said.

CBP works with many other entities to ensure these risks are evaded, including private partners like terminal operators and other public agencies like the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, according to Sutton-Burke.

All cargo arriving in the United States is

screened electronically. Ships' manifests and other data are run through a process that weeds out shipments for further inspection. "We are moving and are continuing to move into the 21st century using more electronic means, more algorithms, trying to basically again screen as much as we can 100% and then segment the high-risk shipments out from the low-risk shipments based on algorithms that have been developed at the targeting center," Sutton-Burke said.

A common way criminals try to thwart CBP officers is by misclassifying their shipping manifests. According to spokesperson Jaime Ruiz, such criminals will often pile legitimate goods at the opening of a container and attempt to hide illegitimate goods at the container's rear. "There is a lot of information that is manifested that is not true. . . . So we don't take at face value what is declared," he said.

CBP has a wide range of equipment to inspect shipments, including X-ray machines large enough to scan containers, gamma ray scanners and a variety of handheld technologies.

"The bottom line is, the most critical layer of the enforcement strategy is the officers and the agriculture specialists. . . . It's the humans that are boots on the ground that are working at the piers, that are conducting the inspections, working at the cruise terminal," Sutton-Burke said.

The technology supplied to those officers are considered force-multipliers. "If you do a manual exam of a 40-foot container, a 40-foot container holds about a three-bedroom house. It can take 120 minutes," Sutton-Burke said. "But you can use one of the large-scale X-ray systems, and you can scan that 40-foot container in eight minutes. So that's another part of the layered enforcement strategy."

There are multiple opportunities down the line to catch a threat or criminal activity thanks to CBP's layered enforcement strategy, according to Sutton-Burke. "The layered enforcement strategy is designed [so that] if one node on that strategy misses something, it'll be picked up from another node. And so that is part of why this type of operation, which could possibly appear overwhelming, is really actually very incredible," she said.

CBP is also responsible for monitoring the travelers going through cruise terminals in Long Beach and Los Angeles, Sutton-Burke noted. CBP monitors logs and has officers on-site to facilitate legitimate travel and identify illegitimate travel or criminal elements.

Seizures of goods at the seaports increased by 22% from fiscal year 2015 to 2016. In total, the number of seizures grew from 537 to 656, according to CBP data. Many of these included seizures of goods that violated trademarks, Sutton-Burke noted. "It could be the fact that with the growth of cargo coming in, that it's increasing," she said, adding that technology has also helped CBP to be more efficient.

"The importance of this is that the global supply chain is not just about CBP. The infrastructure projects that are going on, the growth and the development that California is leading, we are here to be working with them," Sutton-Burke said. She added that if any private entities intend to pursue capital projects — for instance, Long Beach Container Terminal's collaboration with the Port of Long Beach to build out Middle Harbor — she would like to be at the table to assist.

"We actually meet consistently with terminal owners and operators. We are working with brokers associations, trade associations, container exam stations. So we try to meet locally and work closely

with entities around here, including state and local," Sutton-Burke said.

Partnering with the private sector helps ensure that commerce keeps going. "When 9/11 occurred, everything basically just stopped. That is something we definitely don't want to occur again. And I think that's why partnerships also are incredibly important in this whole endeavor," Sutton-Burke said.

"My top goal really is the mission: ensuring that the country is safe, the American people are safe, our economy is safe. But also ensuring that trade facilitation is balanced with that national security perspective," Sutton-Burke said.

She noted that recruitment has been challenging for CBP and that she is focused on developing current staff and empowering them to ensure more of them are retained. "To retain staff nowadays, you basically have to ensure that they understand the importance of the culture, but then you also have to give them the opportunities. So I try not to forget what I needed when I was at that level," she said.

Finally, her goal is to continue to grow partnerships. "I want to ensure that the private entities and the other public entities are aware that we are here to work with them. We are here to be their advocate," she said.

"We're here as part of the business community, and we are here to be a partner with the business community. If I can be of any assistance, I am readily available," Sutton-Burke said.

Sutton-Burke is currently living with her 10-year-old daughter in San Pedro while her husband remains on the East Coast. "We sold the house and now are just trying to look for a permanent place," she said. "We have been having a great time. It is beautiful weather. I love it." ■





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## Sustainable Weddings

(Continued From Page 1)

In addition to using existing greenery for decor, some couples are opting to incorporate reusable living walls of plants for backdrops, according to Dan D'Sa, director of Grand Food & Beverage. "They are actual floral walls that set a visual as a backdrop. And you farm it as if it were a crop," he explained. Similarly, reusable hedge walls have also become popular, he noted.

Couples focused on sustainability are also increasingly using potted plants rather than cut flowers for centerpieces. "What we're seeing is a lot more succulents," D'Sa said. "It is more of a natural thing that can be replanted, rather than an individual flower that gets chopped and it's beautiful for the day and then you throw it away."

Erica Noriega, special events manager for the Aquarium of the Pacific, noted that couples using the Aquarium as a wedding venue often opt for centerpieces that do not involve cut flowers, such as rented faux floral arrangements. "People will rent them so that they are not just being used once," she said.

"Quite a few greenies" have gotten married at the Aquarium, according to Noriega. "A lot of people who have their events at the Aquarium are already sort of eco-friendly minded anyway. We definitely have had people who want to incorporate that into their event with



Lourdes Valles, right, co-owner of Gems & Jewels Fine Jewelry, said there are several options for sustainably sourced wedding rings, including vintage rings, man-made diamonds and moissanite, a diamond substitute. She is pictured with co-owner Jeffrey Winnick at Gems & Jewels Bixby Knolls location, 4130 Atlantic Ave. #102. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

everything from the catering to centerpieces to gifts and trying to make sure that people stay local," she said.

All of the seafood available through the Aquarium's catering service is sustainably sourced. "We have a person on

staff who keeps track of the latest trends and what's going on in the oceans to make sure it's the right season for certain fishes and to make sure that we're using sustainable fisheries," Noriega said. "And then we also compost, and we have

got a food bank that will pick up unused food to make sure that we're wasting as little as possible."

The Aquarium also recently joined an initiative to cut back on plastic use, and it has committed to eliminating single-use plastic straws and bags in its operations. Additionally, the venue has solar power and uses graywater for much of the horticulture on site, and it uses the greenest cleaning products and other supplies as possible, Noriega noted. "All of our construction at the Aquarium has been done to LEED Gold Standard or higher. So we do pretty much everything we can do to make sure we are walking the walk," she said.

Riley said that her company offers "curated local cuisine" and organic options free from pesticides or hormones. More couples are also opting for sustainable dinnerware. "More and more of our brides are insisting on china because it's reused time and time again. But when we reuse disposable wares, it's sustainable," she said.

The Grand's president and CEO, Jim Choura, has made it a company practice to source produce locally for years, according to D'Sa. "We only utilize our local farmers market and the L.A. produce market. We don't buy any of our produce from any food vendor. We personally drive out three times a week and pick it up," he said. "Jim has been passionate about that forever because it keeps money in our community and it benefits our local area."

The Grand recently hosted a vegan wedding where sustainability was a top priority, including when it came down to

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"A lot of people who have their events at the Aquarium are already sort of eco-friendly minded anyway."

**Erica Noriega, Special Events Manager  
Aquarium of the Pacific**

food presentation. All of the serving plates for the event, for example, were made from palm fronds that had fallen to the ground. "People farm it. They go and pick it all up. They compress it down and they mold it into plates," D'Sa said. The plates are biodegradable. "It has got a beautiful, natural look to it where you can actually see the palm detail to it."

D'Sa noted that The Grand is a green operation. "We go as light as we possibly can on all paper goods. All of our cleaning products are green," he said. The venue also features all-LED lighting, solar power and its own generator.

Both Riley and D'Sa also pointed out that many couples are using vintage or rented items for table dressings and décor throughout the event.

Sustainably-sourced engagement rings and wedding bands are also higher in demand, according to Lourdes Valles, co-owner of Long Beach's Gems & Jewels Fine Jewelry.

"We absolutely do see more requests for items that have a low footprint on the environment. And engagement rings are actually something that can be very easy to make sustainable because there are so many options," Valles said.

Pre-owned gemstones or vintage rings are one popular option. An existing ring can be redesigned to meet a couple's desires, or existing gems can be incorporated into new or vintage settings, according to Valles. Using existing materials reduces environmental impacts and saves resources. "In reality, there are so many gorgeous stones, especially the vintage ones, that are available that can be used for engagement rings that have virtually no impact on the environment," she said.

Man-made diamonds are another option. "They are made in a facility that has equipment that can pressurize carbon and make the diamond," Valles explained. "There isn't much difference in quality. It looks the same and it conducts the same heat." Moissanite, a diamond substitute, is another choice for a sustainable ring, she noted.

Noriega pointed out that couples are also cutting back on the use of mailed invitations to their weddings and pre-wedding parties such as bridal showers. Some go even further to help the environment. "We have had couples, especially if they have been together for a really long time or if it's a second marriage, we have had people who have asked in lieu of wedding gifts to make a donation to us or another environmental charity," she said.

"You sort of see people caring about the earth more and more as that messaging gets out there about climate change and all of the things that are going on in our world," Noriega said. "We see people just more concerned about not being part of the problem but part of the solution." ■





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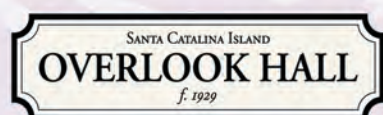
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# What's Trending For The Wedding Party – From Attire To Their ‘Big Day’ Roles

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

When it comes to trends for bridesmaids and groomsmen – from clothing to their roles during and leading up to a couple's wedding day – flexibility is the new name of the game. While some couples still opt for more traditional aesthetics and roles for their wedding parties, others are opting for more relaxed, personalized touches and involvement from their entourages.

“Just in general, everything is a lot more flexible now,” Camille Simmons, owner of Long Beach events planning shop Planning Pretty, told the Business Journal. “There used to be some strict traditions, and some people don't want to follow strict traditions and roles of bridesmaids and groomsmen.”

Perhaps one of the most noticeable ways tradition is increasingly being eschewed is through co-ed wedding parties. Traditionally, women are bridesmaids and men are groomsmen, but according to events professionals, that is changing.

“I know many brides have a man of honor instead of, you know, the traditional [maid of honor],” Lisa Lyons-Gentile, senior catering sales executive at the Renaissance Long Beach, said. “So people are a little bit more again relaxed, a little bit more inclusive. I

know they are even doing co-ed bachelor or bachelorette parties or trips,” she added.

Simmons pointed out that bachelor and

bachelorette parties, which are typically planned by wedding party members, are increasingly becoming more laid back. “It's

not just your typical Vegas weekend anymore,” she said. “Especially in Southern

(Please Continue To Next Page)



Camille Simmons, owner of Planning Pretty at 2742 E. Broadway, said that bridesmaids often each take on a responsibility when planning a bride's bachelorette or bridal party. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

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## The Business Of Weddings

### Trending For The Wedding Party

(Continued From Page 19)

California, a lot of people go off to Palm Springs now to relax. . . . Or people go to San Diego or Santa Barbara.”

Simmons noted that bridesmaids and groomsmen are more frequently taking on bigger duties during the wedding ceremony, such as reading passages during the ceremony or event officiating it. “I had a wedding in the fall, and one of the bridesmaids was the officiant,” she said.

“I think it’s good to find out what people want to offer, what they feel like they could contribute and where their strengths are, and then include them,” Simmons said. If a bridesmaid or groomsman is a videographer, photographer, singer or has some other useful skill, they might be willing to contribute their talent to the wedding, she explained. “It is just important to have a conversation with them to find everybody’s comfort level.”

Daisy Prestwood, catering sales manager at the Long Beach Marriott, noted that wedding party members occasionally lead an icebreaker activity at the reception. “They are questioning the bride and groom on what their likes and dislikes are,” she said, explaining that this trending game is a funny way for guests to see how compatible the couple is.

While the wedding party typically enters the reception with a playful dance, some are getting more creative, according to Ivy Jacobson, digital editor of the wedding magazine and planning service The Knot.

“If they are into sports, they can do like kind of an NBA lineup style, introducing each wedding party member with an interesting fact about them and having the DJ do it so they feel like they are at an NBA game,” Jacobson said. “People are doing balloon and confetti and rose petal drops to give it like an extra effect when they come in. And some people even do kind of a silhouette screen where they can do a pose behind it beforehand and then get revealed to the crowd.”

When it comes to asking friends or family members to be members of the wedding party, brides and grooms are increasingly gifting boxes of goodies through online subscription services with an accompanying note, according to Jacobson.

“A lot of brides are using subscription services that have like a little box already put together with maybe a mini bottle of wine, a wine glass, a piece of jewelry and a little card in there that says, ‘Will you be my bridesmaid?’” Jacobson said. “Other brides do it in fun Instagrammable ways. Like, we have seen some brides put the note inside a balloon with confetti so they have to pop it to read the note, which is really cute to capture for social media.”

Yet, Jacobson said, “There is still nothing like a handwritten note explaining how much their friendship means and detailing why they want them to be a bridesmaid. That will always be in style.”

More relaxed, personalized looks are becoming more frequent when it comes to wedding party fashions. “A lot of people still do matching bridesmaids dresses, but we are seeing a huge spike in mismatched



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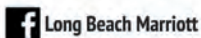
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dressess,” Jacobson said. “The bride could say, ‘I want everyone in blue, but I don’t care what color blue.’” The cut of the dresses is also often mismatched. “They kind of want everyone to embrace that personalized feel and wear something they feel good in,” she explained.

Lyons-Gentile said she has recently noticed a trend of two-piece bridesmaids’ outfits. “They are kind of like a beautiful formal skirt. And the upper part is more like a very dressy top,” she said.

Traditional black suits for groomsmen are now more often being cast aside for other hues like gray or navy, according to Lyons-Gentile. “Textures are really big in men’s attire. They are wearing tweed,” she said. Formal shoes are occasionally swapped out for tennis shoes on the groom’s side of the wedding party, according to Prestwood.

It is typically the responsibility of the wedding party to purchase their own outfits, and there are many other costs involved in participating in a wedding as well, as Jacobson pointed out. The Knot’s 2016 Real Weddings Study found that the average amount spent on accommodations, a wedding gift, travel, attire, accessories and footwear combined is \$1,154.

“I think it’s really courteous to give your wedding party your expectations from the beginning so . . . if they are going to face a financial hardship, they know from the beginning and they can decide whether they proceed or not,” Jacobson said. “Having all information upfront is a really courteous thing to do for your wedding party because they have lives and budgets of their own, too.” ■



The Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden on the campus of California State University, Long Beach was designed by a local landscape architect, and is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The garden’s director said staff and former students of the university often wed there. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Larry Duncan)

## Married, Long Beach Style – Venues With Local Soul

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**  
Assistant Editor

Long Beach is a city with many unofficial mascots of sorts, from the Queen Mary to the Aquarium and even the air traffic control tower-reminiscent Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport. From major landmarks that identify the city to outsiders to more locally well-known gems, there are a

number of sites like these where die-hard locals can get hitched, Long Beach style. Here’s a look at some of them.

### The Queen Mary

The Queen Mary permanently set down anchor in the Long Beach harbor in December of 1967. She has been a beloved landmark of the city ever since, having been converted to a permanent attraction and hotel with Art Deco-style

events venues and views of Downtown Long Beach, the coastline and the harbor.

“It’s the icon of the city. It is to Long Beach what the Statue of Liberty is to New York,” Nicole Ellis, catering sales manager for the Queen Mary, said.

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that many of the couples who get married aboard the historic vessel are from Long Beach, according

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## Local Venues

(Continued From Page 21)

to Ellis. “We have people who were married here because their grandparents got married here or their parents got married here. We host anniversaries for people who are celebrating their 20th, 30th or 40th anniversary from being married on the ship,” she said.

Long Beach’s own mayor, Dr. Robert Garcia, is one of many who will have a special memory to cherish aboard the Queen Mary. On the 4th of July, it was where he proposed to his partner, Matthew Mendez.

The Queen Mary has four venues for wedding ceremonies and can host as small as an intimate wedding with just the couple and as large as a 400-person event, Ellis said. History buffs or maritime lovers can wed in the ship’s wheelhouse, but there are also more traditional venues such as an outdoor gazebo and an indoor chapel.

The ship has even more space for receptions, with eight venues including salons, restaurants and outdoor decks. “We can accommodate receptions for up to about 700 people in our Grand and Windsor salons,” Ellis noted.

“We do about 200 weddings a year,” Ellis said. “Many of them come locally. Some come internationally.”

### The Aquarium Of The Pacific

Since opening in 1998, the Aquarium of the Pacific has seen millions of visitors pass through its doors, including scores of local school children attending for field trips or even proms. Many of these children are now grown and, when the time comes, choose the Aquarium as their wed-



The Esplanade, an outdoor venue at the Hotel Maya, is capable of hosting 220 wedding guests with views of the downtown Long Beach skyline as a backdrop, according to Lisa Duncan (pictured), director of catering and convention services for the hotel. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Larry Duncan)

ding venue, according to Erica Noriega, special events manager.

“We have a lot of couples who the Aquarium is really special to them for a variety of reasons,” Noriega said. “We have had people who have gone on their first date at the Aquarium who have done weddings there, gone to prom there, their fiancé proposed to them there. So there are definitely a lot of people who have a very strong affinity for the Aquarium.”

Ocean lovers might choose to wed in front of the floor-to-ceiling tank in the Great Hall or perhaps hold their reception there. A more intimate setting is the Aquar-

ium’s tunnel, where couples and a few guests are surrounded by swimming sea life on all sides. The venue also has an outdoor patio and a variety of other spaces that wedding parties can use.

“I think between the Aquarium and the Queen Mary, those are sort of the two things you think about when you think about Long Beach,” Noriega said. Most couples who wed at the Aquarium come from within a 50-mile radius, she noted. The Aquarium can easily accommodate up to 350 wedding guests.

### The Hotel Maya

Long Beachers who want to wed with their city as their backdrop need

look no further than the Hotel Maya, a DoubleTree By Hilton that has multiple wedding ceremony and reception spaces with sweeping views of the Downtown Long Beach skyline and the Queen Mary.

“Seven of our eight venues offer a view of the skyline, starting with our private beach that we have on property that is overlooking the Queen Mary over to the lighthouse and then our Esplanade space,” Lisa Duncan, director of catering and convention services for the hotel, said. The Esplanade is an outdoor, covered courtyard on the water with a view of the skyline.

“Then we have a second-floor reception



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room that is quite popular, and that has an unobstructed view of the entire skyline from Queensway Bridge over to the Queen Mary,” Duncan said. “And our newest space, our Vista Del Mar and our Lagunita Pavilion, also offer that really unobstructed view of the skyline. So it is quite unique from that perspective with how many options we have for those great views of the city.”

The Maya can host up to 450 people for weddings. Couples often choose to wed at the Maya because its placement on Queensway Bay coupled with its tropical greenery and décor makes it feel like a destination wedding without having to travel far, Duncan explained. “But when you look back across the water, you’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, there’s Long Beach too.’”

### The Sky Room

Couples looking for sky-high views of the Long Beach waterfront turn to The Sky Room, a restaurant and bar in the historic Breakers building at 40 South Locust Ave. The 1920’s-era building was originally a Hilton hotel, and it has a storied history.

“The top floor, which is The Sky Room now, was Elizabeth Taylor’s penthouse at one point,” Amber Davis, catering manager, said, adding that Conrad Hilton had been married to Taylor. “Way back in the day, it was the Hollywood elite place to go in Long Beach.”

On a clear day, the restaurant offers views of Catalina Island to the south and the Hollywood sign to the north. “There are breathtaking panoramic views. . . . There are not many places you can see that kind of thing in Downtown Long Beach,” Davis said.

A rooftop bar above The Sky Room called Cielo features the same views but

in an open-air, intimate setting. “We actually have a couple of different spaces that we utilize for events,” Davis said. In addition to Cielo and The Sky Room, the ground floor of the building has an all-white chapel, a wine lounge and a ballroom, she noted. Up to 250 people can be accommodated.

### The Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport

For locals and architecture nerds alike, the Holiday Inn Long Beach Airport is something of an unofficial mascot for the city’s east side. The round tower is one of a handful of identical Holiday Inns built in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is identified by the Los Angeles Conservancy as a “treasured” landmark. Its shape, which General Manager Mooyon Kim noted mimics an air traffic control tower, and its proximity to the airport hearken back to the city’s aviation roots.

“This hotel opened as a Holiday Inn. The construction was completed in 1968, and it has been since operating as a hotel,” Kim said. The hotel recently underwent a \$30 million renovation.

The hotel’s thirteenth floor bar and restaurant, VUE, can be booked for wedding receptions, according to Charlene Tritipeskul, director of catering. The venue offers miles of views on all sides, including of the airport runway.

Additionally, the hotel has an outdoor courtyard that is ideal for wedding ceremonies, as well as other reception spaces, including a ballroom. As many as 320 guests can be accommodated at the hotel, Tritipeskul said.

### The Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden

Well-known to locals but perhaps unbeknownst to passersby – it is, after all, tucked away behind walls on the campus of California State University, Long Beach – is the Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden. Designed by Long Beach landscape architect Edward Lovell Jr., the garden was gifted by philanthropist Lorraine Miller Collins and named after her husband. It was completed 30 years ago.

“Ed Lovell was quite a well-known landscape architect, and he took a lot of care in designing this garden so that it would meet Lorraine’s expectations and also serve the campus and the city,” Executive Director Jeanette Schelin said. “He worked with Edward Killingsworth, who was the master plan architect, so the two men had this team approach between the buildings and the landscape. It really produced a beautiful campus.”

Because the garden was designed for four seasons, something is always in bloom, Schelin said. “We get used to sort of two seasons in Long Beach, but the Japanese garden really does provide those four seasons. So it is really nice, and our brides appreciate that,” she said.

About 40% of couples who marry at the garden have an affiliation with the university, according to Schelin. “We’re on campus, and students discover the garden while they are here with their studies. And then we also hear that there were a lot of first dates at the garden, that it was a special place for people to come,” she said. “And when they think about doing their wedding or their photos, you know, this is the place they want to come.”

Schelin reflected, “The amount of effort that we put into maintaining this garden, we do it because we’re maintaining a cultural treasure of the City of Long Beach.”

### The Long Beach Museum Of Art

Located on the bluff off of Ocean Boulevard is the Long Beach Museum of Art, a historic landmark home, art museum and restaurant rolled into one. The main building is the 1911 Elizabeth Millbank Anderson House, which Executive Director Ron Nelson said was built by a banking and finance family from New York City.

After World War II, the home became a social club and, later, a club for Navy chief petty officers, Nelson said. In 1950, it became an arts center and has been amassing a collection of art ever since. In 2000, the museum’s gallery pavilion was completed, adding another building to the property. Its restaurant features both indoor dining in the Anderson House and outdoor dining on the bluff, overlooking the ocean and Queen Mary and port.

“We try to leave the galleries open when there is a wedding because there is always a period of time to kind of capture another audience with that,” Nelson said. “And I think it is a nice sort of respite between a service and a reception . . . that can be a period of time when the bride can change if she wants and meet special people there.” He added, “It has a real spiritual and emotional appeal to it.”

Many Long Beach locals have married at the museum, including Nelson. “Of course, I am heavily lobbying the mayor,” he said with a laugh, referring to the recently engaged Garcia. The museum can host up to 275 people for weddings. ■



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## Focus On Signal Hill

(Continued From Page 1)

council just adopted a \$21 million balanced budget. We're projecting a moderate surplus as well. I just think from a budget perspective the city is looking pretty good."

The city's business environment is also strong, according to Honeycutt, with each of the major retail centers fully leased, car dealerships expanding and renovating, and new businesses such as Ten Mile Brewing preparing to open their doors. In addition to dealership renovations by Honda and BMW, the owners of Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep Ram are working to bring a Mazda dealership to the city's auto center.

Honeycutt explained that the large big box stores, such as Office Depot, Best Buy, Home Depot and Costco, continue to bring in large amounts of tax revenue for the city. According to city staff, the city's tax revenue breaks down as follows: 37.5% from business and industry, 22.6% from autos and transportation, 14% from general consumer goods, 12.3% from state and county pools, 8.4% from building and construction, 2.3% from restaurants and hotels, 2.2% from fuel and service stations, and 0.7% from food and drugs.

"What's kind of interesting is our In-N-Out Burger at our Gateway Center. That's got to be one of the best burger places in their chain," Honeycutt said. "When I look at the revenues that In-N-Out generates, it's always very surprising to me."

According to Mayor Edward Wilson, Signal Hill's benefits begin the moment an owner decides to open for business in the



Signal Hill Mayor Edward Wilson said he is pushing for the city to move to a citywide elected mayor system to give residents a voice in the decision, as well as provide the city with more consistency. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

city. He explained that the city's application process is much faster and cheaper than many other surrounding cities, saving time and money for everyone involved. Local law enforcement is another business attraction, Wilson explained.

"We have an outstanding police department, which is another reason businesses like being here," Wilson said. "Their response time is very quick. They're very friendly but very professional and have great training."

Wilson said he is really excited about where the city is and where it is going. To keep moving forward, Wilson said the city established a five-year strategic plan with six guiding goals: ensure long-term fiscal stability; ensure public safety as a high priority; promote a strong local economic base; maintain and improve public infrastructure; ensure and enhance quality of life for residents; and promote a transparent and open government.

"It took a while to get to where we are at,

but our opportunities going forward are significant. We are a different city than we were 20 years ago [when] I got on the council," Wilson said. "I said we are going to put million-dollar homes on top of the hill. People didn't think we could do it – we now have it. We didn't have a gas station – we now have three gas stations. We didn't have our own zip code. There are a lot of things that people said we'd never have that we have today."

### City Of Signal Hill Five-Year Strategic Plan

The city has six guiding goals:

- Ensure long-term fiscal stability;
- Ensure public safety as a high priority;
- Promote a strong local economic base;
- Maintain and improve public infrastructure;
- Ensure and enhance quality of life for residents; and
- Promote a transparent and open government.

Earlier this month, Honeycutt said the city activated its new water well, including a new water treatment plant. The new well can produce the same amount of water as the two existing wells combined. Honeycutt said water independence helps the city keep water prices low for residents, a city quality in which he takes pride. Additionally, Honeycutt stressed the city's lack of a utility user tax.

In line with the city's economic and development growth, Wilson said that he is now urging city officials to allow residents to vote for their mayor. Under the current system, residents elect five councilmembers to four-year terms, and the position of mayor rotates among them each year.

Wilson explained that one year as mayor



Signal Hill City Manager Charlie Honeycutt said the city expects to close the fiscal year with some budget savings. He added that the city council recently approved a \$21 million balanced budget, with projected savings. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)





The 2.2-square-mile City of Signal Hill boasts seven parks and 1.9 miles of walking trails. Signal Hill Petroleum, a large landowner in the city, hopes to add to the trail system, while the city is in the process of designing a new dog park and view park. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

is not sufficient to set the course of a city and that being an elected four-year mayor would allow for more consistency and direction. He said this idea was part of his recent campaign, and he was amazed at home many residents thought they already voted for the mayor.

Another change Wilson implemented, or rather reverted to, was how commission ap-

pointments are made. He explained that in recent years, this process has varied but that the city charter clearly states that the mayor makes nominations, while the council approves candidates.

"If you're going to have a procedure, I think it should be consistent each time," Wilson explained. "To me, the best way to get consistency is to utilize the charter that

we went out to the people and said this is how we want to operate. If that's the rules, then that's what we should use."

Wilson said the city is also looking into a new enterprise resource planning system to integrate all city departments so that all revenue streams are pooled, as well as revamping the city website to move more services online, such as building permits and busi-

ness applications. To keep up with today's fast-paced world, Honeycutt said staff is looking into hiring a communications specialist to more effectively communicate with the community and promote the city utilizing modern tools such as social media.

Looking to the future, Wilson and Honeycutt said the city is beginning to examine

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## Focus On Signal Hill

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the impacts of Proposition 64 and the legalization of marijuana in California. Residents have voted several times on marijuana issues, including setting taxes on the books, but have so far voted heavily to deny marijuana in the city. However, Wilson said city staff is determining the best approach moving forward.

Currently, the city is preparing for or underway on several projects. Already under construction is the Los Cerritos Channel stormwater diversion project, in partnership with the City of Long Beach, Long Beach Airport, California Department of Transportation and Los Angeles County. Signal Hill's budget has \$1 million allocated to the joint project on the northwest corner of Lakewood Boulevard and Spring Street. As a measure to keep up with California's ever-increasing environmental regulations, the project will divert stormwater to an underground reservoir and allow it to percolate back into the groundwater basin.

Another project is a partnership with Southern California Edison to convert all streetlights to LEDs, saving the city between \$10,000 and \$15,000 annually on light bulbs. The city is also preparing to receive a Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment from Richard Fisher & Associates, the findings of which will be used to update the city's Parks Master Plan.



Signal Hill Chief of Police Christopher Nunley has been with the department since arriving as a police explorer in 1994. Nunley assumed the position of chief last December and said the city is great to work with and very supportive of the department. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

Honeycutt recently celebrated his 30-year anniversary with the city, where he first began work in 1987 as a maintenance worker. He said that 30 years ago he would not have imagined working for the city for

so long; however, he was never presented an opportunity worth leaving the jobs that were always exciting and satisfying.

"Signal Hill is a small community, and a lot of people take pride in being able to play a part in it," Honeycutt said reflecting on his time with the city. "I just want to express my appreciation to all those groups and people." ■

## Signal Hill Police Chief Nunley Emphasizes Community Outreach

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

As president of the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce, as well as a Signal Hill business owner and resident, Melissa Guy said the low crime rate was a big draw for her when making the decision on where to locate her family and business.

"[Signal Hill] has been such a great environment to do business in that I moved my family here. Because with having such an active police department, they are really top-notch, and the crime is really low in comparison to other neighborhoods," Guy said.

Mayor Edward Wilson said the department is outstanding and praised its fast response times, friendly but professional demeanor, and great training. He boasted that many former police chiefs have gone on to serve as chiefs in other cities, such as La Mirada and Culver City, and one even became a U.S. marshal.

The city's most recent police chief is Christopher Nunley, who has been with the department since 1994 when he came in as

a police explorer. Nunley assumed the chief position in December of last year and said he loves it, as well as working for the City of Signal Hill. He added that he is the first chief since 1994 to have come up through the ranks internally.

"It's a great town. It's well run. We have a supportive city council, our residents are very supportive and very engaged, and we've got a good leadership team over at the city," Nunley said. "I think what makes Signal Hill special is that everyone cares about the city. They take an ownership to it."

This sense of ownership is also present in officers out in the field, according to Nunley. He said when a crime occurs, officers feel as though they let the residents down, a quality that pushes officers to work harder.

One of the station's greatest challenges is recruitment, Nunley explained. He said becoming an officer has always been a job that takes a special person because of the inherent challenges that come with the position. Nunley said the recent portrayal of police officers in the media probably is not helping recruitment efforts, but that it is impossible to determine to what extent.

However, once an officer joins the department, Nunley said there is a very good retention rate. Of course, there will always be attrition due to retirement and department shifts, but Nunley said that by and large many of the employees are long term, mostly due to the department's small, family-oriented vibe.

Another challenge the department is facing is the small uptick in petty property crimes, such as car break-ins. Nunley said this increase is largely due to Proposition 47 and AB 109, which lessened the severity of certain crimes leading to the early re-

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## Focus On Signal Hill

(Continued From Page 26)

lease of perpetrators of such crimes. He explained that the entire region is experiencing this increase, most cities far more than Signal Hill.

“It’s always a challenge to think of innovative ways to keep crime down and impact the crime in your city,” Nunley said. “We’re trying to do that through community engagement – working with neighborhood watch groups, going out to HOAs and explaining what they can do to harden their area as a target for criminals, really trying to create a good partnership with the community.”

Regionally, the number of more severe crimes is increasing, but in Signal Hill, the statistics are relatively flat, according to Nunley. He said the city has never had a huge crime problem, which correlates to the number of officers, as well as the city population and size.

The Signal Hill Police Department has 37 officers for its population of around 12,000 people in a 2.2-square-mile city. This equates to about 324 residents for every one officer. Long Beach has a population of around 462,000 in a 51-square-mile city, with a police force of around 800, which equals nearly 578 residents for every one officer.

Additionally, Nunley said each city department working together assists in keeping crime down – from parks and recreation establishing afterschool and summer programs to planning and zoning working on blighted areas to public works removing graffiti right away. Of course, Nunley said the police department’s fast response times – typically less than two minutes for a priority one call – are a key factor as well.

Community involvement is important to Nunley and his team. The department participates in local events year-round, such as National Night Out, the Miller Children’s Hospital’s beach day, holiday toy drives, and countless other community outreach events.

Nunley recalled an instance recently when several officers, on a whim, went to Las Brisas II, a low-income housing community in Signal Hill, to grill some hot dogs and talk with residents. It is this sort of outreach and communication that



Chad Charron, general manager of Boulevard Cadillac and Boulevard Buick/GMC, said he has put an emphasis on certified pre-owned (CPO) cars leading to an increase of over 460% in CPO sales. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Larry Duncan)

Nunley said helps build trust within the community.

“If people don’t understand their police department or they don’t feel like they can reach out to them, then they’re not going to call when they’re needed,” Nunley said. “I really think if you can reach out to your community and if you can connect on a personal level, they’re going to be more apt to pick up the phone, they’re going to be more apt to partner with you in dealing with local crime situations or even just small annoyances.” ■

### Auto Dealer Sales Expected To Decline Slightly After Several Robust Years

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

For the past few years, the City of Signal Hill has seen between 5% and 6% growth in sales tax revenue from the Signal Hill Auto Center, according to City Manager Charlie Honeycutt. Recently, he ex-

plained that the economy has begun to flatten out, and the city is projecting only a 2% growth in auto sales this year.

“It’s still growth, it’s just not at the pace that we’ve become used to the last few years,” Honeycutt said. “We’re still pretty confident in their performance.”

Chad Charron, general manager of Boulevard Cadillac and Boulevard Buick/GMC, said business has been strong this year. He explained that the dealerships’ success is evident in the fact that they have hired 15 employees since last year. He said the extra personnel allow the dealerships to offer customers a better experience when purchasing a car.

The most noticeable change to business is the shift in popularity to midsize SUVs, Charron said. He said that full-size SUV sales are still strong but that many people seem to be upgrading from midsize sedans to small SUVs. Charron explained that the Cadillac XT5 – the company’s crossover SUV – and Escalade account for 75% of the dealership’s volume.

At the Buick and GMC dealership, the GMC Acadia, another midsize SUV, accounts for 33% of Charron’s volume. He said the midsize SUVs are resonating well

with the surrounding community. Another major change for the dealerships is an extreme boost in certified pre-owned car sales.

“It’s an arena we’re more focused on, and we are up over 460% from last year,” Charron said. “We offered some before, but we were not as strong.”

Charron said there are no plans for renovations or expansions at his dealerships, only continued investment in the employees so they can invest in clients. He said he loves the area and does whatever he can to team up with the community, including being a boardmember of the Police Foundation.

Philip Schultz, general manager of Long Beach BMW, said the dealership is doing very well this year and that he is excited about his new team and the progress they are making in regards to community involvement.

“I am unconditionally committed to serving and giving back to the community. We work really hard each and every day to create the experience for our guest,” Schultz said. “True, genuine relationships with our community is what will help grow Long beach BMW. We are proud to be a part of this community.”

Schultz said he is excited about the deal-

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Philip Schultz, general manager of Long Beach BMW, said the dealership is doing well and that he is committed to serving and giving back to the Signal Hill community. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

ership's revived relationship with the cities of Long Beach and Signal Hill, noting that at the store's recent grand opening event Signal Hill Mayor Edward Wilson was in attendance, as well as members of the city's police department. Currently, the dealership's sister store, Long Beach Mini, is undergoing a renovation, according to Schultz.

Bob Davis, president of Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep Ram, said overall sales are up about 7% to 8% at his dealership. He said the increase is due, in large part, to SUV, Jeep and truck sales. Davis explained that Chrysler discontinued a few small sedan models, which has reduced volume on that end, but that trucks have more than made up for the loss. Solid sales are not the only highlight for Davis.

"We've got one more hurdle to cross, but we are hoping to put a Mazda dealership here. We're excited about that. Mazda has a really good reputation, they build a really great car," Davis said. "It will be nice to have a fuel efficient car that seems to be on the rise. Hopefully we'll be starting to move some dirt around in a few months."

The last step for the new dealership is approval by the California Department of Finance in Sacramento, which should come

through this week, Davis said. The project will be located at 1400 E. Spring St., which is currently being used to store Davis's extra inventory. Davis also noted growth in his service and parts business – number seven in the nation in parts sales and the top Chrysler parts wholesale dealer in California.

In addition to owning the dealership, Davis serves as president of the Signal Hill Auto Center Association. He said other dealers in the center are also up in sales this year. He noted Long Beach Honda, which has new owners, has increased sales substantially and is currently in the process of remodeling the showroom and adding office and service space. Long Beach BMW also did some shuffling, separating the BMW and Mini inventory into two stand-alone showrooms.

"I think as a whole we really value our relationship with the city. They have been good supporters of the auto center. We work well together," Davis said. "I think they always work hand in hand with us in order to do good work for both the city and the auto center."

One recent project between the city and auto center was the installation of a new LED freeway sign at 3100 California Ave., the same location of a proposed dog park.

Davis said the auto dealers were "disgusted with the previous sign and are really enjoying the ease of displaying clear messages and images."

"I think the main thing is that as a car dealer, business is good and it's been good. But it's also not without some treachery with all that's going on in the world," Davis said. "So we just try to be smart with what we're doing. All in all, I think most of the [dealerships] are pretty pleased with the year so far." ■

## Volatile Oil Prices Keep Well Drilling On Hold

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

Even though it's not covered in oil derricks as it was in years long passed, Signal Hill still produces its fair share of oil through Signal Hill Petroleum (SHP). However, continuously low oil prices have put a stop to the company's drilling activities.

"Our oil production is stable, but based on where current oil prices are, we are delaying our plans for more significant reinvestment," David Slater, SHP chief operating officer and executive vice president, said. "We do have projects planned. We'd just like to see a little bit better margin before we make that capital commitment."

Slater said the industry saw a sag in prices recently, down to around \$44 per barrel from \$50 per barrel a short time ago, according to the West Texas Intermediate benchmark. He explained that the current market is very volatile, with price swings between \$10 and \$12.

Despite market volatility, Signal Hill Petroleum's more than 400 wells continue to

(Please Continue To Next Page)

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## Focus On Signal Hill

(Continued From Page 29)

produce approximately 1 million barrels of oil per year, which comes out to more than 2,700 barrels per day.

During times of moderate gas prices, Slater said when discretionary spending is low and the company's two drilling rigs are mothballed, SPH focuses on its infrastructure to ensure it continues to operate in a neighborhood-friendly manner. As a member of a small community, Slater said this is important for the company's relationship with residents living near active wells.

The company is continuously working to maintain pipelines, tanks, pumps and all other infrastructure to ensure their capability when drilling activities resume. Signal Hill Petroleum is also a prominent landowner and developer in Signal Hill, which helps offset low oil prices.

The City of Signal Hill taxes each barrel of oil produced in the city, which generated \$1.1 million in tax revenue during the 2015-2016 fiscal year. However, with the drop in oil prices and halting of drilling operations, tax revenue has been cut by almost half.

Despite the freeze on drilling operations, Slater noted that the Long Beach Oil Field – a super giant, meaning it has produced over 1 billion barrels of oil – still has plenty of oil for the urban oil company to tap into, hopefully in the near future.



David Slater, chief operating officer and executive vice president of Signal Hill Petroleum, said discretionary spending is at a minimum due to low and volatile oil prices, which means all drilling operations are on hold. He said he is optimistic that drilling activity can resume in the next six months or so. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

"But we're optimistic that we're going to be reinvesting and having drilling activity in the next six months or so," Slater said. "There's a lot of oil and gas opportunity. The life of the oil and gas field has

got a long, long way to go. And there's still a lot of oil to be produced and a lot of wells still to be drilled." ■

## Kaiser Signal Hill Is The 'Medical Office Of The Future'

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

**K**aaiser Permanente opened its 20,000-square-foot Signal Hill medical office at 845 E. Willow St. on June 29, 2016. In its first year, the medical facility's 50 physicians and staff have had 25,544 patient appointments, not including lab, pharmacy or nurse clinic assistance.

"The welcoming that we have felt in the community here is beyond what we expected. We've been so engaged in the community, and we've been provided a lot of support," Ozzie Martinez, chief administrative officer for Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center, said. "That's huge for us in terms of them seeing Kaiser Permanente truly as an anchor institution within the community to help the community as a whole."

Martinez said that as operations continue in Signal Hill, the company is embracing it as the medical office of the future. He explained the staff is continuing to analyze how to integrate into patients' lives to provide care where they are, when they need it. To do this, telehealth technology has been incorporated into the medical offices, allowing for patients to be seen virtually.

Beginning in March, telehealth technologies are being used for dermatology services. Using high-definition cameras,

dermatologists at Kaiser's medical center in Carson can consult with patients at the Signal Hill office. Martinez said this type of service is more convenient for patients, who might not have the time to drive to medical offices out of the general area.

The Signal Hill office began in-person dermatology services last week, utilizing flexible space in the building. Martinez said this is only the beginning.

"We have rotating providers come through, and we're looking at the opportunities to rotate additional specialties. [With] the utilization of these exam rooms . . . we're excited about the different functionality that we're seeing out of the space that we have so we can maximize the area and eliminate that hassle factor for our patients to get the care that they need without having to leave their home medical office building."

Depending on the success of dermatology in Signal Hill, Martinez said the facility will look into building specialty carts so that doctors of other specialties, such as plastic or general surgery or orthopedics, can utilize the space with all the tools they need.

According to Martinez, Kaiser is also going all-in to provide behavioral health care in Signal Hill, as well as its other facilities. Martinez explained that Kaiser is trying to eliminate the stigma that exists when it comes to behavioral health. He said the office has been able to provide group therapy options in English and Spanish during the week, in the evenings and on Saturdays.

So far, Martinez said the organization has been surprised by the demand for behavioral health care. He explained that offering this service at more offices has made it easier for people to utilize them, as they do not have to take extra time for travel. He

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## Focus On Signal Hill



Ozzie Martinez, chief administrative officer for Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center, said the Signal Hill facility at 845 E. Willow St. had 25,544 patient appointments in its first year and recently began in-person dermatology services. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

said the behavioral health care is integrated into the services already provided, so it's not in a separate part of the building, which helps alleviate the stigma.

"I think that's been very successful in terms of the number of visits we've been seeing and the impact that we're seeing," Martinez said. "We're actually working on trying to incorporate another psychiatrist in

that space given the demand of services that we've been seeing. So we're very excited about that."

A major push by Kaiser at its Signal Hill facility has been culturally responsive care to LGBTQ patients. Martinez said the staff partnered with St. John's Well Child and Family Center, Transgender Health Program and the LGBTQ Center of Long

Beach to train physicians and staff to foster culturally sensitive awareness in order to provide the best care possible.

"It's exciting that we're expanding to provide this type of training at all the medical center offices to really expand on that culturally responsive care," Martinez said. "And we're really taking a big focus on that."

Other services provided at the Signal Hill

medical office include primary care, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, walk-in nurse clinic, x-ray, pharmacy, blood draw, and virtual care through telephone and video appointments. The office is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. To make an appointment, call 800/780-1230. ■

(Please Continue To Next Page)



Overlooking LA and Orange County, the city of Signal Hill is an enclave completely surrounded by the city of Long Beach. The Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce was founded on the principle to make our community a better place to live, work, and do business in and around the city of Signal Hill.

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## Focus On Signal Hill

### Business Owners Report Sales Growth Year Over Year

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

**W**ith new businesses opening their doors, current businesses expanding and others relocating from other areas, Signal Hill City Manager Charlie Honeycutt said the business environment is doing well.

“Our major shopping centers are fully leased. Our primary businesses like Costco, Home Depot and the auto center are continuing to perform for us,” Honeycutt said. “We’ve got a couple new businesses in town. We’ve got Ten Mile Brewing Company, which is a new business that will be opening up at the end of July, and Fromex has relocated from Belmont Shore to Signal Hill.”

Mayor Edward Wilson said he thinks businesses open in or move to Signal Hill in large part because of the ease and cost of dealing with the city. He explained that the city has no utility users tax, has less expensive business licenses and completes the application process faster than larger cities, which allows businesses to begin making money sooner.



Earl Gibson, general manager of the Town Center East Home Depot, said the store has been performing above expectations and that he is very pleased with the results. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

Many of the city's businesses, including the national companies, are great business and community partners with the city, according to Wilson. He said the city and businesses work together and that businesses are eager and happy to be in Signal Hill because it is a community that cares, not only about its residents but its businesses as well.

Melissa Guy, president of the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce and co-owner of Asset Media Group, said city officials and staff excel at connecting with local businesses and prioritizing them when looking for goods and services.

“The city is very active with the cham-

ber,” Guy said. “We host a meet-the-city event where the mayor and other city officials come out and meet local business owners, hear their concerns and share some things that are upcoming in the city, things that could affect their businesses, opportunities that are coming to the community, as well as just being able to high-five and handshake those people who make decisions in the city.”

The chamber currently has about 200 members, which is roughly 15%-20% of the business population, according to Guy. She said that is a fairly high percentage when compared to other cities, which makes the Signal Hill Chamber “powerful.”

Moving into the third and fourth quarters of this year and into 2018, Guy said the chamber is committed to continuing to provide more and more resources to business owners, including the largest community partners such as Kaiser Permanente, EDCO and Signal Hill Petroleum. She noted that she would like to see more active chamber participation by large companies such as Costco and Home Depot to create a more unified business community.

“The city and the chamber have always partnered,” Guy said. “We are working on an even stronger partnership between the chamber of commerce and the City of Signal Hill to bring more resources like workshops on starting businesses in the city, staying in business and growing business.”

Guy said that business is booming and that as surrounding cities continue to increase rents and fees and overall cost of operations, Signal Hill is becoming all the more attractive to startups and for relocation.

Paul Martin, owner and general manager of Pirtek Long Beach, initially planned on being located in the beach city. However, when his real estate deal fell through, he found his current location in Signal Hill and said he was pleasantly surprised at the ease of doing business with the city and how much cheaper it was than Long Beach.

“It’s been fantastic. Signal Hill has been very supportive of businesses. They are very helpful in cutting through any red tape,” Martin said. “Working with the city and all its employees was a lot easier. They

didn’t try to run us through a bunch of hoops like Long Beach tried to.”

Pirtek conducts on-site hydraulic hose repair for construction, heavy equipment rental and manufacturing businesses, as well as recycling companies and a significant amount of business with port terminals.

Martin said business this year has been steady, though petroleum-related business has been down due to low oil prices. However, he said business is up about 5% over last year, and he anticipates the second half of the year to see more growth.

Dana and Lisa Johnson will celebrate the two-year anniversary of their restaurant, Fish-O-Licious, in October. They also were first looking to open up shop in Long Beach but during negotiations decided the cost was too great for a new-build restaurant. They caught wind that City Mex was closing in Signal Hill and jumped at the opportunity.

“I think because it’s a smaller city it’s a little bit easier. The city council is right down the street. In fact, most of them eat here, so it’s a lot easier to get their ear,” Dana said. “Plus, it’s a great spot to be in because there’s so much business around here and everyone gets hungry at lunchtime.”

The most difficult aspect of starting the business after replacing a restaurant with a great following was getting residents to give them a try, Dana said. The restaurant has seen growth every quarter since opening and has seen a 25% growth in business year over year, according to Dana.

The growth is the result of a meal-prep program Lisa began last summer for local gym-goers, Dana said. He explained that the restaurant prepares meals and places them in microwaveable containers, which can be stored in a customer's refrigerator for up to five days. The program is so successful that the couple are looking into ways they can expand the service to deliver to other cities such as Downey and Tustin.

Allen Printing & Graphic Design was established in Signal Hill in 1979. Jonade Saleem, creative director and owner of the shop, said he has grown business about 70% since taking over seven years ago.



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“We’ve helped brand some businesses locally, even in Long Beach, like the Pie Bar. They are probably the one that stands out to me the most, as far as building their brand,” Saleem said. “We work with a lot of the restaurants in the area, like the Hofmans’ – Lucille’s BBQ, Hof’s Hut, Saint & Second. We work with The Attic. We just did a menu redesign with them.”

The company can print anything from the smallest business card to banners and posters, Saleem said. However, he has been pushing and focusing on the design aspect of the company. He currently has three other employees and said that being located in the center of Long Beach while reaping the business benefits of Signal Hill – specifically the lower sales tax – has been great for the company.

Mitch Kron has owned and operated Big Studio Custom Apparel in Signal Hill for 19 years. He said that he had a business in Long Beach for some time and found it easier to do business in Signal Hill, adding that he is friendly with local law enforcement.

“We like the business-friendly environment that Signal Hill has to offer. We love our location. We eat at Curley’s once a week,” Kron said. “Being in Signal Hill is a real positive thing for us. We feel comfortable here. We feel safe here.”

Big Studio started in Kron’s garage in 1988 but has grown into its current 12,000-square-foot shop that employs 31 people.



Lisa and Dana Johnson opened Fish-O-Licious at 2594 Cherry Ave. in October 2015. In the past year, Dana said business has increased 25% thanks to a meal prep program started by Lisa. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Larry Duncan)

Kron said the shop is busy and business has increased, with a lot of new accounts.

On the Fourth of July, Wine Country had 115 people attend a rosé wine tasting, according to owner Randy Kemner. He said overall sales are relatively flat from last year, due in large part to technical issues with the online business. He added that local business and walk-in count are

up, which is making this an exciting time for the store.

Kemner said tasting events have been sensational because they offer selections that cannot be found at any other local stores. He said the store’s gourmet food section has been expanded, including new artisan ice cream. Additionally, Kemner said he has a new craft beer buyer that is

doing great work, which is bringing in a whole new generation of consumer.

“We have a lot of pressure on us from chain businesses. The way we’ve chosen to deal with it is to be smarter, more original, do the hard work and be more personable,” Kemner said. “We cater to people that are looking for things that are fresh, original,

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## Focus On Signal Hill



Mitch Kron, owner of Big Studio Custom Apparel, has operated in Signal Hill for 19 years. He said he enjoys the business-friendly environment the city offers. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

(Continued From Page 33)

exciting and not necessarily more expensive. A chain offers mass-produced products for a mass market, and we deal with small producers. It's pretty thrilling."

Wine Country also provides wine storage services, which include 95 wine lockers that have a capacity of between 12 and 48 cases. Kemner said the storage lockers are 100% rented out.

City officials have been supportive of his business from the start, Kemner said, adding that the city has progressive values while remaining business friendly. The location of the store is ideal, Kemner said. He explained

that Redondo Avenue is a well-traveled commuter street, and after almost 22 years in business, he still has people enter the store daily and say they drive by every day and never knew the store was there.

Business is up between 10% and 15% for Ship & Shore Environmental Inc., according to President & CEO Anoosheh Oskouian.

"We have been experiencing steady growth, which is really nice," Oskouian said. "We engineer and manufacture air pollution control systems. So it has been increasing not only because of the demands of the government and the requirements

that are out there, but also our involvement with a lot of industries has increased."

The city's proximity to Long Beach Airport is a convenient perk, Oskouian said, not only for her staff but also for clients coming into town. Being central to Orange and Los Angeles counties is also helpful to her business.

Signal Hill residents enjoy the convenience of two Home Depot locations in the 2.2-square-mile city. Town Center East Home Depot General Manager Earl Gibson said his store has been performing above expectations this year and that he is very pleased with the results.

"I'm really humbled by the support we get from our Signal Hill community. We have several of our customers that live in our area, they support our store, they tell us when things are really good, they tell us when there are opportunities we can address," Gibson said. "But overall, I think that our community really enjoys us being here and we are fulfilling their needs."

When asked if having two locations so close is detrimental to the sales of either store, Gibson said he did not think so and that he views it more as a partnership. If his store doesn't have what a customer needs, they can get it from the other. In this way, he said that having two stores is more convenient to customers.

Mercedes Sepko, co-owner of Marketink LG, said her 2016 sales experienced an 80% increase from her 2015 numbers and that this year is still seeing growth, though not as drastic. She said the slowdown is due to the increased marketing and printing needs during the election season last year which is not present now.

At the end of 2016, Sepko said the company expanded by leasing the building next door. The expansion allowed the company to purchase a new machine for cutting custom decals, a service not previously provided.

"The Signal Hill Chamber is changing dramatically. It's just getting very dynamic, and the new board is really involved. And

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## Focus On Signal Hill



Since taking over Allen Printing & Graphic Design seven years ago, Jonade Saleem said he has grown the business about 70%. Pictured from back to front: David Oliveira, production assistant; Saleem; Monserrat Zitle, office manager; and Karen Chen, graphic designer. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)

it's a pleasure to be part of it," Sepko said. "It motivates businesses. There is this general sense of optimism and business community, and we're happy to see it."

Business has been consistently on an up-

swing for Morey Remodeling Group, according to owner Ben Morey. He said business is up between 18% and 20% forecasting for the rest of the year. The company is located in a Signal Hill indus-

trial park, and Morey said people are often surprised that the space has a showroom.

"From our perspective, [the city has] been really easy to work with. The thing that's been really nice on our end is the police department does a really good job of trying to watch out for the commercial buildings here," Morey said. "Also, being here in the central location is great. People access us very easily."

Dave Solzman, owner of Delius Restaurant, said business this year has been pretty decent, up 3% to 5% from last year. However, he explained that the middle six months of 2016 saw a drastic slowdown, unusual for the time, so this year's numbers are really just a return to normal.

Being a resident of Signal Hill, Solzman said he and his wife love the city. He said being a small town makes it convenient and personal for residents and business owners.

"We're on track for our biggest year ever, and hopefully it stays that way. It's just nice to see that whatever slump we were in last year seems to have rectified itself," Solzman said. "We're just really positive right now for the future. It just looks really bright."

Big E Pizza owner Jimmy Eleopoulos has been in business in Signal Hill for 31 years and said the city has changed drastically in the time he has been open.

"From what it was 31 years ago to now is day and night," Eleopoulos said. "Signal

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## Focus On Signal Hill



Signal Hill Petroleum's Heritage Square Development is designed to be an urban village. The project features about 200 Class A apartment units with amenities, boutique grocery store Mother's Market, a high-end restaurant and open gathering space. Located on the northwest corner of Cherry Avenue and Burnett Street, the project is nearing the end of its design phase. (Rendering courtesy of Signal Hill Petroleum)

(Continued From Page 35)

Hill has become a very vibrant city. Where before you had tumbleweeds on the way to work, now it's a busy city."

So far this year, sales are up about 5%, according to Eleopoulos. Part of the increase is due to the restaurant's recently expanded dining area, which hosts a lot more parties, he said. With the prices of payroll and food increasing, Eleopoulos said he thinks the entire food service industry will see big price jumps. However, after 31 years of ups and downs, he said he would describe the atmosphere right now as comfortably stable.

Liberty Coin opened its doors in Signal Hill in 1992. Retail manager Ryan White said that business has been brisk overall. He said he has seen an uptick in the sale and purchase of precious metals and that the rare coin market has been stable, though on the quiet side.

"I think people are afraid and they have a desire to take some control over the craziness we live in. I think one way to do that is to invest in something you can hold, a tangible investment that has stood the test of time," White said. "I think that's important for people after the boom-and-bust cycle of the stock market and other investment vehicles like housing. Gold is just one other option that you can invest in to potentially make money but at least keep your wealth."

Being located in the middle of Long Beach and central to the South Bay and North Orange County is beneficial to the

shop, White said. He added that the direct access to the 405 Freeway makes it easier for customers to get to the store.

Shawn Hitchcock, president of 2H Construction, said the strong economy has been good for business. He said work has been steady and similar to last year. The company has built out several projects in Signal Hill, including its own corporate headquarters and the Kaiser Permanente medical office.

"Working with the City of Signal Hill is good because it's less bureaucratic, it's a smaller city," Hitchcock said. "You can go in and talk to who you need to talk to on a given day if you want to. You can form relationships, and you'll probably be working with the same people on the next project."

Hitchcock said the company also does a lot of work in Long Beach, with 10 projects under its belt. He said he is excited to see the City of Signal Hill growing and becoming more aesthetically pleasing while also bringing new and different services to residents and businesses.

For LB Walker Automotive, work has been nonstop since the beginning of the year, according to store manager Sal Lombardi. He said the shop is so busy that he is the first one to show up and the last one to leave, often arriving before opening to accept vehicle drop-offs from his regulars.

"We're about 25% to 30% over last year. Each year we're going up. But this year alone, I think, it's jumped tremendously," Lombardi said. "I spoke to a couple other

shops here in the area, and they are busy too. We do our thing and keep our nose clean. Take care of customers right and you'll always be busy."

Lombardi noted the cleanliness of the city, saying that he himself is a "clean freak" at his shop. He recalled his recent annual inspection saying he was slammed that day and the shop was a bit messy for his taste, but the inspector still told him his shop was one of the cleanest in the city.

"The city and everyone on the council, they're just great people. They're very open arms – anything you need you just have to make a phone call," Lombardi said. "I love this city. If I were going to live anywhere else, it would be this city right here." ■

## Numerous Developments To Alter Signal Hill Landscape

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**  
Senior Writer

**T**he City of Signal Hill is in the midst of a development surge – affordable and market rate housing, for-sale homes, retail, parks and mixed use projects. One of the most notable projects in the works is Signal Hill Petroleum's (SHP) Heritage Square.

"The site plan has advanced significantly in the last two months," Dave Slater, Signal Hill Petroleum chief operating officer and executive vice president, said. "We're looking at a Class A apartment, residential, multi-family building, in addition to restaurant space and bringing in a very high-quality boutique grocer, Mother's Market."

The project is located on the northwest corner of Cherry Avenue and Burnett Street and is currently being negotiated between the city and SHP. Slater said the company has identified a high-end restaurant operator, which he hopes will open a signature restaurant with a great view at the project.

Slater explained that part of the city negotiations are for a former redevelopment property still owned by the city and needed by SHP to complete the project land aggregation. The company already owns all other necessary surrounding land.

"We're really looking to create an urban village, Main Street atmosphere. And the site design we've got on the table now, I think we're very close to having fine-tuned it," Slater said. "I think the site plan is really exciting, and I think we're going to deliver a real quality project – lots of open space, gathering space, kind of unique and eclectic retail spaces, a mix of restaurant uses."

A key feature to the Heritage Square project is the inclusion of about 200 residential units. Slater described the housing element as a Class A, multi-floor, residential building that will feature amenities to appeal to a population not present in Signal Hill. The residential component is important because Slater said it brings in a customer base for the new urban village businesses.

The Heritage Square project will be very pedestrian friendly, according to Slater, with an open plaza serving as a destination and connection point for the city's extensive walking and hiking trail system.

Signal Hill Petroleum also played a role in the Crescent Square residential development on the northeast corner of Walnut Avenue and Crescent Heights Street. Far West



Zinnia is a 72-unit affordable housing development by Meta Housing located at 1500 E. Hill St. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan)



Industries is constructing 25 three-story, single-family, detached homes that are for sale. Model homes are already completed for viewing, while construction continues on the remaining homes. Slater explained that SHP owned the land and conducted environmental remediation on abandoned oil wells before selling to Far West.

"Then we've got the Zinnia workforce housing development that's going to provide 72 affordable units to low-income families," City Manager Charlie Honeycutt said. "That's over on Walnut Avenue and Hill Street. It's under construction right now, and we think that will open in the fall. Housing is becoming so unaffordable in general. It's much-needed housing units."

A major project for the city is the construction of its new public library adjacent to city hall on Hill Street. The current project design calls for a 12,000-square-foot library, which is three times larger than the previous library, and will feature a historical museum and separate children's section, according to Mayor Edward Wilson.

"I just went to a conference where they were talking about how important it is for kids to have accessibility to books because reading is the one thing that is fundamental through everything you do," Wilson said. "I've always believed that we are always looking to have a sustainable

future, and that means making sure that our kids are having that opportunity because our kids are the future."

The library project had already been sent out for bid, which came back higher than anticipated, Honeycutt explained. He said the city is going to look into making modifications to the project to lower costs, as well as identify additional funds, before sending it out for rebid. Honeycutt explained the process is only delaying the project a couple of months, and he hopes for a groundbreaking before Christmas with a one-year construction period.

The city is also working on plans for a view park and a dog park. Design of the dog park at 3100 California Ave. is completed, and Honeycutt said he expects it to go out for bid later this month, with construction beginning in October and wrapping up before Christmas. He said the park will feature separate areas for large and small dogs and will include architectural design elements and not be simply an open grass area.

"The view park, the first phase of that project, the design is complete. The City of Long Beach actually owns a property adjacent to the view park on Cherry Avenue and Burnett Street," Honeycutt said. "So we are working with them on a lease agreement where we can expand the view park and the trail system. It has a great

view of the port area and will also incorporate a recycled waterline."

Honeycutt said the project was ready to break ground before the option to expand onto the Long Beach property, but if an agreement could be made, design for a second phase would need to be done. The project is largely funded by a \$2 million grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy. Honeycutt said Signal Hill is proud of the grants it receives, which fund 47% of the city's capital improvement programs.

Both Honeycutt and Wilson expressed interest by the city to see the development of a hotel. Honeycutt said that being adja-

cent to the 405 Freeway with two NFL teams playing in the Los Angeles area, not to mention being located minutes from Downtown Long Beach and its amenities, Signal Hill is perfectly positioned for a successful hotel. Wilson agreed.

"Personally, I'd like to see us do a development over by Spring Street and Atlantic Avenue. It's a longer-term project, but I view it as a multi-level premium outlet mall with view-orientated restaurants up on top and perhaps a hotel attached to help service Long Beach Memorial and any other opportunities that are there." ■

(Please Continue To Next Page)



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## Small Business Showcase – Signal Hill

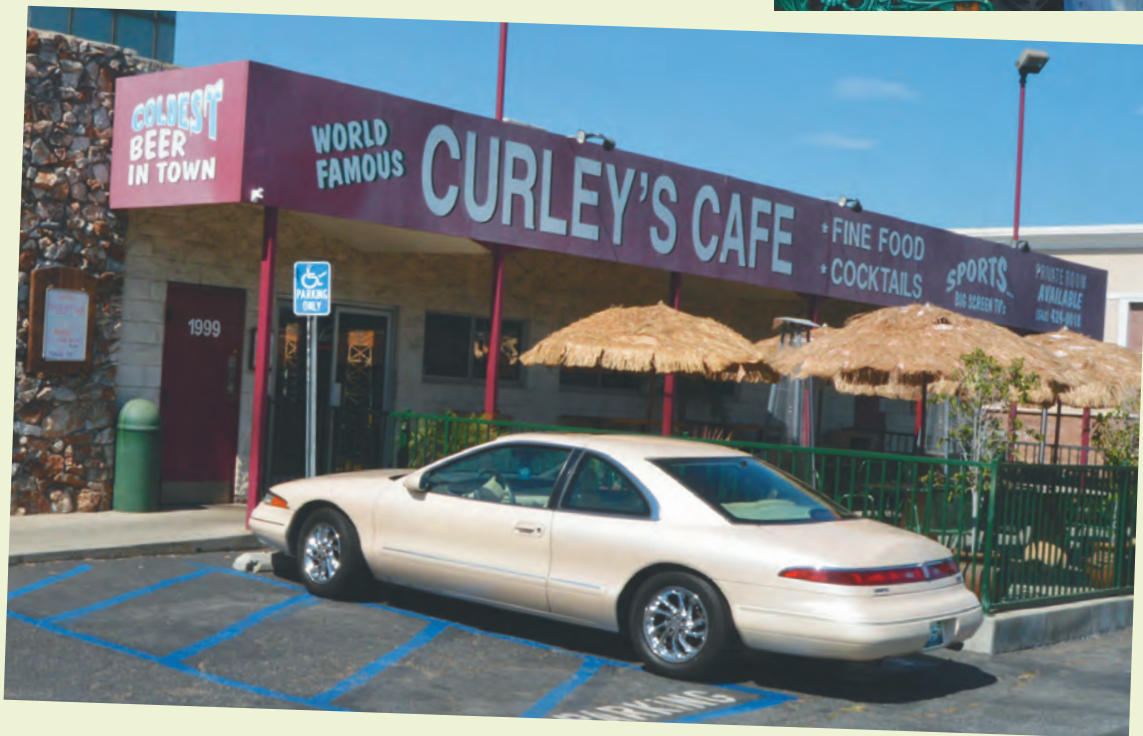


### Signal Tribune

In 1994, Neena Strichart entered the newspaper world selling advertisements for The Signal, where she also had a small column and snapped the occasional photograph. From there, she moved on to sell ads for the Press-Telegram. “How do I say this? . . . It wasn’t a good match for me,” Strichart said. “So I left and was doing some marketing for former clients, including press releases, helping them design and placing ads in papers for them.” After a conversation with her mother, Strichart decided to branch out on her own. With the acquisition of two papers (The Signal and the Signal Hill Tribune), she began publishing the Signal Tribune in her dining room. The paper is now located at 939 E. 27th St. in Signal Hill. It has a staff of 11 – not including Strichart and her husband – and has a circulation of 25,000 (soon to be 30,000) papers throughout Long Beach and Signal Hill. “I love being able to cover local stories. We’re not just full of press releases. We have a staff that cares. Money is lovely, but that is not our number one goal. Our goal is to give the readers what they need, give the advertisers what they need and move forward from there. We love what we do.” For more information, visit [www.signaltribunenewspaper.com](http://www.signaltribunenewspaper.com).

### Fromex Photo & Digital

After being located on 2nd Street in Long Beach’s Belmont Shore for decades, John Albright relocated his film processing and printing company to Signal Hill. Fromex Photo & Digital reopened at 2699 E. 28th St., Unit 405, in January. “Our business has become so much more e-commerce business. A majority of our business comes in online and through the mail,” Albright said. “So being down on 2nd Street, the retail walk-in traffic wasn’t as important as it once was. So this has worked out very well for us.” Albright and his eight employees print photos of all sizes, from wallets to 40-by-60-inch prints; process film; scan prints, slides, film and photos; and print on canvas and aluminum. The company also does custom framing and mounting, along with other odds and ends such as life-size cutouts, headshots – basically anything photo related, with half of the business coming from out of state. “To me, personally, the whole photo processing industry is fun. Dealing with mixing chemicals, dealing with optics and physics and math and everything else, it’s just amazing how much technology is involved in here that keeps it interesting,” Albright said. “I still enjoy doing it. So here I am at a time in my life where I should be retiring, but I’m still having fun.” For more information, visit [www.fromex.com](http://www.fromex.com).



### Curley's Cafe

Restaurateurs John and Debbie Toman took over Curley’s Cafe at 1999 E. Willow St. in Signal Hill at the beginning of 2012. The restaurant and bar was first established in the city in 1932 when oil derricks covered the hill. John recalled when he and his brother-in-law first visited the Signal Hill staple for a meal to determine if it was a good investment: “We saw it as a fixer-upper that had real good bones and real good staff.” After good food and service, John said he was sold. The couple renovated the cafe, remodeling the bathrooms and giving the interior a facelift, taking care not to alter it too much. They now have 15 employees working the restaurant, which has a slightly younger crowd today due in part to the craft beer selection and healthier food options. However, classics such as the chili are still served – completely unchanged. “We’ve got all the old pictures and a lot of history in there,” John said. “We’ve got people that still come sit at the bar looking for somebody to tell their story of 40 years ago [to]. That’s pretty cool. It’s just an old-school place where you get great food.” For more information, call 562/424-0018.

### Luke Hiller Incorporated

About 10 years ago, after being located in Long Beach for 35 years, Luke Hiller moved his staircase and flooring company to 1894 Freeman Ave. in Signal Hill. Hiller learned his woodworking skills refinishing furniture at Wood Right Shop in Long Beach before opening his company that focuses on hardwood floors. “We do a lot of historical restoration in Long Beach,” Hiller said. “We do both ranchos, and we did the Bembridge House and places like that.” In addition to new and restored floors, Luke Hiller Incorporated does demolition and removal of hardwood floors and surface preparation for other contractors in Southern California. The company has 10 employees and is well known for its ability to recreate the patina of old-world flooring, according to Hiller. “I think one of the interesting things about the business is the different types of architecture. I’m a big fan of architecture, especially the types of architecture that are considered more historical,” Hiller said. “We get excited when we are doing a re-creation or working on a property that’s trying to hit a certain look that’s based on local architecture from 50, 60, 70, 80, up to 100 years old.” For more information, visit [www.lukehillerinc.com](http://www.lukehillerinc.com).





## Small Business Showcase — Signal Hill

Articles by Senior Writer Brandon Richardson.  
Photographs by the Business Journal's Larry Duncan

# Support Local Small Businesses

## Wheely Cool Bikes

After graduating high school, Mitchell Azevedo did not want a typical job. “Fixed-gear bikes were really popular back then. So I started buying and selling used fixed-gear bikes,” Azevedo said. “I enjoy it. It provided a more cost-friendly way for people to acquire them and ride around.” Gradually, Azevedo said he shifted away from fixed-gears to road bikes, which have more gears, are lighter weight and are more efficient. This shift marked the beginning of Wheely Cool Bikes, now located at 2300 Walnut Ave., Suite A, in Signal Hill. Azevedo, pictured with his partner Denise Yavas, opened his road bike showroom in December 2016. The two owners employ one mechanic who works on the bikes and provides repair services to customers. Each bike in the showroom is also available for rent, according to Azevedo. To purchase a road bike, customers must make an appointment to visit the shop, which also accepts trade-ins for store credit. “The reason we do by appointment only is because it’s sort of a big commitment spending this amount of money on a bike. Road bikes are more expensive than your typical bikes,” Azevedo said. “So I want to have that one-on-one time with the customer and make sure that I get them what they need.” For more information, visit [www.wheelycoolbikes.com](http://www.wheelycoolbikes.com).



## Age of Aquariums

Marine biologist Dan Gilboa opened his aquarium design and service company, Age of Aquariums, in 1988 to earn extra cash while working for the Long Beach Water Department. Eventually, the business grew to the point where he could leave the water department. “I’ve always had a passion for keeping tropical fish growing up, which led to my choice of majors at school,” Gilboa said. “It’s my business ever since.” In 2008, Gilboa expanded his business by opening a retail store at 2642 Cherry Ave. in Signal Hill. Between the two divisions, Gilboa and his 14 employees design, build, install and service custom aquariums ranging from 50 to 5,000 gallons, as well as sell basic tanks along with everything from filtration systems to food and even the livestock – freshwater and saltwater fish, living coral and freshwater aquatic plants. “The most rewarding part is seeing kids come in and get all excited about the animals. No matter if you have a betta [fish] in a small one-gallon bowl or you have a 5,000-gallon aquarium, the bottom line is always keeping the animal alive and the passion for the animal. You’re not just doing it to have a vessel of water there, you’re doing it to enjoy the animals.” For more information, visit [www.ageofaquariums.biz](http://www.ageofaquariums.biz).



## Pet Pantry

Thirteen years ago, after owning and operating Bill’s Top Shop, a convertible top restoration store founded by her great-grandfather in 1929, Patty VanWinkle found herself in the pet food business in Signal Hill. Pet Pantry has been located at 2801 Cherry Ave. for about three and a half years. “The reason I got in the pet business is because there is a lot of pet food out there that is below average and is causing cancer, diabetes, kidney failure, heart attacks and tumors,” VanWinkle said. “Cancer is up over 33% in dogs, and diabetes is off the wall.” Operated by VanWinkle and two volunteers, the store focuses on dog and cat food products that do not contain corn, wheat, soy, white rice or sugar, as well as other dog- and cat-related items such as American-made flea medication, shampoo, treats, frozen food, bones and other goodies. “Here at this store, we sell food at very affordable prices that you don’t find at very many stores, because I’m very anal about what goes into all of my friends’ furry little family members,” VanWinkle said. “This is not for money. This is not my living. I don’t need this store. This store is for the animals – period.” For more information, call 562/989-1929.





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