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Hospitality & Tourism Industry Makes \$1.8 Billion Mark On Long Beach



For the third year running, the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center and the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) have been recognized with Stella Awards. Bestowed by Northstar Meetings Group, which owns two major meetings industry publications, the center won this year's gold award for Best Convention Center, Far West Region, while the CVB took the silver for Best CVB in the Far West Region. Pictured with the awards at the convention center, from left, are CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling, Mayor Robert Garcia, and Convention Center General Manager Charlie Beirne. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**
Editor

Arguably the most visibly impactful industry in the City of Long Beach is logistics

and goods movement – home to the country's second largest port, the goods passing through the maritime gateway into the interior of the country move by rail and freight, and

are supported by a network of ancillary industries and service providers that call the area home. But as it turns out, this is not the most impactful

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The Sky's The Limit: Signal Hill Company Takes On Air Pollution In Asia

■ By **MICHAEL GOUGIS**
Contributing Writer

Asia's dramatic growth into the world's manufacturing powerhouse comes at a cost. Pollution, in many forms, shrouds the economic benefits that industrialization

brings to the continent and surrounding areas. Scientists estimate that airborne pollutants have killed hundreds of thousands of people, and it does not take a scientist to see the smog that blankets major cities with a sickly pall that veils the sun.

Now, a Signal Hill firm that provides air pollution control systems for industry is expanding its manufacturing operations in Asia as countries there move rapidly to clear their skies.

"The potential is incred-

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Is A New Entertainment District Blossoming In Central Long Beach?

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Writer

Walking down the western part of Anaheim Street, just before the thoroughfare crosses the Los Angeles River, one can't shake the feeling that something is afoot. Once dominated by industry, low-profile watering holes and a rough reputation, the corridor has attracted a slew of new businesses in the past couple of years, including a brewery, new bars and a climbing gym.

Kyle Flavin, owner of The Hawk on Anaheim Street and the recently opened Darlings on nearby Long Beach Boulevard, said the economic potential of the neighborhood was part of the reason he and his business partners decided to invest in Central Long Beach. "We felt like there were a lot of really interesting businesses that were going to file in along this strip on Anaheim," Flavin explained.

The influx of new businesses in the area suggests that Flavin was onto something. Just in the past few months, two new businesses – a cocktail bar called The Grasshopper and the Long Beach Rising climbing gym – have opened across the street from each other. Together with Trade-mark Brewing company, which also opened its doors this year, the businesses form a new entertainment hub on the corner of Anaheim Street and Locust Avenue.

Before opening his two bars, Flavin did his research, reaching out to the city's eco-

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So Long 2019, Hello (New) Roaring 20s

■ By Editor **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**

The time has come, dear readers, for the last Millennial Pulse column of the year. And what a year, am I right? The drama. The intrigue. The anxiety!

I don't know about you, but when I look back on 2019, I'm kind of ready to heap it in the trash and set it on fire – not that I

would ever set a trash can on fire, unlike my former classmates at Lakewood High School (circa 2002-2006), who seemed to think doing so was an annual right. Hot tip, high schoolers: when everyone else is protesting/lightly rioting, go to the pizza

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PortSide: Keeping Up With
The Port Of Long Beach



■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Writer

When Tam Tran came to the U.S. from Vietnam at age 19, the country was in the middle of the Dotcom Bust. His mother was an accountant by profession, but Tran had never imagined himself following in her footsteps. “No one says: when I grow up, I want to be an accountant,” he said. But after coming to a new country and seeing droves of workers lose their jobs as a result of the crash, Tran felt compelled to give it a shot. “When you’ve just come to a new country, you’re looking at which job is secure,” he remembered thinking. Accounting is a pretty stable gig, he concluded. “No matter whether the economy is up or down, they’ll al-

ways need accountants.” Fast forward to today, Tran has been with the Long Beach Harbor Department’s finance division for almost 18 years. An accounting manager with the port, Tran enjoys not only the security his position offers, but the balance it awards him between his personal and professional life. “What I enjoy most about the job is the work-life balance,” Tran noted. Over time, he said he’s come to realize the importance of his position, especially when talking to friends outside of the field, who often find it challenging to grasp the nitty-gritty of financial statements, reports and products. “That’s when I realized [that] what I learned, my field of expertise, does have a value,” Tran said. “I can make a difference. I can help people.” ■

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Army Corps Report: Breakwater Modification Not Feasible

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Writer

A 14-year study of options to change or remove the breakwater barrier between the Long Beach shoreline and the open ocean has likely come to an end. Over the course of the past decade and a half, the city conducted several studies, including an in-depth ecosystem study in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to consider the issue.

On Monday, November 25, the Corps, which had been tasked with studying the feasibility and environmental impact of several modifications to the breakwater structure, released its final draft report on the issue. While suggesting alternative solutions to the issue of decreasing bio-habitats in the San Pedro Bay, the Corps did not include any modification of the breakwater in its list of proposed actions. Instead, researchers are proposing a \$140 million project to create additional rocky reefs near the Chaffee oil island and the replanting of eelgrass, creating 200 additional acres of underwater habitat.

Initially kicked off as a study of possible breakwater modifications in 2005, the project eventually morphed into a broader review of potential changes to the bay's infrastructure. According to Acting City Manager Tom Modica, the reason for this shift in focus was the desire to involve the Army Corps of Engineers, which brought its expertise and federal funding to the project.

To qualify for participation by the Army Corps, a project has to fall within one of the agency's focus areas, such as flood prevention or navigation improvement. "The breakwater [study] didn't really fit into any of those," Modica said. But by expanding the focus from studying only breakwater modifications to the larger issue of rehabilitating underwater habitat, "It did fit into the bucket of ecosystem restoration and that was

really what the city was interested in: how do we improve water quality, circulation, habitat," he explained.

As a result of the adjusted focus, researchers began modeling different modifications to the bay's infrastructure that could help restore habitats for underwater critters such as the bright orange Garibaldi fish still commonly spotted around Catalina Island, spiny lobsters, sea stars and whelks.

And the breakwater? Any changes to the decades-old structure were ruled out as unfeasible, especially out of concern for the U.S. Navy's operations nearby. In addition to its base in Seal Beach, the Navy maintains an anchor point for ammunition transfers in the bay, designed to protect city residents from the impact of an unexpected detonation. That anchor point is protected by the breakwater structure.

In October 2018, Captain Noel Dahlke, the commanding officer of the Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station at the time, shared his concerns with the city in the form of a letter. "Any modification to the breakwater would bring on increases in wave energy affecting vessel motion and increasing the risk to safety of personnel and damage to vessels and equipment," the letter read. "This unwanted effect would severely impact the Navy's ability to respond during a time of national or international crisis."

Eileen Takata, the Army Corps' lead planner on the East San Pedro Bay Ecosystem Restoration Study, provided additional reasons why the various options that included changes to the breakwater structure did not make the final round of recommended solutions. "Those modifications would not contribute to or benefit those habitat types that we want to restore," Takata said. Additionally, she noted, "The two breakwater plans were screened out because they were very inefficient, frankly, cost-wise."

In a statement following the release of the draft report, Assembly-



Figure 4-16: Alternative 4A

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' preferred plan for East San Pedro Bay habitat restoration includes nearshore rocky reefs that would slow down shoreline erosion on Long Beach's peninsula. (Image courtesy of the Army Corps of Engineers)

member Patrick O'Donnell, who represents the 70th District, suggested that forces other than science may have played a role in the Army Corps' decision to exclude breakwater modifications from its final list of proposed solutions. "I am not confident that suggestions such as planting kelp beds and

eelgrass near the breakwater will improve and restore the ocean ecosystem," O'Donnell said. "I hope that the outcomes of this study were dictated by science, not political science."

Army Corps staff vehemently denied the assertion that politics had influenced their findings. "We watched the study [progress] over all these years, our commanders have come and gone, and that has not been a factor at all," Plan Formulation Branch Chief Raina Fulton told the Business Journal. "The reason why the Army Corps of Engineers is involved is because of the fact that we are not biased as to

what's happening with the local agency," project lead Chris Lee added. Modica said O'Donnell's comments were "speculation" and declined to comment on them further.

Despite its findings suggesting that any changes to the breakwater wouldn't be feasible, the Corps still included an analysis on those options in the final draft report. "We hope that the public sees that we did analyze and include breakwater modifications," Takata said. "We want to hear what people think about those habitat restoration measures. Not all of them made it into the tentatively selected plan, but they're in the report to be evaluated by the public."

The report will be made available for public comment on November 29. Once the 60-day public comment window has closed, it will be up to the city council to select one of the proposed options. ■



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From Homelessness To Business Owner: Victoria Ojerio-Kosuda, Founder Of Inspyr Arts



Assisted by instructors and owner Vicky Ojerio, youth create works of art during classes and workshops at Inspyr Arts. Ojerio is pictured during the studio's gift-making workshop. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

■ By **MICHAEL GOUGIS**
Contributing Writer

Working in a children's art studio, Victoria Ojerio-Kosuda was struck by the quality of the education provided for kids as young as five. And she knew her parents never could have afforded to send her to such a studio.

What struck her hardest was knowing that there were children with talent, like her, whose families could not afford that studio.

"They were teaching really advanced techniques in drawing and painting that I didn't learn until I was in college. It was this really high-quality education that I wished I could have learned at that age," says Ojerio-Kosuda. "It started to gnaw at

me. My parents could never have sent me to a studio like that when I was a child. There were children who would never have this chance."

Those realizations fueled a passion to bring art education to youth who otherwise would be left out. That passion drove Ojerio-Kosuda to homelessness — twice — before she could put Inspyr Arts Studio in Long Beach on solid footing. In doing so, she's become an employer and an example of the city's success in helping dreams grow into sustainable small businesses.

Today, Inspyr Arts runs art programs for ages five to 18 in a Broadway studio, brings mobile programs to schools and nonprofits, and operates summer art camps. It exists due to the help of the Long Beach

Economic Development Department's revolving loans, an education through the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program and a belief in the Inspyr Arts idea.

Inspyr Arts began in 2003, an offshoot of Ojerio-Kosuda's experience teaching in an art studio. Determined to bring arts to those of lesser means, she packed up boxes of art supplies and dragged them to a nearby Boys & Girls Club. After volunteering for years, she converted the operation into a business — and wound up unable to afford rent, instead living in her truck.

Ojerio-Kosuda took a step back, taught in the public schools and at nonprofits to learn how those organizations operated. In 2008, she opened a studio. "I [thought] that \$10,000 would be enough. I wound up

homeless again," she says. "But this time, I had an SUV!"

She turned to the Goldman Sachs program at Long Beach City College, where she got an education, as well as encouragement from other small business owners.

"It's pretty much blown my mind. You're connected with these brilliant business professors who help you to dissect your business and push you to grow. And you're in contact with other business owners who are in your same situation," she says.

It was at a seminar there that she learned about predatory financing. She'd secured a loan to help Inspyr Arts and was ready to sign the documents. At the seminar, the presenter warned against that type of loan in general, then warned against that type of loan from the exact company that Ojerio-Kosuda was about to borrow money from.

"I was sitting in the classroom saying, 'Oh no,'" Ojerio-Kosuda says.

It was here that she learned about the city's revolving loan program and secured a \$50,000, nine-year loan at 6.75%. In part, helping businesses avoid predatory lending practices is one of the goals of the loan pool, says Seyed Jalali, economic development officer.

"There are some very convenient ways for businesses to get cash, but they do not realize how expensive the money is. The money is fast, but the cost is very high, and they fall into a spiral that is very difficult to get out of," Jalali says.

"This is a way the city supports the entrepreneurial ecosystem — how to make affordable capital available to the community. We are not a bank. We are a safety net for businesses that are not yet bankable."

Today, InspyrArts employs 10 full- and part-time instructors, leases a 1,500-square-foot space and is expanding into online instruction. And Ojerio-Kosuda says her supporters at the city and the Goldman Sachs program have given her the pieces she needed to make Inspyr Arts a success.

"I can't thank them enough. They've showed me how to do this, and they still are," she says. ■



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New Entertainment District Blossoming

(Continued from Page 1)

conomic development department and the Willmore City Heritage Association to find out more about the neighborhood's past – and its likely future. "We liked this side of town, we wanted to invest in this side of town, due to some of the things that we had studied . . . the growth that could potentially happen over here," he noted. "We fell in love with what was going on over here. We felt there was an energy, we felt there was a dynamic buzz that continued to build."

That buzz seemed familiar, Flavin said. "I used to work in Downtown L.A. right when the Arts District was thriving, and it's interesting how businesses and artists always seem to congregate in an industrial area, because of the low rent and the ability to do something like music, art or culture, and not really be disturbed," he noted.

Lower real estate costs and the neighborhood's unique mix of industrial and residential properties were what attracted Grayston Leonard, owner of Long Beach Rising, to this part of town. "Every single business's biggest hurdle is overhead," Leonard explained. "And for us, because this wasn't a developed area, we could afford it."

The climbing gym is located in the historic Packard Building, which was renovated by local developer Millworks. Formerly a showroom for a car manufacturer, the building offers the ample space required to set up climbing walls, while glowing with an airy historic charm. "The fact that [this building] was still standing was huge, and the fact that we could afford it was incredibly enticing," Leonard noted.

Now, Leonard is hoping to collaborate with neighbors like Trademark Brewing to come up with event concepts that make use of their combined spaces and shared parking lot. After seeing innovative multi-use concepts such as Badeschiff in Berlin – a beach bar, music venue and nightclub that

features a swimming pool floating on the Spree river – and the Brooklyn Boulders climbing gym in New York, which regularly hosts live music and other events, Leonard felt inspired to bring something similar to Long Beach. "So the question is: How do you work within what you're allowed to do while at the same time trying to stretch it a little bit?" Leonard explained.

While local zoning codes and permitting requirements can make implementing out-of-the-box ideas tricky, Leonard hopes that together with the entrepreneurs around him, he can create a unique destination that adds to the neighborhood's resources and brings in clients from all parts of Long Beach to this part of town.

But an influx of businesses attracting a new clientele to the neighborhood can also spark fear of gentrification and displacement. Ron Smith owns the Long Beach Kickboxing Center, which has been in the neighborhood since 1987. Smith is hopeful that the new establishments will bring business to the area, but he also has his concerns. "You wind up having mixed emotions. You like the new businesses and the facelift, but you wonder about the people it affected negatively," Smith said. He is especially worried on behalf of the many homeless residents who have long sought refuge in this part of town and might soon have nowhere to go. "That's the only thing I worry about, the increasing homeless situation," he noted.

When asked about the issue of gentrification, Leonard's response made it clear that he has spent a lot of time pondering his role in that process. "Everyone wants to be that person who brings something new to an area that's positive and find a way to integrate with [the existing neighborhood]. And you don't want to be the gentrifier," Leonard said. "We inevitably are." As a young person starting a new business, he didn't have the necessary funds to set up shop in one of the city's more established business districts, he explained.

But, Leonard noted, more economic



The recent opening of The Grasshopper, a new cocktail bar on the corner of Anaheim Street and Locust Avenue, marks the newest addition to a blossoming entertainment scene on this long corridor of Central Long Beach. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

activity in the area has already sparked investment in public infrastructure by the city. An alleyway behind his business that had been unpaved since the city's founding was finally paved. Sidewalks are being power-washed. Soon, Leonard hopes, there will be more streetlights and trash cans in the neighborhood. And despite some critics, he noted, the response from the community has been largely positive. "Most people [who] have come in and

interacted with us are extremely happy we've actually done something," he said. "These buildings were vacated and abandoned for a really long time."

Flavin echoed that experience. "We expected more adversity, maybe apprehension or resistance to what we were doing. But we felt like it was pretty well embraced," he noted. "On this side of town, people are encouraged and they're looking forward to what has been developing." ■



Grayston Leonard, owner of Long Beach Rising, hopes his climbing gym can provide a space for people to connect. "[Climbing] brings a ton of different people together," he told the Business Journal. "Climbing is the glue, but everyone does something outside of it." (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

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Long Beach Airport Produces \$8.6 Billion In Economic Impact, Report Shows

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Writer

A new report released by the Long Beach Airport (LGB) shows that in 2018, the airport had an impact of \$8.6 billion on the region's economy. This figure consists of both direct and indirect economic contributions by the airport campus, which includes the Douglas Park and Long Beach Exchange developments.

The adjacent retail and business centers contributed considerably to the overall economic impact of the airport campus, according to Claudia Lewis, finance and administration bureau manager at LGB. "Over the past five years, the airport's economic impact has fluctuated," she noted, citing the closure of Boeing's C-17 manufacturing facility as one factor. But overall, Lewis said there was an upward trend driven by additional flight slots and business development in the area.

In 2015, the airport added nine flight slots. "For us, that means additional passengers, and that's what really drives the majority of our revenue at the airport," Lewis explained. Passengers create additional economic impacts in the city once

they leave the terminal building. A survey of 1,000 passengers at LGB found that commercial travelers spend an average of \$546 outside of the airport, while general aviation passengers spend an average of \$335. This marks the first time that information has been collected and included in the annual report.

Lewis also noted that a \$22 million capital improvement project currently underway at the airport is likely to produce both short-term and long-term contributions to the local economy. According to the report, construction alone creates an economic impact of \$22.5 million and 236 jobs per year.

Once completed, new concessions and retail spaces will provide additional employment opportunities and increase the airport's attractiveness to travelers, Lewis noted. "We know that passengers have a choice, and these upgrades will entice passengers to choose Long Beach Airport," she said. The number of passengers traveling through LGB has increased over the past five years, from 3.3 million in 2012 to 4 million in 2018.

Lastly, the report highlighted the airport's ability to sustain itself financially, without assistance from the city's Gen-



Southwest Airlines, one of five commercial airlines flying out of Long Beach Airport, added several new departures in October. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

al Fund. In 2018, the airport's enterprise fund generated a total revenue of \$48 million, a majority of which came from airlines and parking fees.

"This report shows what a tremendous economic benefit Long Beach Airport is to our local economy," 5th District Coun-

cilwoman Stacy Mungo, who represents the area, said in a press release. "With construction underway at the airport and the ongoing development of Douglas Park and the Long Beach Exchange, we anticipate this impact to be even stronger in the future." ■

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“Iconic” Southern Cuisine Joint Celebrates 35 Years Of Serving Long Beach



■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Writer

For the last 35 years, Cheryl Carter has been serving up authentic barbecue and southern food at Johnny Rebs’ True South. In 1984, after spending four months traveling the south – including Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina

and Texas – learning to cook with southern flare, and a year-long buildout of an old beer bar, Carter opened Johnny Rebs’ for business. Carter said that on its first day, the new restaurant was overrun by customers and ran out of food by 4 p.m. “We closed, prepped for day two and managed to make it ‘til 6 p.m. when we ran out of food again,” she recalled. “It took us about a week to figure it out, but we did and have never slowed down.” Some guest favorites include barbecue pulled pork, brisket, fried catfish and fried chicken, which is made using a 100-year-old family recipe. All food at Johnny Rebs’ is made from scratch, Carter noted, adding that she prides herself on her restaurant’s customer service, thanks in large part to her staff, many of whom have worked at the restaurant for years. “Johnny Rebs’ is an iconic restaurant in the 8th District that has been serving Long Beach’s best Southern cuisine for 35 years,” Councilmember Al Austin said. “I especially appreciate the work they have done to support so many schools and organizations in our community through their ‘Shell Out for Charity’ campaign.” The Johnny Rebs’ campaign has collected over \$1.2 million in pocket change, which has been donated to local schools, the Long Beach Branch of the NAACP, the Agape Museum, the Long Beach Community Foundation, Xela-Aid Local Hope, Pathways Hospice, the Long Beach Library Foundation and other groups. “We’ve survived a devastating fire, and all the ups and downs of being a small business,” Carter said. “Our story is about real people and real food.” (Photograph by Brandon Richardson) ■

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Satellite Launch Hub: Third Firm Signs Douglas Park Lease

By BRANDON RICHARDSON
Senior Writer

Aerospace manufacturer and small satellite launch service provider Rocket Lab has leased an 87,605-square-foot building at Sares-Regis Group's final Douglas Park development, Pacific Pointe Northwest, according to Larry Lukanish, senior vice president of commercial development and investment for Sares-Regis. Currently based in Huntington Beach, Rocket Lab is relocating its corporate headquarters to the Long Beach facility located at 3550 Carson St. Rocket Lab is the third satellite launch company to move into Douglas Park, with the first being Virgin Galactic - now Virgin Orbit - in 2015. The news of Rocket Lab's relocation comes just two months after Mayor Robert Garcia announced a Douglas Park lease by SpinLaunch, which was previously based in Sunnyvale. Pacific Pointe Northwest is a four-building development totaling nearly 400,000 square feet of industrial and office space. Construction of the project is expected to be completed by the end of the year. While no other leases have been signed, Lukanish said there are "a few interested parties."

City Council To Consider Updated Land Use PEIR Approval

During its December 3 meeting, the Long Beach City Council will vote on whether or not to certify the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), adopt the General Plan Land Use Element (LUE) and Urban Design Element (UDE), and repeal the General Plan's Scenic Routes Element, which the new documents would replace. On March 6, 2018, after more than 10 years and heated public debate over allowed building heights in certain areas, the Long Beach City Council voted to confirm the LUE and Urban UDE placetype and height maps, directing city staff

to update the PEIR. Following the 2018 vote, the LUE and UDE texts were updated to reflect changes requested by the council, "to correct minor errors [such as grammar, typos and formatting] and to address environmental impacts arising from the environmental review process," according to a staff report. If certified, the amendments to the Long Beach General Plan would be submitted to the California Coastal Commission for approval.

Commission To Vote On Planned Industrial Development

During its November 7 meeting, the Long Beach Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve the site plan review and local coastal development permit for the construction of two concrete tilt-up industrial buildings with surface parking at 300 Studebaker Rd. Commissioner Andy Perez recused himself from the vote and Commissioner Ron Cruz was absent. Approved plans for the 6.69-acre project site in Southeast Long Beach include a 91,700-square-foot building and a 47,500-square-foot building, as well as 168 surface parking spaces. Combined, the buildings will total 118,200 square feet of industrial space and 21,000 square feet of office area. The project meets city regulations requiring 30% on-site open space with the inclusion of 1.81 acres of open space across Studebaker Road on two parcels divided by Loynes Drive. Previously occupied by Loynes Tank Farm, the development site used to consist of two aboveground storage tanks filled with heavy fuel oil. The tanks were removed in 2010.

Commercial Real Estate To Remain Strong In 2020, Experts Say

Continuing the longest period of economic expansion in United States' history, national commercial real estate markets, including office, retail, industrial and multi-family, are ex-

pected to continue strong 2020 at a "tempered" rate, according to an outlook report released by CBRE.

"Next year will bring deceleration on a few fronts, but this still is an expanding economy and a flourishing property market benefiting from a robust job market, solid consumer confidence and low interest rates," Richard Barkham, CBRE's global chief economist and head of Americas research, stated. "We'll see resilience across asset classes such as office, retail and multi-family as demand continues to buoy those sectors. And we see transaction volumes and capitalization rates staying relatively stable."

According to the report, growth of office-using jobs will slow to 0.3% in 2020, down from 1.5% in 2018 and 2019, which will lead to new construction outpacing net absorption next year. This decrease will result in a slight increase to the national vacancy, and rent growth will slow to a 1.6% gain. However, CBRE projects the flexible-office sector to grow by 13% in 2020, with inventory to reach 87 million square feet, 2.1% of the country's office market.

The industrial market has expe-

rienced 38 quarters of positive net absorption, which might be difficult to sustain in 2020 due to historically low vacancy rates, the report notes. With the impact of national trade conflicts expected to be limited, rent growth is expected to increase by an average of 5% next year.

While CBRE predicts more consumer caution in 2020, the firm also expects rents and net absorption to increase slightly due to a lack of new retail construction. "Trends likely to gain momentum in 2020 include developers converting malls to mixed-use complexes, Generation Z boosting traffic at retail centers, and health and wellness uses taking more retail space," according to the report.

The multi-family market will likely slow down slightly as new supply outpaces demand and rent control legislation remains an industry concern. The report speculates vacancy to increase slightly to 4.5%, while rents decrease about 2.4%.

Belmont Heights Apartment Building Sells For \$15 Million

Stepp Commercial Principal Robert Stepp and Senior Vice Pres-

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Small satellite launch company Rocket Lab has leased more than 85,000 square feet of industrial and office space at Pacific Pointe Northwest in Douglas Park. The firm is relocating its corporate headquarters to Long Beach from Huntington Beach. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)



Stepp Commercial represented the buyer in the nearly \$15 million sale of the two apartment buildings located at 425 Coronado and 424 Obispo avenues. (Photograph courtesy of Stepp Commercial)

ident Michael Toveg represented the buyer, Santa Monica-based Miramar Capital, in the nearly \$15 million sale of two adjacent apartment properties totaling 48 units. Located at 425 Coronado Ave. and 424 Obispo Ave., the properties include a mix of two-bedroom, one-bedroom and studio units, as well as 48 parking spaces and a swimming pool between the buildings. “This was a rare opportunity for our client to own two large-scale adjacent apartment assets in a

prime Belmont Heights location,” Stepp stated. “These properties were owned by the seller for 30 years and present a value-add play for the new ownership to renovate and update the unit interiors and exterior to secure a stronger rental income and favorable cash-flow.” The seller was a private investor based in Los Angeles.

Winter Homeless Shelter Now Open

Located in West Long Beach, a winter shelter provided by Long

Beach-based nonprofit United States Veterans Initiative is expected to open December 7 and will operate through March 31, 2020. However, the site may open sooner if construction finishes ahead of schedule. The shelter will operate from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. but may have extended hours during rainy weather. As a closed facility, participants must be transported to and from the shelter from designated pick-up and drop-off areas: 14th Street Park at 14th Street and

Palmer Court near Long Beach Boulevard, and the Multi-Service Center, 1301 W. 12th St. Once checked in, participants will be required to remain at the shelter until 7 a.m. The shelter is part of the 2019-2020 Winter Shelter Program for Service Planning Area 8 (SPA 8). SPA 8 consists of the southernmost portion of Los Angeles County. The first phase of the city’s year-round shelter, Atlantic Avenue Bridge Housing Community, is expected to open by June 2020. ■



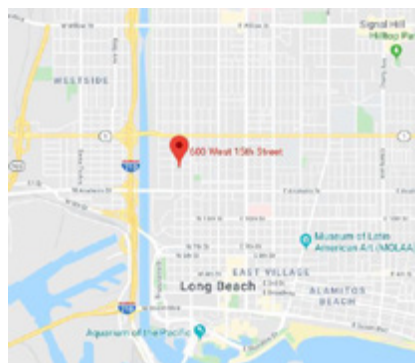
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Building A Better Long Beach: Children’s Village Is A “Game-Changing” Medical Facility

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Writer

Every year, Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach cares for more than 65,000 children through more than 84,000 visits. These visits are made to the main campus at MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center and seven auxiliary offices throughout the city, each of which offer different services. Having to travel to multiple offices for necessary care can take a toll on patients and their families, an issue soon to be solved by the new Cherese Mari Laulhere Children’s Village, under construction a short walk across the parking lot from Miller Children’s.

The 80,000-square-foot, four-story outpatient medical office will incorporate 36 different specialties, including pulmonology, gastroenterology and metabolic genetics, Dr. Graham Tse, chief medical officer at Miller Children’s, explained. Plans for the facility also include pharmaceutical services

and rehabilitation therapies. Inpatient care will continue to be based at Miller Children’s.

“Many of our patients have multiple chronic medical problems, so bringing 36 specialties and other associated therapies and resources into one place really makes care for our patients better,” Tse said. “We have the luxury of building the village around what we need for our patients and staff from the ground up, which is unusual. This is really a game-changing, cutting-edge building, leading care well into the 21st century and beyond.”

Located at 2801 Atlantic Ave., the Children’s Village will include 67 exam rooms, one blood-draw station and one specialty lab for the hematology and oncology patient care area. Each floor will feature a shared workspace for staff, as well as a small number of private offices for managers overseeing operations within the building. To assist patients’ families that may have other children, Tse said the hospital’s Cherese Mari Laulhere



When it opens in spring 2021, the Cherese Mari Laulhere Children’s Village will incorporate 36 different medical specialties currently offered at eight different facilities throughout Long Beach, according to Dr. Graham Tse, chief medical officer of Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach, who is pictured at the construction site. The 80,000-square-foot outpatient facility is located on the MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center campus. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

Child Life Program will be relocated to the Children’s Village to provide childcare. Miller Children’s leadership expects a 3-5% increase in patient volumes when the new facility opens in spring 2021, but have not yet determined if additional hiring will be necessary.

Hospital staff, along with patients and their families, celebrated the groundbreaking of the Children’s Village in July but the vision for the facility began long before that, Tse noted. “It’s been in full gear for the last few years in terms of the design and getting the funding . . . to make it all reality,” he said. “But the actual conception . . . began probably over a decade ago.”

The total construction budget for the Children’s Village is \$70 million, half of which is funded through 2008’s Children’s Hospital Bond Act. The

hospital is funding the remainder of costs through philanthropy and its own funds. Last year, the Miller Children’s & Women’s Foundation launched a \$60 million philanthropic campaign to benefit the project, as well as programs and services planned for the Children’s Village that currently operate at a loss due to low reimbursement, according to hospital staff. One of the largest contributions to the campaign was from the Cherese Mari Laulhere Foundation, for which the new building is named.

“We serve a wide spectrum of patients, but the majority have transportation, socioeconomic and language challenges,” Tse said. “We’re going to be able to address them all within the Children’s Village and make it really easy, efficient and painless for the patients to receive the care they need.” ■

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Ikenna Mmeje, COO of Miller Children’s & Women’s Hospital Long Beach, writes a message on the final steel beam for the Children’s Village. The beam, signed by much of the hospital staff, was placed during a topping-off ceremony on November 20. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

Realty Views: Mixed Signals for Housing

■ Perspective by **TERRY ROSS**

Another year is almost in the record books, but the numbers for a year that was supposed to signal the beginning of a residential real estate slowdown are decidedly mixed. Agents and owners have felt like there is a slowdown – or at least a balancing of the market – with fewer properties receiving multiple offers and the average number of days on market extending out from what it was even a year ago.

From the perspective of the mortgage industry, there is positive news to report as delinquencies dropped to a 25-year low in the third quarter according to the National Mortgage News. The seasonally adjusted delinquency rate during that period of 3.97% is down from 4.47% the year before and 4.53% in the second quarter of this year.

At the beginning of the fourth quarter in October, foreclosure filings increased by 13% to 55,197 nationally from the previous month. But they were down by 17% compared to October 2018, according to Attom Data's Foreclosure Market Report. Analysts are cautiously optimistic.

"Mortgage delinquencies decreased

in the third quarter across all loan types – conventional, VA, and in particular, FHA," Marina Walsh, the Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) vice president of industry analysis, said in a press release. "The FHA delinquency rate dropped 100 basis points as weather-related disruptions from the spring waned. The labor market remains healthy and economic growth has been stronger than anticipated. These two factors have contributed to the lowest level of overall delinquencies in almost 25 years. Looking ahead, we do continue to monitor the credit profile of new FHA loans, as changes to this profile can have a noticeable impact on future delinquency rates."

In yet another industry indicator, the CoreLogic/Case-Shiller Index, one of the industry's more reliable gauges of housing prices, noted that home prices nationally rose 3.5% in September over the same month in 2018. Prices are predicted to rise another 5.6% by September of 2020. This study also noted that on a month-by-month basis, home prices seemed to have gained some momentum. But going backward from its June report, the company showed a 15-month trend of "decelerating annual

appreciation."

Lawrence Yun, the chief economist with the National Association of Realtors, told RSI Media that the outlook is for improved price growth with a year-over-year increase of 4.3% in median price appreciation, as compiled by his organization.

"The figure is likely to show reacceleration in home price gains in the upcoming months, as the market has been shifting towards higher demand due to lower mortgage rates and reduced supply as home builders constructed fewer homes this year compared to last year," Yun said.

Despite the recent rise in foreclosures, the mortgage bankers have reported a revised outlook for single-family mortgage originations for the coming year from Fannie Mae, increasing the mortgage production forecast by \$21 billion for 2019 and \$15 billion for 2020.

"As we forecasted, housing supported the larger economy in the third quarter, and we expect it to continue to play a productive role through the first half of 2020," said Doug Duncan, Fannie Mae's senior vice president and chief economist, in a press release.

"Positive contributions from single-family housing construction, home improvements and brokers fees pushed residential fixed investment growth to a robust 5.1% annualized pace this past quarter, and we forecast continued but moderating strength as construction activity and home sales growth continue at a slower pace. With mortgage rates normalizing, we expect a decline in refinance activity in 2020, with the refinance share of originations dropping from a projected 37% in 2019 to 31%. Of course, the housing market as a whole remains constrained by the persistent supply and affordability issues, which is particularly unfortunate given the current strength of consumer demand for reasonably priced homes."

Despite earlier predictions of a housing downturn and eroding enthusiasm on the part of buyers for much of this year, it looks like much of organized real estate is finding many year-end positives in the latest data.

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 terry-ross1@cs.com or call (949) 457-4922. ■



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Students, Teachers Create Plan To Reduce School Waste



Students in Pamela Weinstein's Green Team class spend several hours a week working on projects that aim to reduce waste and increase awareness of environmental issues in the community. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Writer

Only about 500 feet away from the campus of Rogers Middle School sits Alamitos Bay, and the Pacific Ocean is less than a mile away. So it's not surprising that students at the school feel

particularly connected to issues affecting the world's oceans, such as plastic pollution.

"I feel like we can impact [the situation] more because we're closer to the ocean. We have a big impact, because our plastic goes straight to the ocean," Harper Hogan, a seventh grader at Rogers,

explained.

After learning about plastic pollution in their Green Team class, a special elective focused on environmental protection, students at Rogers began researching different ways to reduce plastic waste and how those strategies could be employed at their school. After a year of research, presentations to the school's parent-teacher association, the school board and even the Long Beach City Council, students and their teachers at Rogers and two other Long Beach schools developed a program aimed at encouraging other campuses to reduce plastic waste.

The work of students and teachers at Helen Keller, Charles Evans Hughes and Rogers middle schools reached a new milestone on Saturday, November 16, when the groups came together to organize the Long Beach Unified School District's first Green Summit. At the event, which was attended by parents, teachers and administrators from across the district, they presented tools, checklists and a newly devised incentive program for schools to begin separating and reducing waste on campus and beyond.

"One of the biggest things is helping people understand what they can and cannot do, because there was a lot

of misinformation out there," Karin Wasinger, a teacher-librarian at Helen Keller Middle School and one of the initiators of the program, told the Business Journal. This was especially true for one component of the waste separation system proposed by the pioneering schools: food donations.

After their lunch break, students are encouraged to drop off the remaining contents of their lunch trays in separate bins: recycling, trash, liquids and food sharing, for unopened packages of string cheese and the like. The food sharing bin, which takes the form of a cooler to keep perishable items from spoiling, brought up questions about the legality of taking in and storing food on campus, according to Wasinger and her colleagues. At the Green Summit, they set out to clarify guidelines around food sharing, such as maintaining a cooling chain, to mitigate any concerns schools interested in participating may have about this and other elements of their sustainability plan.

"We just wanted to have a [sustainability] plan for all the schools in Long Beach that wanted it," Rogers student Anika Kerekes noted. In addition to creating a roadmap for schools to become more sustainable in their waste management, teachers secured funding

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- Straws and utensils for take-out orders are only given upon request
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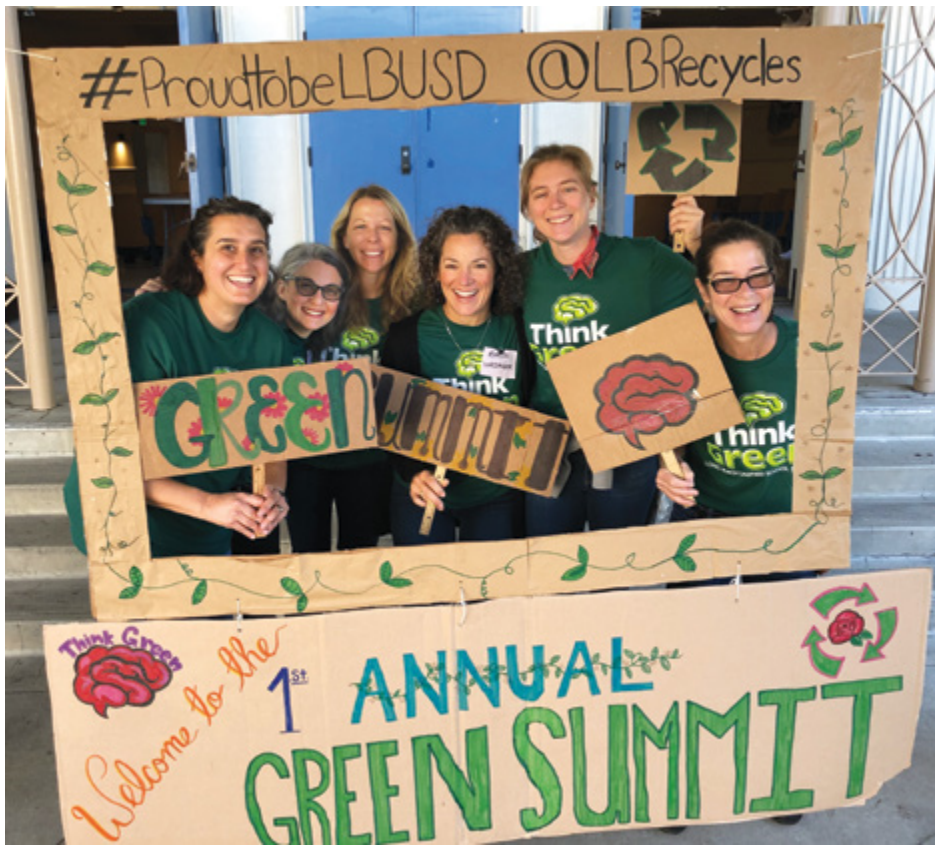


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Pictured from left to right: Danielle Van Divort, Hughes Middle School teacher; Pamela Weinstein, Rogers Middle School teacher; Erin Rowland, waste diversion and recycling program manager at the City of Long Beach Environmental Services Bureau; Karin Wasinger, Helen Keller Middle School teacher and librarian; Anika Ballant, education director at Algalita; and Cathy Procopio, Long Beach advisor at Grades of Green. (Photograph courtesy of Danielle Van Divort)

for a rewards program and provided attendees of the summit with forms to order the bins needed to set up their sorting stations, at no cost to the individual

school site.

To make this possible, a group of three teachers joined efforts and reached out to the school district, the

city's environmental services bureau and several nonprofits they had already been working with on their individual sustainability projects. "We realized we were all doing the same thing and said, let's join together," Danielle Van Divort, a sixth grade science teacher at Hughes Middle School and one member of the core trio behind the sustainability plan, told the Business Journal. As a result, she noted, "we've created partnerships that did not exist before between the city and the school district."

With the roadmap and resource guides in hand, schools interested in participating can begin prepping their cafeterias and lunch areas for the group's first audit. The group plans to visit participating campuses next spring to check on their progress, with the help of partnering nonprofits and the city's environmental services staff. Schools that pass the audit receive up to \$2,000 out of the district's pot of unrestricted funds to pay for green projects and enhance their custodial budget.

The Green Summit marked an important milestone in the effort to create a more sustainable school district, but for the students at Rogers Middle School, the task is far from finished. Led by their Green Team teacher, Pamela Weinstein, students are already working on new projects that go beyond waste separation and aim to reduce the

amount of plastic used at the school, nearby elementary schools and even by neighborhood residents.

Gigi Monge, one of the students in Weinstein's class, explained what motivated her to participate in a group that is currently preparing presentations about sustainability to be held at elementary schools. "We think change can start in little kids, because if we teach little kids environmental stuff, things that they can do, we think that when [they] grow up [they] will understand more about the crisis that the earth is going through. And we think that's really important," Monge said. "Older generations can change, but it's harder to make them understand," one of her classmates, Castin Machul, added.

Another group is tackling the waste produced by the school's cafeteria. "A ridiculously large amount of school lunches is produced daily for kids who need them and that's great, because no kids are going to be hungry as a result of that," Green Team student Wyatt Miller explained. But, he noted, those lunches produce a lot of plastic waste. To reduce it, Miller's group is planning a pilot program that would eliminate individual cookie wrappers by having cafeteria staff hand out cookies using tongs instead. "Hopefully that works here, and we can say: look, it works at Rogers, why doesn't it work everywhere else?" he pointed out. ■

Recycling in Long Beach



Commercial Recycling

State law (AB 341) requires recycling for any commercial property that generates four or more cubic yards of waste per week. This includes multi-family residential properties with 5 units or more.



Commercial Organic Recycling

State law (AB 1826) requires businesses that generate 4 or more cubic yards of waste per week to arrange for organic waste recycling services. Organics include food, yard trimmings, and food-soiled paper.

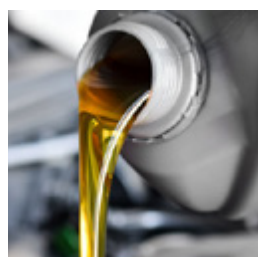
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Air Pollution In Asia

(Continued from Page 1)
ible,” says Anoosheh M. Oskouian, CEO of Ship & Shore Environmental (S&SE), which specializes in air pollution capture and control systems.

Ship & Shore has been expanding its operations outside of the U.S. throughout 2019, installing systems in Spain, India and Thailand and adding to its offices in Canada, Europe and the Middle East.

But the latest step marks new territory for the company. For the first time, it will be manufacturing its systems overseas, with production underway in China and Thailand, the company says.

“Due to the current political climate it makes a lot of sense to start manufacturing in China,” Oskouian says. “Up until this point we have been shipping products manufactured here over there. But with tariffs in place now . . . it made more sense to simply start manufacturing there.”

In October, the company announced the establishment of a new manufacturing plant in Shanghai. While this oper-



Anoosheh Oskouian, president and CEO of Signal Hill-based pollution abatement firm Ship & Shore Environmental, recently visited Zhangjiagang, China, the site of the company’s newest facility. Oskouian toured the facility and met with staff. Pictured there, from left, are Dr. Chen Hai Feng, deputy general manager; Joon Lai, engineer and sales manager, Asia; Oskouian; Leo Zhang Xian Lei, general manager; and Fang Yuan Xiang, board of directors. (Photograph courtesy of Ship & Shore)

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ation, Ship & Shore China, is located in a previously existing manufacturing facility, another purpose-built plant to be located in China already is on the drawing boards. The company began installing systems in China in 2016, and Oskouian has served as an adviser for the country's environmental protection agencies.

"We recognize that while the recent tariffs are unfortunate, we can't allow these short-term complications to steer us away from addressing the pollution control needs of China's 1.4 billion citizens," Ship & Shore Vice President of Engineering John Von Bargen said in October.

And in November, the company announced another expansion, this time in Thailand. Ship & Shore Thailand is located in Bangkok, and is intended to serve as the center of operations, including manufacturing, that will take place in that country.

"The . . . move into Thailand arose from both customer demand as well as an urgent need in the region for immediate improvement in pollution conditions, a situation that S&SE finds per-

vasive throughout developed Southeast Asia," the company said in a news release.

The need for air pollution control in the region is dramatic, and governments there have already started to slash away at the atmospheric damage caused by rapid industrialization. Earlier this year, Thailand closed more than 400 schools for days as smog settled in over the city. In the past, smog has forced the closure of schools and airports in China.

Ship & Shore's current area of specialization is in regenerative thermal oxidizer systems that capture and destroy volatile organic compounds. These compounds, commonly known as solvent fumes, hydrocarbons and hazardous air pollutants, combine with other airborne pollutants and, when exposed to sunlight, create ozone, which then helps form the fine particulates that are the basis of smog. One of the common strategies for combating the formation of smog is to stop the release of volatile organic compounds into the air.

Chemical manufacturing plants,

petrochemical production and petroleum refineries and factories tend to create those compounds as part of their operations. Ship & Shore's systems capture those emissions before they are released into the atmosphere and destroy the volatile organic compounds by, to put it simply, burning them into nonexistence. The process destroys 96-99% of the compounds.

Regenerative thermal oxidizers capture the heat generated by this process and use it to pre-heat the incoming emissions stream, thus dramatically reducing the energy needed to operate the system.

As major industrial sources are fitted with the air pollution control systems, government and regulatory attention tends to filter down toward mid-size and small operations. While those tend to emit a smaller amount of pollutants individually, their cumulative impact is substantial. Ship & Shore Environmental has focused on scaling its systems to fit the needs of a variety of applications and also is versed in application, certification and permitting processes.

The company's aggressive approach to the Asian market is based on what it sees as not only an opportunity for business growth, but a real need to address one of the most significant environmental issues facing industrialized nations. And it is a problem that can be addressed successfully. Oskouian herself recalls flying into the Los Angeles basin and descending into smog thick enough to obscure the landscape – an experience that has not been repeated in recent years.

"I hope that one day all companies, all operations, will have an environmental component in their planning," she says. "There are no borders when it comes to air pollution. Whatever is created anywhere, we will all wind up breathing it. It makes sense for everyone to have environmental controls in place.

"I try to keep reminding myself, the sky's the limit. The possibilities in the region [Asia] are great. And we have an opportunity to take advantage of that potential, and to do something that truly helps the citizens there." ■



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Tourism Industry Makes Mark

(Continued from Page 1)

industry in Long Beach when it comes to employment – a recent report by Los Angeles-based Beacon Economics reveals that the hospitality and tourism industry is actually the second largest job sector in the city, after health care.

The hospitality and tourism industry supports 18,652 jobs, 15,000 of which are supported by direct visitor spending, 1,599 supported by indirect spending (supply chain-related spending by businesses due to the direct visitor spending) and 2,053 supported by

induced spending, which is spending by individuals or households caused by increased earnings linked to the direct and indirect spending. Total labor income generated by the industry was \$687 million in 2018, according to the report.

Furthermore, Beacon's analysis found that the industry generated an estimated \$1.8 billion in total economic impact in the city last year.

The report's principal author, economist Robert Kleinhenz (who has since left Beacon to strike out on his own), asserted that trade and transportation would actually make up the third largest category of employment, coming in behind hospitality and tourism.

How did Kleinhenz come up with

such an impressive figure? The report, which was commissioned by the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) to assess the economic impact of the hospitality and tourism industry, analyzed data provided by the City of Long Beach and Visit California, a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to promoting California as a tourism destination.

First, Kleinhenz assessed data regarding the city's transient occupancy tax (TOT) revenues, which are generated by a tax paid by overnight visitors at local hotels. TOT in 2018 totaled \$30.6 million. Given the city's 12% TOT rate, the report determined that roughly \$255 million was spent at local hotels that year.

To account for short-term rental spending via accommodation services like Airbnb, which do not yet pay TOT, Kleinhenz referred to Long Beach's proposed fiscal year 2020 budget. The document estimated a potential of \$900,000 in lost tax revenue from the 1,300-plus short-term rental units if the city does not implement an ordinance making them subject to TOT. This estimate suggests that about \$7.5 million was spent at such rentals in fiscal year 2018, per the report.

In addition to TOT revenues, the hospitality and tourism industry generated \$37.7 million in property taxes and taxable sales in 2018, according to Beacon Economics.

Playing into the massive \$1.8 billion estimated economic impact is an analysis of visitor spending based on data patterns from Visit California. Using the organization's analysis of visitor spending patterns in Los Angeles County, Kleinhenz told the Business Journal that he was able to come up with a reasonably accurate depiction of such spending within the city. About one-quarter of total visitor spending is spent on food services. Accommodation spending accounts for the second largest percentage of total visitor spending at 22.4%, followed by entertainment at 14.2%, transportation at 14% and retail at 12.7%.

In other words, visitor spending isn't just restricted to hotels; it is also dispersed among local eateries, attractions and venues, transportation services and shops. Visitor spending on food services alone totaled \$297 million in 2018, based on Kleinhenz's estimates.

"These are some really impressive numbers, in my observation, about the contribution that this industry makes to the local economy," Kleinhenz said.

The economist said he hopes the report opens people's eyes to the importance the hospitality and tourism plays in Long Beach's economy. "Clearly, the goods movement and logistics industry is a local pillar of the economy. Arguably, education is another one, because of the presence of Cal State Long Beach and so on," he noted. "But the visitor industry has become another significant industry

that has grown over these last dozen-and-a-half years or so."

Kleinhenz noted that in the past Long Beach was known as a Navy town, and one with an economy centered on the aerospace industry. That all changed after the Navy left and Boeing wound down its operations over the past few decades.

"The state of the industry I think is good, and that's reflected in the continued increase in the transient occupancy tax revenues that the city has seen grow up over the last several years," Kleinhenz said of the hospitality and tourism sector.

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the CVB, presented these findings to the Long Beach City Council in October. Asked why the organization commissioned the report, he told the Business Journal, "It was time to share a broader, updated scale of what overnight visitors bring to the City of Long Beach."

While TOT is often a topic of discussion – particularly when the CVB gives its annual presentation to the city council upon renewal of the city's contract with the organization to market Long Beach as a destination – Goodling felt it was important to assess the economic impact of the industry beyond the hotel bed tax. TOT is the fourth largest tax revenue generator for the city, he noted.

"We wanted to capture that new data," Goodling said. "I don't think it's something that you need to do every year, because unless there are wild swings in the economy, it's going to be fairly consistent. But it's been enough time and the economy has been so robust that it was time to capture updated information."

The analysis of visitor spending and associated tax revenues for the city illustrates how well Long Beach is doing when it comes to growing tourism and attracting visitors for conventions – a task that largely falls on the CVB. "The CVB shares in part of that revenue, but there are many other city departments that also use that revenue in their efforts in promoting the city," Goodling said. "It provides us the opportunity to continue to do things like we just did this past weekend with the California Democratic Convention, and to showcase the city."

Goodling was referring to one of the biggest gets for the city's convention center in years – the California Democratic Party's annual convention, which, being held just before a presidential election year, put the city on a national stage as major candidates and legislators flooded the city.

With an annual contract to market Long Beach, the CVB is paid more than \$5 million each year by the city government. Goodling believes the report illustrates a sizable return on investment. "The economic impact as set forth by Beacon Economics shows that the financial returns greatly outweigh the money that we're given," he said. ■

Aquarium Wing Named After CEO's Family



■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**
Editor

John and Dr. Mario Molina, members of the Aquarium of the Pacific's board of directors, unveiled a new sign in the Aquarium's Pacific Visions wing dedicating the space to the family of Dr. Jerry Schubel, the institution's president and CEO. The newly named Schubel Family Culmination Gallery is an interactive space where Aquarium visitors can play digital games to test their knowledge about ocean conservation and the environment. The 5,000 square-foot space features interactive gaming tables, displays and animal exhibits. Schubel recently announced his planned retirement, and the Aquarium board is currently searching for his successor. Pictured from left: Aquarium of the Pacific Board Director Dr. Mario Molina; Aquarium President and CEO Dr. Jerry Schubel and his wife Margaret Schubel; and Aquarium Board Director John Molina at the entrance to the newly named Schubel Family Culmination Gallery in the new Pacific Visions wing. (Photograph courtesy of the Aquarium of the Pacific) ■

Officials Say Hotel Bed Tax Increase Could Be Transformational For Arts Groups, Convention Center

■ By **SAMANTHA MEHLINGER**
Editor

The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center has gained a healthy collection of accolades over the past few years, having been recognized by multiple meetings industry organizations for contemporary upgrades that have refreshed the center with glitzy, yet cost-effective, venues readily equipped with lighting, décor and furniture.

Now that the center has been appropriately decked out with modern flair, Charlie Beirne, the facility's general manager, says it's time to focus on "the back of the house" – specifically, \$50 million worth of needed infrastructure improvements to functional equipment at the center, including boilers, HVAC systems, escalators and other apparatus. The price tag comes from a city report assessing the center's immediate needs.

"The facilities are old. I think our guys . . . have been able to keep the mechanics working well without people noticing," Beirne said. "Don't forget, we have about anywhere from 1.4 to 1.6 million visitors a year through the facility. That's a lot of wear and tear on the escalators, elevators, carpet – [and the] air conditioning is on constantly."

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of

the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), added that replacement parts for many pieces of equipment at the center are no longer available because they aren't being manufactured anymore.

The convention center also has needs related to preparing for the 2028 Olympics, as it will host multiple games. Improvements must be made to the seating in the arena, as well as the venue's escalators, according to Goodling, whose organization is dedicated to growing tourism, meetings and conventions in Long Beach.

To help fund these projects, as well as to provide increased funding for local arts and cultural organizations, Mayor Robert Garcia proposed putting a 1% increase to Long Beach's transient occupancy tax (TOT) on the March 3 municipal ballot. The Long Beach City Council approved the proposal at the body's November 12 meeting, directing the city attorney to draft an ordinance for placement on the ballot.

The TOT, which is currently set at a rate of 12%, is charged to overnight visitors staying at local hotels and short-term rentals like Airbnbs. Ultimately, it will be up to Long Beach voters to approve or reject the increase.

If approved, half of the 1% increase



This December 2018 image depicts the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, an aging facility that would benefit from an increase in transient occupancy tax, should voters decide to approve the proposal in March 2020. According to the center's general manager, equipment such as escalators, HVAC and other items need upgrading. (Business Journal Photograph)

would be earmarked for the convention center, while the other half would be dedicated to local arts and culture organizations.

To a visitor renting a room, the increase in TOT would equate to about \$1.80 to \$2 more per night, according to Acting City Manager Tom Modica, who gave a presentation at the council meeting. The tax would

generate an estimated \$2.8 million annually both for the convention center and for local arts organizations.

Half of the city's TOT revenues are deposited in the city's General Fund, while the other half go to the Special Advertising and Promotions (SAP) Fund, which is dedicated

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to advertising and promoting the city. TOT revenues in the General Fund are not earmarked for a specific purpose, according to Grace Yoon, budget manager for the City of Long Beach.

“For the Special Advertising and Promotions (SAP) Fund, the TOT revenue makes up the majority of the fund’s revenue,” Yoon wrote in an e-mail to the Business Journal. The major expenditures of this fund include support for the arts, the CVB, community events and other efforts related to tourism and promotion of the city.

Goodling pointed out that the convention center is home to two major theaters – the Beverly O’Neill Theater and the Terrace Theater – which several Long Beach performing arts groups call home. An increase in TOT would help fund some of the improvements to equipment needed in those theaters – lighting dimmers, chillers and so on, per Beirne’s description.

The higher TOT would also benefit arts and culture groups with direct funding for educational programming. According to a

staff report from the mayor’s office, the city received a letter on October 22 from the CVB, local hotel managers and arts organizations requesting an increase in TOT to fund “a need for expanded student and family arts education in Long Beach” as well as improvements to the convention center.

Executives from these organizations, including the Long Beach Museum of Art, the Long Beach Playhouse, International City Theatre, and others appeared before the city council on November 12 to advocate for the tax increase.

“\$1.80 seems pretty inconsequential when you look at the return on investment and the impact you have a chance to make on the arts and on this community,” Caryn Desai, artistic director for International City Theater, said regarding the proposed TOT increase.

In his address to the council on the TOT proposal, Garcia said that he had been in discussions with Goodling and arts leaders for the past couple of years about how to best provide a more stable, long-term funding source for the arts and the convention center.

He called the proposal to increase the TOT a “transformational opportunity to support the arts and tourism in Long Beach.”

Garcia said the arts are a “public good,” and noted that it is necessary for the government to invest in the arts in order for those organizations to succeed. “It is something we have done in Long Beach, but it’s also something that we can do better,” he said. He also pointed out that the convention and tourism industries in Long Beach serve as major economic drivers for the city.

In order to ask voters to increase the tax, the council first had to declare a state of fiscal emergency that indicated the city did not have the means to pay for the necessary convention center improvements. The council unanimously approved this emergency as well as the ballot measure on November 19.

At the meeting, Modica pointed out in a presentation that the total rate taxed on overnight visitors is actually about 15%, when accounting for the 3% tax assessed by downtown’s tourism business improvement district. If the TOT increase passes, the total tax rate would be 16%.

As a point of comparison, the City of Los Angeles charges a combined rate of about 15.75% on overnight visitors – however, due to higher room rates in L.A., Long Beach rooms are expected to cost visitors on average \$100 less per night, Modica explained. Long Beach’s tax rate will still be about 1% lower than the City of Anaheim’s, he noted. Both of these cities directly compete with Long Beach for conventions and meetings.

Competition for conventions is only growing, according to Goodling. He cited planned improvements to the convention center in Sacramento, new hotels planned in Anaheim, and a large “big box” hotel with the same amount of meeting space as Long Beach’s convention center being built in Chula Vista. That hotel is part of Marriott’s Gaylord brand of massive hotels spreading throughout the country.

Gaylord hotels are making for stronger competition because, due to their presence in the western, middle and eastern parts of the U.S., they are able to book annual conventions for three years out by rotating them through each location. In doing so, the event planners are able to package lodgings, meeting space and food service under one roof, which they can’t do in Long Beach, Goodling explained.

This increasing competition is one reason Goodling is emphasizing the need to reinvest in the convention center. However, he emphasized, the CVB and the center itself have been recognized for the past three years running for their service and upgrades, respectively, illustrating that the city has been able to maintain its competitive edge. Both the CVB and convention center have been repeatedly recognized by the Stella Awards, annual awards given out by the NorthStar Meetings Group, which owns two of the top meetings industry publications.

Goodling reflected, “It just goes to show that we are on trend, we are on target, we are hitting our marks and we are delivering.” ■

After Six Years, The Pacific Ballroom Proves Its Worth



■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Writer

Six years ago, after a \$10 million renovation of the underutilized Long Beach Arena, the Pacific Ballroom within the arena was unveiled as the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center’s newest event space. Since its launch in November 2013, the Pacific Ballroom has generated a \$425 million economic impact to the city by attracting new conventions to Long Beach that otherwise could not have been accommodated at the convention center due to space limitations, according to the Long Beach ArConvention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). Additionally, 30% of conventions held in Long Beach now utilize the Pacific Ballroom, with catering revenue doubling in the last five years. The 45,000-square-foot venue has since been the site of countless meetings, receptions, dinners, theatrical presentations, concerts and fashion shows. The versatile event space accommodates up to 5,000 people and features one of the largest-ever flying steel truss systems suspended above the floor. The truss system includes state-of-the-art sound and theatrical lighting, which can be raised or lowered to create a customized atmosphere for each event. The arena’s upper deck seating is hidden from view by electronically operated curtain walls during events. In addition to the built-in amenities, the convention center owns tables, seating and décor that are available at no added cost to event planners. “The Pacific Ballroom was the beginning of our experience in creating special event spaces. It proved so successful that we then created The Cove and the Terrace Theater Plaza,” CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling said. “Because of all these new spaces and their uniqueness, we are winning business over other cities and large hotels.” Since the opening of the Pacific Ballroom, Long Beach Arena’s days of usage have increased from 136 days to 250 days annually. (Photographs courtesy of the CVB) ■



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Regular Renovations Keep Hotels Relevant And Competitive

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Writer

With hundreds of guests staying in each hotel room every year, and thousands traipsing through halls and common areas, it is easy to imagine the wear and tear inflicted annually at local hotels. In an industry as competitive as hospitality and tourism, it is important for hotels to maintain their spaces, including regular facility upgrades.

“All of the hotels in the city compete on both rate and occupancy. And not only do we compete with ourselves, but we compete with other markets as well,” John Thompson, managing director of The Westin Long Beach, said. “So it’s incumbent on us to have renovated products that support the overall mission and vision of the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and the city, who rely on tourism and conventions to keep people employed.”

To that end, The Westin, a 469-room hotel in downtown, is in the midst of an approximately \$26 million renovation of the entire hotel. The first phase of renovations included all guestrooms, which received new mattresses, carpet, wallpaper, seating and decor. Room renovations were completed in April.

The lobby, which reopened in July, received new marble flooring, a new front desk, new reception and seating areas, fresh paint and new wood accents, as well as a

garden wall, new furniture and artwork that gives a nod to Long Beach’s coastal location. The ground floor restaurant was also fully redesigned and reopened as Navy Proof Food and Spirits. The final lobby renovation is the construction of a Bluestone Lane coffee kiosk, which is expected to open before the new year.

“There is an absolute tie into who we are and what we represent from a California coastal community overall. We want to allow our guests to rise and meet a better day through the holistic touch points of eating well, breathing well and working well,” Thompson said. “All the components that, when you’re traveling, you sometimes lose sight of. We want the space to be a center of calm in what can sometimes be a hectic travel day.”

The final phase of The Westin’s renovations, updating the hotel’s 50,000 square feet of meeting space, will occur within the next two years, Thompson said. Meeting spaces, including one of the largest ballrooms in Long Beach, will be revamped with new carpet, wallpaper and furniture, as well as new air walls. Thompson noted that renovations are often done in tandem with other capital projects to enhance the guest experience, such as improvements to high-speed internet and including TV streaming services in guest rooms.

The 138-room Hyatt Centric The Pike



The Westin Long Beach is in the midst of an approximately \$26 million renovation. The new lobby reopened in July. (Photograph courtesy of The Westin)

Long Beach recently began a multi-million dollar full renovation, according to General Manager Jon Benson. Faux-wood flooring is being installed in all rooms, as well as new bed platforms, mattresses, nightstands, seating, 55-inch TVs, and lighting. Upgrades will also be made to in-room refrigerators, window coverings and all painted surfaces, Benson noted.

“Everything in the room will be basically new. Bathrooms are going to largely re-

main the same except for upgraded lighting,” Benson said. “We have beautiful bathrooms in the property, so we just are enhancing the backlit mirror with a better lighting package, as that often is a big request, especially with female travelers who like better lighting for makeup and hair.”

Corridors throughout the hotel are receiving new carpet, wall covering and lighting. Faux-wood flooring will be installed at

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the elevator landings, as will “cool” graphics to accentuate the renovation, Benson said. The rooftop pool area is being stripped to make way for a new deck, cabanas and furniture. The pool itself is also being resurfaced, Benson said. The rooftop and guest room renovations are expected to be completed in January and February, respectively, Benson added.

On the ground floor, Benson said the Bay Street Kitchen is going to be closed soon and transformed into a new market bar concept that has a “cool, trendy, local” feel for guests and Long Beach residents alike. The rest of the lobby will be renovated with new finishes and a redesigned and repositioned front desk. The current bar area will be converted to a multifunctional space for meetings or luncheons, Benson said. The buildout of the lobby and restaurant is expected to be completed by June. All other meeting spaces are also being spruced up with new flooring, wall coverings and lighting.

Ultimately, the goal of the renovation is to better connect the hotel to Long Beach and the port using nautical themes, Benson explained, adding that this is the first full renovation since Hyatt purchased the hotel from another operator. “We didn’t fully invest in converting it to a Centric brand when we bought it,” he said. “This is our opportunity to create its identity and really give it the proper character . . . that pays homage to Long Beach.”

Karen Englund, general manager of Renaissance Long Beach Hotel in downtown,



A Bluestone Lane coffee kiosk is expected to open in The Westin lobby before the end of the year. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

said there are plans for a lobby renovation beginning next year, which include a re-imagined restaurant space that will integrate with the Sip Bar and Lounge to provide an enhanced “meet and eat” space. Meeting space design and updates have become critical for hotels to review on a regular basis, Englund

noted, adding that less traditional and more dynamic spaces are what customers are now looking for. Details of the Renaissance renovation are not yet available.
“Different hotel companies have different cycles, but generally every five to seven years there’s a soft goods renovation and

about every 10 years there is a hard goods renovation,” Thompson said. “The busier the hotel is, the more wear and tear you get in these spaces. And so it’s incumbent on hotels to keep them fresh and new from an attractability perspective.” ■

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Long Beach Garners Attention Among Out-Of-State And International Travelers

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Writer

From the gondoliers shuttling through the Alamitos Bay to the small boutique hotels downtown, companies in Long Beach's tourism and hospitality industry have seen an uptick in out-of-the-area visitors. From the East Coast to the western shores of Asia, Long Beach is garnering attention nationwide and even globally.

This trend is both reflected in and driven by the national and international press coverage the city has received. Bob Maguglin, director of public relations at the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), said targeted outreach to travel and lifestyle writers has been key to securing coverage that highlights what Long Beach has to offer to everyone, from pet owners to the LGBTQ community.

"We try not to use a shotgun approach," Maguglin explained. Instead, the CVB prepares customized trips for writers based on their area of interest and expertise. One time, he remembered, he took a group of German entertainment writers to Joe Jost's to see the booth made famous by the movie "The Bodyguard." Another trip, this one taken by an Australian travel writer, was designed to showcase the ease of traveling from Oceania to Long Beach via Honolulu. Last year, Maguglin said the CVB hosted a total of

139 journalists on such trips. "That's why we're getting the kind of coverage that we do, because we're extremely active in bringing in those writers," he noted.

Many providers in the area credit the CVB with guiding the spotlight toward Long Beach, while also noting the role individual companies have paid in accomplishing that goal. "It's a combined effort, it's noticeable and we need to continue on that," Nilda Parrado Langston, vice president of Harbor Breeze Cruises, told the Business Journal.

In addition to articles about Long Beach in publications ranging from The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and many others, ads in magazines and newspapers have done their share in drumming up interest. Harbor Breeze Cruises is one of the companies that has partnered with other organizations in the area, such as the Aquarium of the Pacific and the CVB, to maximize the impact of its advertising.

"In the past, several entities in Long Beach would advertise separately," Maguglin said. As a result, advertisements for Long Beach accommodations and attractions were often small and scattered throughout different publications, he explained. "So we put together a program where, by combining our resources, we get a whole page or two-page spread ad in these publications, which really grabs



Michael O'Toole, co-founder and owner of The Gondola Getaway, has been shuttling tourists through the Alamitos Bay for more than three decades. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

the attention."

These strategies have shown success. "I don't have a system in place to accurately measure where tourists come from, but from my observation, out of the country visitors have increased," Debra Fixen, general manager of Shoreline Village, said. "Hearing someone on the boardwalk speak in a foreign language [happens] almost daily." Merchants' sales at the wa-

terfront shopping mall have steadily increased, she noted. Long Beach's growing popularity comes as no surprise to Fixen.

Across the board, tourism companies told the Business Journal that they've seen a noticeable increase in out-of-the-area visitors. Many considered the transformation of downtown to be a key factor driving this development. "When I got here,

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there wasn't a single building between the Aquarium, the Aquarium garage and the civic center," Aquarium of the Pacific President and CEO Jerry Schubel remembered. "The city is maturing."

Larry Black, owner of the historic Varden Hotel in Downtown Long Beach, agreed. "When I first purchased the Dolly Varden, people looked at me and said: you're going to what part of town?" he remembered. Once a low-budget boarding house, the Varden has become a go-to for business and leisure guests, Black noted, especially among European visitors, who value the experience of staying at a small, boutique hotel. The area around it has developed in a similar fashion. "The transformation is extraordinary," Black said.

"Long Beach has done such a fantastic job of cleaning up the town and making it exciting for people to come," Greg Bombard, president and CEO of Catalina Express, told the Business Journal. California's temperate climate and the variety of water sport activities available on Catalina Island have helped cement Long Beach's position as a full-package destination, Bombard noted. "I think it plays well together," he said. "We're very for-

tunate in what we have available to us."

The attractions surrounding Long Beach have added to its appeal, according to Bruce Baltin, managing director of CBRE Hotels. "Southern California in general has had a really strong growth in tourism, both domestically and internationally. Long Beach is perfectly positioned to be a beneficiary of that," he explained.

"Many visitors who come to Southern California look for a variety of things to do. They may want to go to Disneyland, Universal Studios or Seaworld, but they're also looking for authentic neighborhoods," Baltin noted. Long Beach neighborhoods, from the East Village Arts District to Belmont Shore, fit the bill. Black echoed that assertion, emphasizing the city's convenient location at a short driving distance to many of Southern California's main attractions. "People are using Long Beach as home base now," he said.

Once visitors arrive in the city, they have an opportunity to explore local offerings and some touring companies even bus travelers directly to Long Beach attractions. That has been the experience of Michael O'Toole, co-founder and owner of The Gondola Getaway, who has seen

his business grow significantly as tourist groups from Japan, Greece and Germany, among other countries, are shuttled directly to his dock.

Previously focused on providing a romantic dinner experience for couples from the region, outside visitors now make up a larger portion of the company's business, O'Toole noted. "We've drastically expanded our daytime business and a lot of the daytime business are the travelers," he said. However, romantic evening trips remain a core part of the business and have also begun to attract international visitors, especially from the United Kingdom and Russia, O'Toole pointed out.

The city's diverse dining options are drawing additional visitors to Long Beach, Maguglin noted. "Long Beach is really finding its place as an art and dining center for Southern California, with restaurants that are now garnering national attention," he said.

Taylor Woods, principal of Urban Commons, which operates the Queen Mary, confirmed this trend. "It's exciting to see Long Beach itself is thriving as more of a foodie destination, and we've enjoyed adding more entertainment to the ship, too," Woods said. In collaboration

with California festival giant Goldenvoice, Urban Commons has organized a number of music festivals on the historic ship in recent years. "As more attractions, restaurants, retail and other entertainment are brought into and grow in Long Beach, we'll all be able to continue building awareness for what an amazing destination Long Beach is for families and individuals of all ages, from all over," Woods enthused.

Whether they go on a gondola ride through Naples, take a whale watching trip in the San Pedro Bay or dance on the deck of the historic Queen Mary, visitors to Long Beach are guaranteed a unique experience. "It's memorable. A visit from outsiders to Long Beach is memorable, they refer us and they come back," Parra-do Langston said. "Long Beach can offer a very complete experience."

The key, Schubel noted, will be to keep the attention of the diverse and sophisticated demographic of travelers the city has been able to attract in recent years. "I think we're finally becoming a destination for people from outside of Southern California," he noted. "We just have to make sure we continue to meet their expectations." ■



The Aquarium of the Pacific continues to be one of the city's most well-known attractions, and out-of-the-area visitors have been particularly interested in the institution's focus on sustainability, according to President and CEO Dr. Jerry Schubel. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)



Long Beach's size is conducive to its growth as a tourism destination, Schubel noted. "We're small enough to be manageable, but large enough to capture national and international attention," he said. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)



Schubel said the Aquarium has seen a significant increase in out-of-state and international visitors, based on an analysis of ZIP codes. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)



The Queen Mary has also benefited from Long Beach's increasing reputation as a tourist destination. "We have experienced small incremental growth in visitors outside of the Southern California region over the last two years, and that trend is continuing," Urban Commons Principal Taylor Woods said. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

New And Enhanced Spaces Expand Event Venue Offerings In Long Beach

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Writer

Staff at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center and the Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau are always on the lookout for underutilized spaces to convert into fresh, hip event venues.

“Today’s trend is to have events in spaces that are unique. People like and want something that is original to a destination,” CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling said. “These spaces are very original, they do not exist in any other city and they are fulfilling that need to create that ‘wow’ or Instagram-able moment.”

Examples of convention center space conversions over the last several years include the once-dreary street underpass on Seaside Way that has been transformed into The Cove, a vibrant urban event space, and the completely re-landscaped Terrace Theater Plaza, which includes a Bellagio-esque multi-spray fountain, palm trees and flower gardens, and can accommodate everything from sit-down dinners to rock concerts. In 2019, three more spaces have been reinvented to en-

hance and expand event offerings at the convention center.

Ocean View Club

The eastside lobby of the Terrace Theater balcony has been transformed into the Ocean View Club, one of the newest event venues at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center. Overlooking the Long Beach coastline through floor-to-ceiling windows, the “one-of-a-kind” space is ideal for small receptions, food functions, such as dinners, or meetings with groups of 100 to 200 guests, according to the CVB. The Ocean View Club features a bar with a food service counter, allowing event planners beverage and dining options. The space includes an



array of seating areas, including chairs, sofas and tables, all lit by chandeliers, floor and table lamps.

Seaside Ballroom Lounge

The entry area to the Seaside Ballroom, located at street level on Seaside Way east of Pine Avenue, was recently renovated, transforming it into a new



pre-function space dubbed the Seaside Ballroom Lounge. The event space has been upgraded with new furniture and décor, including plush chairs, sofas and ottomans, as well as crystal chandeliers, table lamps and LED sconces. The space accommodates up to 400 guests for a reception and offers event planners a full range of food and beverage service.



The Brickline Mural, Pacific Gallery

The Pacific Gallery, which encompasses the lobby area of the Long Beach Arena, was recently enhanced with a large mural by Esao Andrews, an American artist known for his surreal figurative and landscape painting, specializing in the gothic and grotesque. “The main subject – the butterfly – I spent the most time on,” Andrews stated. “Painting branches that big is something I’ve never done before and it feels satisfying to come down and look at it from afar. It was a real pleasure . . . and now I just want to paint bigger all the time.” The 30-foot-tall, 150-foot-long mural features a large butterfly and flowers hanging from a tree branch in a hallway area of the Pacific Gallery now referred to as “the brickline.” The Pacific Gallery is used as a space for receptions, food functions and special events, separate from the Pacific Ballroom. ■

CITY OF LONG BEACH BID OPPORTUNITIES

TITLE	BID NUMBER	DATE
Alley Water Main Conversion Daisy Avenue	WD-29-18	12/05/2019
Information Tech Project Management – Utilities	RFP ER19-115	12/05/2019
One (1) One-Ton Extended Cab Pick-Up Truck	WD-02-20	12/06/2019
STI Firearms and Magazines (REBID)	ITB PD19-128	12/06/2019
Engineering Design Services for the S-8 Sewer Lift Station Rehabilitation Project	RFP (SC-0359)	12/09/2019
Mueller Parts and Supplies	ITB ER20-006	12/11/2019
On-Call Professional Engineering & Inspection Svcs	RFQ ER19-138	12/12/2019
Agriculture & Construction Equipment Parts & Svcs	ITB FS20-007	12/12/2019
Queensway Bay Landscape Services	RFP PR19-122	12/17/2019
Engineering Construction Mgmt. Svcs for Various Development Projects at LB Airport	RFQ AP19-132	12/17/2019
Taxiway D Rehabilitation Between Runway 8L-26R and Taxiway J	R-7136	12/18/2019
Construction Materials Testing/Inspection Services For Various Development Projects at LB Airport	RFQ AP19-133	01/07/2020

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

Bidder Registration

To receive notifications of bid opportunities, register with the City of Long Beach at www.longbeach.gov/finance/business-info/purchasing-division/purchasing-division/. Additional details on upcoming bids and how to register can be found on the website.

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(Continued from Page 1)

line. It'll be extra short.

Whether it was internationally, nationally or locally, it seemed there were endless tragedies and controversies this year, from turbulent protests for freedom abroad, to increasingly inflamed political divisions throughout the country, to repeated and senseless gun violence at home in Long Beach. In short: good riddance, 2019.

I find myself pondering if my negative feelings about this year are the fault of the media, or if it really was that bad. In many ways, it seems like we're moving backward. Like all the news is bad. Like leaving my house is a risky endeavor in itself – or perhaps that's just the onset of agoraphobia.

Going into 2020, it's natural to wonder what will be better, considering all the unresolved problems at play in the world today. But rather than assuming that everything will go to hell and a handbasket, perhaps it is more productive to consider how to start off the new decade on the right foot.

What can we do to ensure the 20s again will roar, rather than whimper? As the decade unfolds, Millennials ought to finally be gaining more influential traction in society as more of us are elected to office and promoted within our respective fields, so perhaps the answer is that we don't drop the ball. Our best bet to do that is to consider what went wrong this decade –

and 2019 was a pretty good encapsulation of those issues – and what we can do to turn them around (as decreed by me, Queen Sheba of Millennial Pulse, whose reach is vast and unshakeable, of course).

For the second time in the lives of Millennials, our country has endured a presidential impeachment inquiry – although last time around, I was about 10 years old, and both the substance and method of the proceedings were a bit beyond my fifth grade comprehension, if you know what I mean.

As for the current proceedings, I'm of two minds. First: Can't we all agree that this kind of circus is bad for our country? And I hope we can all agree it's a circus. Second: Now, whether or not it's a necessary circus. . . . That's what we elect Congress to figure out, and according to them, it probably is.

Moving forward, the question as to what to do when all this is over is the same one that I've pondered in several of these columns as our country's political divide continues to deepen: How are we going to function as a nation when our branches of government, which are supposed to act in our best interests, are paralyzed by divergent political ideologies? And how are we going to function as a nation when those bodies are so focused on their political differences that governing has devolved into something of a Greco-Roman blood sport?

Most of our legislators in office today are Baby Boomers or Gen-Xers. Perhaps, as more Millennials enter the Capitol, our penchant to stray from party preference (according to Pew Research Center, the majority of Millennials are independents) will help mend fences and get things moving again. Heck, maybe we should really upend things and elect the only Millennial running for president, if not just for the sake of a generational power shift.

On a local level, one way Millennials can help improve politics in 2020 is by actually voting. Long Beach's voter participation rate has been abysmal in recent elections, including the most recent special election that resulted in Long Beach Transit Boardmember Mary Zendejas winning the 1st District Long Beach City Council seat.

The first district has more than 20,000 registered voters, but only 2,723 people voted on November 5. While lower turnout is typically expected for special elections, our electorate doesn't do so well in citywide municipal elections, either; about 13% of registered voters participated in the April 2018 city election.

Long Beach has cultivated a political machine for churning out anointed candidates. The pattern goes something like this: Mayor Robert Garcia announces his endorsement and within days most of the councilmembers and other elected officials, including our

county supervisor and state assemblymember, send out their endorsements for the same candidate in quick succession. This pattern occurred most recently this year with the now State Senator Lena Gonzalez and her successor on the council, Zendejas. The same pattern is now playing out with 2nd District Candidate Cindy Allen.

All of these women are strong, capable leaders. I am not challenging their qualifications. But if it at all bothers you that our elected officials are being handpicked by the powers that be – even if you end up voting for that person – you ought to start paying closer attention to local politics and participating in elections. We need alternative voices, or the deck will continue to be stacked.

Beyond politics, the best way we can avoid totally flubbing the start of the next decade is pretty straightforward. With human rights issues flaring up around the world, most visibly at the moment in Hong Kong, and gun violence as perhaps the most pervasive danger in American society, it seems like it's due time to stop sitting our hands and hoping these systemic societal issues work themselves out. Highlighting these issues on social media is not enough. Millennials are incredibly comfortable at communicating digitally – but we have to be sure that more of us show up in public spaces to effect change, too. ■

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