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George Economides, the ‘voice of business,’ steps down



George and daughter April, 2010.

■ By **ASHLEIGH RUHL**
Contributor

George Economides and his Long Beach Business Journal have been the voice of businesses in the city for more than three decades.

And although Economides, 72, sold the publication earlier this month, his legacy will continue with the Business Journal, starting with today's first edition under the new ownership of Pacific Community Media.

In recognition of the LBBJ's founder and the historic role of the paper, many community leaders shared some of their thoughts about the man and the impact he's had on Long Beach. Economides, too, described some of his favorite moments and hopes for the future.

Among the many fans of

the Business Journal is former Mayor Beverly O'Neill, who said Economides and his staff were tough watchdogs who regularly delivered accurate and intelligent news.

"I admire George," she said. "He is totally immersed in Long Beach and knows more about business and development than anyone. He has a depth of knowledge about the city."

That depth of knowledge, Economides said, came in part from his background and the connections he made as the former president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. He leveraged that, as well as experience in communications work during his time with the United States Air Force, to create the Business Journal, officially launched in 1987.

Among the LBBJ's first advertisers was Jane Netherton, former president of International City Bank and one of the first women to serve as a bank president in California.

"I was one of the most consistent advertisers from day one because George was all about getting it right — he wasn't looking for a popularity contest," Netherton said. "I read every edition. It was real news. It was real, in-depth coverage."

Netherton said she's looking forward to seeing how the LBBJ evolves under its new ownership, and she said she's glad another local company — one co-owned by businessman John Molina, who's already behind the ownership of the Long Beach Post — is prioritizing business news coverage.

(Please Continue to Page 12)

Should California invest another \$5.5 billion into stem cell research?

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Over the past 15 years, California's stem cell program has funded over 1,000 research, training and community engagement projects focused on stem cell technology in the state.

But in October of last year, the agency in charge of administering the state's stem cell program awarded its last round of new funds, allocating the last of a total of \$3 billion in funding approved by California voters. Now, the author of Proposition 71, which established the program in 2004, is seeking another round of \$5.5 billion in funding for stem cell research in a measure vying for a spot on the Nov. 5 ballot.

"The scientists and patient advocates in California have proven through the California stem cell initiative funding that they can change the future of medicine and human suffering," the measure's author, Robert "Bob" Klein II told the Business Journal. "California funding has filled the gap of the federal government's failure to fund this revolution in medicine."

Klein's interest in stem cell research and regenerative medicine arose from his youngest son's ultimately fatal battle with diabetes. Diagnosed with Type I Diabetes at age 11, Klein's son Jordan required human insulin-producing beta cells, the artificial production of which — to the best knowledge of the scientific community at this point — requires stem cells.

In 2016, 26-year-old Jordan Klein died of complications related to the disease, two years after scientists first made significant progress on finding a treatment developed with the help of human embryonic stem cells.

(Please Continue to Page 22)

Heritage Award winners this year include some heroic home rescues

■ By **TIM GROBATY**
Staff Reporter

Standing against those who are avidly intent on tearing down historic and architecturally significant (and beautiful) buildings, are Long

Beach's preservationists, a group that includes some city workers, several architects and contractors, the city's own Cultural Heritage Commission and, not to be confused with that group though it often is, Long Beach Heritage.

Long Beach Heritage is a not-for-profit organization that has encouraged and advocated for historic preservation since 1980. Additionally, the organization educates owners of these buildings on

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Long Beach Business Journal

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Portside: Keeping up with
The Port of Long Beach



■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Dan Coffey worked alongside Port of Long Beach staff for eight years before joining the organization. Now a port leasing officer, Coffey’s first introduction to the port was while working as a real estate right-of-way consultant in the early stages of Gerald Desmond Bridge Replacement Project. After joining port ranks, Coffey assumed multiple roles in addition to his day-to-day leasing duties: project manager specializing in large project planning and implementation and liaison to consulting firms hired by the port for development projects. “I have the ability to kind of bridge the gap between the port’s interests and the consulting world, which helps streamline projects and create efficiencies when possible,”

Coffey said. Managing around 500 lease agreements keeps the port’s leasing staff busy year round, Coffey noted. Leases at the port range anywhere from 5-50 years depending on the type of agreement, and long-term leases must be reviewed and updated every five years. Coffey describes himself as an “anomaly” because he has a project management professional certification, which is usually held by engineers, as well as his real estate license. “I really enjoy working with . . . all the divisions at the port. That’s the most interesting thing to me by far: the collaboration,” he said. “It’s challenging. It’s exciting. It’s rewarding. I get to see the projects develop, grow and ultimately get built. It’s a fantastic place to work. I’m constantly impressed by the caliber of people we have here.” (Photograph by Brandon Richardson) ■

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Thank you for your journalistic integrity and passion for business which built a publication juggernaut that served to connect all parts of Long Beach through mutual interest in advocacy, investment and ultimately, pride in our boundless economic potential.



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Dede Rossi looks back on a decade of leadership at the Belmont Shore Business Association

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

Dede Rossi announced her departure from the Belmont Shore Business Association at the end of last month, but old habits die hard.

On a sunny Friday morning, the association's executive director can still be found peeling tape scraps from light posts along Second Street and chatting it up with local business owners.

"I'm in no hurry to leave," said Rossi, whose decade-long tenure with the association has been the longest in its history.

Rossi said she's determined to help the association find a qualified successor, a process that is currently underway and will likely take up to three months to complete. But Rossi's also excited for the opportunities ahead.

"I've been thinking about it for a while," she said. "I wanted to take a break, maybe try something new."

What's next remains to be seen, she noted.

Talking to Rossi, it's clear that the

pressure of leading the association in charge of a transforming business district hasn't always been easy.

"A lot of the property ownerships are changing," she said. "There's still a few locals that own property, but not like it was years ago."

A shift toward more corporate-operated stores has also impacted the association's ability to influence whether a store front is vacated or not, she said. "[Corporations] look at their bottom line and decide up in a corporate board room somewhere: we're not going to renew the lease," Rossi explained.

Corporations and small businesses alike are scrambling to adapt to a changing retail landscape and shopping districts like Belmont Shore's Second Street are bearing the brunt.

"The retailers are trying to figure it out," Rossi said. But all hope is not lost. "Food is huge right now and I think food is what attracts people down here," she noted. And she's not ready to give up on product retailers either. "People still love to shop, people



When outgoing Belmont Shore Business Association President Dede Rossi joined the organization, her expertise was in fundraising, but being at the head of the association has been an education in all things business, she said. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

still love to move around and go places," Rossi said. "It's social."

But the competition for foot traffic is stiff, as shopping districts across the

city and the region are contending over a shrinking brick-and-mortar clientele. "We're not the only game in town," Rossi acknowledged. The city, she noted, has put an emphasis on promoting Downtown in recent years. "I love that, because I'm a Long Beach person, but we need a little more love over here," Rossi said.

Being the designated point of contact for business owners, on anything from homelessness to storefront vacancies and trash collection, has taken a toll on Rossi. "I've been here for ten years. I was just thinking: maybe let somebody else who isn't jaded by having to deal with certain things [take over]," she said. "I will be able to go to the gym down at the Belmont [Athletic Club] without somebody asking me: what's going to go into so and so [space]?"

As for her successor, Rossi said a passion for the city and the job are crucial to success. "You've got to feel deeply about your job," she said. And: "You have to know Long Beach. I think that's really important," she added. Rossi also had a word of advice for whomever will follow in her footsteps: don't fight your critics on social media. "You're not going to win," she said.

The district's direction for the future will depend highly on the priorities of Rossi's successor, but there are some debates she expects to continue. Safety has been a primary concern for businesses in the area, she noted, and a shift of funds from the district's subsidized bus pass program for local employees toward the hiring of a private security provider might be on the horizon. "We want people to feel safe down here, that's really important, and that's something we're working on," Rossi said. ■

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Engineers union files unfair practices charge against city

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

The union that represents city engineers has filed an unfair labor practice charge with the state, alleging the city has drawn out negotiations over a new contract.

The Long Beach Association of Engineering Employees is one of eight bargaining units that are currently in negotiations with the city to replace labor agreements that expired at the end of September.

Only the police and firefighters unions have been successful in ratifying new terms for their members. The two remaining unions, Association of Long Beach Employees and Service Employees International Union, are currently under contract terms imposed by the Long Beach City Council as a result of unsuccessful negotiations with the Long Beach Department of Human Resources.

In its charge with the state Public Employee Relations Board, the engineering union alleges that the city has engaged in unfair practice by failing to negotiate in good faith.

“The city has been taking too much time to get their ducks in a row, when it comes to negotiating with our bargaining unit,” LBAEE President Jason Rodriguez told the Business Journal. “We need help. We need help fixing this situation.”

Salaries are a major concern for the union. A salary survey published by the union in October showed that Long Beach

engineering employees earned less than their regional counterparts in 13 of the 15 positions reviewed. Positions to be included in the survey were picked according to city guidelines and compared to the “Standard 10” cities selected by the city, which include Anaheim, Torrance and Los Angeles.

Income gaps between Long Beach employees and their colleagues in the region ranged from 16.2% below the area median for Geographic Information System (GIS) analysts to 4.6% above the median for fire prevention plan checkers.

“The fact that the engineering employees are so far below the median is cause for great concern. It’s almost an emergency,” Rodriguez said.

Long Beach Labor Relations Manager Dana Anderson said in an email that she could not comment on ongoing negotiations, adding that the city is “negotiating in good faith.”

Anderson said the city submitted a response to the labor charge on Feb. 11.

Once the city’s response has been submitted, the assigned PERB agent will determine whether the charge meets the legal standard for a violation. If it meets the standard, the charge will be transformed into a complaint to be resolved through an informal settlement conference, mediated by a different board agent.

If the two parties are unable to reach an agreement during the settlement conference, the case will be set for formal hearing in front of a PERB administrative law judge. ■

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Cost of airport terminal improvements to rise by \$21 million

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Staff Reporter

Long Beach Airport will soon undergo another significant transformation that will restructure the pre-security portions of the facility after the Long Beach City Council approved a change to the construction contract last week.

The approved change to the Phase II of terminal improvements will raise the original cost of work by at least \$21 million.

While upgrades that were completed in 2013 overhauled the interior of the airport, replacing mobile trailers with a permanent concourse flush with local dining options, air conditioning and landscaping, the next phase will focus on the front of the airport.

The new \$80 million contract, which could end up costing as much as \$110 million when accounting for contingencies in the contract and soft costs, will create a new ticketing building and seismically retrofit the historic terminal building that currently houses the ticketing counter.

In the future, the rental car area will be pushed into the old ticketing area and passengers will be serviced by upgraded baggage claim areas and a new meet-and-greet area. Three elements of the project are expected to be deferred, including roadway

improvements and a ground transportation center which will require a great deal of planning to restructure the entryway to the drop-off area.

The six portions of the improvement that the airport is expected to break ground on in the near future are estimated to be completed by the middle of 2022.

A base contract amount of \$58.8 million was originally approved by the council in 2018 and awarded to Swinerton Builders, a firm from Los Angeles. However, airport staff said that market pressures have driven the cost up.

Airport Director Cynthia Guidry said that while production costs have risen about 12% nationally, the Los Angeles region has seen a spike of about 30%. Additionally, large-scale construction projects like the new football stadium in Inglewood and improvements being carried out at LAX and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Authority in advance of the 2028 Olympics have stretched resources thin, she said.

“The agencies are really competing for the same limited pool of construction resources,” Guidry said. “Our original estimates were targeting having six to seven bids per trade, but in reality we’ve only seen about two bids per trade.”

To cover the cost increase of the base

contract, the airport is expected to issue a \$21 million bond. That will require a second City Council vote to approve it, something that could happen as soon as next month. The rest of the funding will come from airport revenue that is driven by passenger activity but also through parking fees and lease agreements the airport has with existing tenants.

Mayor Robert Garcia said the airport improvements have a “home run vision.” He

praised the airport for its recent run of being nationally recognized as one of the best airports in the nation and said the improvements would only add to its profile.

“It’s a great airport that I think we want to maintain its charm and its historic nature as well,” Garcia said.

The airport’s Phase II project is part of a citywide project labor agreement and is anticipated to create about 440 direct jobs. ■



A rendering of the terminal improvement project at Long Beach Airport. The new price tag could be as much as \$110 million, up from the original \$58 million. (Rendering courtesy of Long Beach Airport)

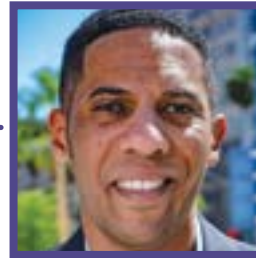
2nd

DISTRICT



Did not respond by deadline

	Cindy Allen				Jeanette M. Barrera				Jesus Cisneros			
2nd District Issues	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
Will you support efforts to reverse the Broadway road diet and bike lane project?	✓					✓						
Do you support building more affordable housing in the 2nd District?	✓				✓							
Would you support building housing for the homeless in the 2nd District?	✓				✓							
Are you supportive of the city’s relationship with Queen Mary operator Urban Commons?			✓					✓				
Do you support further automation at the Port of Long Beach?			✓				✓					
Would you push for further study of the Elephant Lot as an potential location for a municipal pool?		✓					✓					
Do you feel like the following issues are improving or worsening in the 6th District?	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening
Business Climate	✓							✓				
Crime		✓					✓					
Homelessness			✓					✓				
Cleanliness of public space		✓					✓					
Citywide Issues	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
Do you support the ballot measure to permanently extend the Measure A sales tax?	✓							✓				
Do you feel Measure A funds have been spent as promised by elected officials?	✓							✓				
Would you support dedicating more Measure A funds to restore public safety positions?	✓							✓				
Do you feel the city is fiscally responsible?	✓							✓				
Do you support the city’s efforts to implement mobility and traffic-mitigation efforts, such as additional crosswalks, bike lanes and road diets?		✓				✓						
Do you support rent control?		✓			✓							
Do you feel the city is doing enough to attract and retain businesses?		✓						✓				
Do you support measures to retain local control of land use?		✓			✓							
Do you believe the city is doing enough to address climate change?			✓					✓				
Do you support efforts to remove portions of the breakwater?			✓		✓							
Do you think the city is doing enough to address economic inequality?				✓				✓				
Are Long Beach officials transparent enough in their leadership?	✓							✓				
Do you support the formation of a Long Beach Community Choice Aggregation program?			✓			✓						



Robert E. Fox				Eduardo Lara				Nigel Lifsey				Ryan Lum			
Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
✓						✓		✓						✓	
✓				✓				✓				✓			
✓				✓					✓			✓			
			✓			✓				✓			✓		
✓							✓	✓						✓	
			✓		✓				✓					✓	
Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening
			✓		✓				✓			✓			
			✓			✓				✓				✓	
			✓				✓				✓				✓
		✓					✓				✓			✓	
Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
			✓			✓			✓					✓	
			✓				✓			✓				✓	
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			✓			✓					✓			✓	
✓				✓					✓			✓			

6th

DISTRICT



Did not respond by deadline



	Dee Andrews				Ana Arce				Sharifah Hardie			
6th District Issues	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
Do you support building more affordable housing in the 6th District?					✓				✓			
Would you support building housing for the homeless in the 6th District?						✓			✓			
Do you believe the city’s efforts to combat crime in the 6th District are sufficient?							✓					✓
Do you think there’s enough business diversity in the 6th District?						✓						✓
Would you support the implementation of an inclusionary zoning plan in the district?					✓				✓			
Do you feel like the following issues are improving or worsening in the 6th District?	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening
Business Climate							✓					✓
Crime								✓				✓
Homelessness								✓				✓
Cleanliness of public space								✓		✓		
Citywide Issues	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
Do you support the ballot measure to permanently extend the Measure A sales tax?					✓							✓
Do you feel Measure A funds have been spent as promised by elected officials?							✓					✓
Would you support dedicating more Measure A funds to restore public safety positions?							✓					✓
Do you feel the city is fiscally responsible?						✓						✓
Do you support the city’s efforts to implement mobility and traffic-mitigation efforts, such as additional crosswalks, bike lanes and road diets?						✓					✓	
Do you support rent control?					✓				✓			
Do you feel the city is doing enough to attract and retain businesses?							✓					✓
Do you support measures to retain local control of land use?					✓				✓			
Do you believe the city is doing enough to address climate change?							✓					✓
Do you support efforts to remove portions of the breakwater?											✓	
Do you think the city is doing enough to address economic inequality?							✓					✓
Are Long Beach officials transparent enough in their leadership?							✓			✓		
Do you support the formation of a Long Beach Community Choice Aggregation program?							✓		✓			



Suely Saro	Craig Ursuy	Josephine Villaseñor
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[illegible]

8th

DISTRICT



Did not respond by deadline

	Al Austin II				Juan Erick Ovalle				Tunua Thrash-Ntuk			
8th District Issues	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
Do you support building more affordable housing in the 8th District?							✓		✓			
Would you support building housing for the homeless in the 8th District?								✓	✓			
Do you support plans to purchase the W.A. Rasic construction building as the new site of Fire Station 9?								✓			✓	
Would you support a vacancy fee for commercial properties?								✓			✓	
Do you think there's enough business diversity in the 8th District?							✓					✓
Do you think the city's efforts to combat crime in the 8th District are sufficient?								✓				✓
Do you feel like the following issues are improving or worsening in the 8th District?	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening	Improving	Somewhat Improving	Somewhat Worsening	Worsening
Business Climate								✓				✓
Crime								✓				✓
Homelessness								✓				✓
Cleanliness of public space								✓				✓
Citywide Issues	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No	Yes	Leaning Yes	Leaning No	No
Do you support the ballot measure to permanently extend the Measure A sales tax?								✓	✓			
Do you feel Measure A funds have been spent as promised by elected officials?								✓		✓		
Would you support dedicating more Measure A funds to restore public safety positions?					✓				✓			
Do you feel the city is fiscally responsible?								✓			✓	
Do you support the city's efforts to implement mobility and traffic-mitigation efforts, such as additional crosswalks, bike lanes and road diets?							✓		✓			
Do you support rent control?								✓		✓		
Do you feel the city is doing enough to attract and retain businesses?								✓			✓	
Do you support measures to retain local control of land use?					✓				✓			
Do you believe the city is doing enough to address climate change?								✓			✓	
Do you support efforts to remove portions of the breakwater?						✓				✓		
Do you think the city is doing enough to address economic inequality?								✓			✓	
Are Long Beach officials transparent enough in their leadership?								✓			✓	
Do you support the formation of a Long Beach Community Choice Aggregation program?					✓				✓			

Work to begin on two additional beach concession stands

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Staff Reporter

The Long Beach City Council approved a \$2.8 million contract to begin the buildout of two more beach concession stands as the city continues its push to activate its shoreline.

The council's vote on Tuesday, Feb. 11, will allow work to proceed on the Junipero and Granada Avenue sites, which, like the Alamitos location, will include a play area and new vendors that the city has yet to name.

In total the contract could be worth as much as \$5 million with cost overruns but will be paid out of the city's Tidelands Fund. (Tidelands funds are designated solely for the space at marinas, beaches and waterways, including the Convention Center, the Queen Mary and adjacent properties such as the Aquarium of the Pacific and Rainbow Harbor.)

Construction began in August on a much larger \$9 million project just south of the Villa Riviera, where a 4,240 square-foot

concession project expected to replace Alfredo's Beach Club was supposed open by this summer. That date has now been pushed back to at least the fall.

The Junipero location is expected to include a playground and cafe area in addition to the concession stand. A full and half-court basketball court and fitness station have already been completed and will be part of the footprint of the Junipero concession project.

The Granada location will also have a fitness station element in addition to the food and dining area but will also include a water play area and a dog washing station. The Granada concession stand is located near the city's only dog beach.

Construction of the two sites is expected to be completed by summer, but the council must first approve tenants to operate them. The city has tried to fill the Alamitos location with local business operators but has yet to announce tenants for that location either.

While the city end of the construction is expected to finish by the summer, a separate process by the tenants to build out the interiors to their specifications would still need to

be completed before the concession stands could open.

Mayor Robert Garcia advised city management that if it needs to revise the search parameters to ease the search process that it shouldn't hesitate to request revisions from the City Council. He said it was imperative

for these concession stands to have quality operators, especially with their expected prominence during the upcoming 2028 Olympics.

"These are home run sites and they deserve home run food and beverage," Garcia said. ■



During its February 11 meeting, the Long Beach City Council approved a \$2.8 million contract for the buildout of concession stands at Granada (pictured) and Junipero beaches. (Rendering courtesy of the City of Long Beach)

City strengthens ban on plastic straws and foam containers

■ By **JASON RUIZ**
Staff Reporter

Long Beach's ban on Styrofoam and similar containers will soon apply to retail sales and expand to include plastic straws after the City Council voted unanimously on Tuesday, Feb. 11, to amend an ordinance it adopted in 2018.

The April 2018 ordinance was implemented with a phased-in approach, with larger businesses being impacted first and smaller ones, like restaurants with less than 100 seats, being hit last. The final phase of that ordinance went into effect in December, but the City Council requested in October that revisions be made to include plastic straws and other materials.

Under the new ordinance, plastic straws could be banned in Long Beach as soon as March. And a ban on retail sales of Styrofoam-like products such as polystyrene egg holders, meat trays sold in grocery stores and packing peanuts used to protect fragile items during deliveries could begin as soon as October.

California already banned plastic straws statewide in 2019, but that law applied to only restaurants. There were exemptions for to-go drinks, and sit-down restaurants could still provide the plastic straws when customers requested them. Long Beach's ordinance would go a step further and ban establishments from providing plastic straws almost entirely.

Diko Melkonian, the city's environmental services manager, said that an exemption would be included in the ordinance for those who need straws as a necessity to be able to drink their beverage. What those straws should be made of is up to the business.

Recently-elected Councilwoman Mary Zendejas, who uses a wheelchair, praised the exemption for people with disabilities.

"As a person with a disability that can't lift up a cup or glass to drink from, I thank you again for all those that are out there in my same situation who don't have the necessary strength to pick up a cup and drink from it, especially when it's full," Zendejas said.

Some businesses like Starbucks, which announced it would phase out straws in 2018, have proactively traded in their signature green straws for lids with sippers on them. After the passage of the amended ordinance, others will either have to follow suit or find an alternative to plastic straw.

"It's really up to them," Melkonian said. "We're trying not to suggest that they use any one particular product, just that it not be plastic. Some restaurants are even offering paper straws or you can buy a metal reusable straw and just keep it for yourself."

When it comes to the foam ban, the existing ordinance has slowly forced businesses throughout the city to transition to alternatives as the phased-in law slowly took hold. Many to-go orders, which were traditionally plated in foam clamshells, are now packaged in wax-lined cardboard boxes.

Mayor Robert Garcia, a self-described avid user of food-delivery services, said that he has seen the impact the city's ban on polystyrene—the generic term for Styrofoam—has had. The addition of plastic straws to the ban should not be that difficult of a transition for businesses, he said.

"I've seen the change that has happened in the last year from some of my favorite places that I just did not like that they still used polystyrene," Garcia said. "And now they've all converted to paper or another product and it's really great."

Tuesday's vote was the first of two procedural votes with the second being

scheduled for the City Council's Feb. 11 meeting. After that, it typically takes about 30 days after the mayor signs a

non-emergency ordinance into law for it to become effective. ■



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George, 19, in the Air Force in 1966.

(Continued from Page 1)

Steve Goodling, president & CEO of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, also regularly advertised in the paper and said he appreciated how Economides “had a pulse for what was going on” and “never shied away from a story that was controversial.” Goodling and others agreed that the Business Journal contributed to the economic success of the city. Jim Michaelian, president and CEO of the Grand Prix Association of Long



George's first Christmas in the U.S. with his parents, 1952.

Beach, said Economides and the Business Journal should be credited for “being a strong proponent of the type of business environment that is now attracting numerous new enterprises to Long Beach.” Former Mayor Bob Foster called

Economides a tireless advocate for business. “He made sure that business issues were at least heard and understood by the various political bodies,” he said. “I can say with certainty that there were many times that his reporting or

opinion made the difference in budget, regulation, public safety and recreation issues in Long Beach.” Foster said Economides never let him sidestep a question, yet they became friends over the years together. “He hosts a sharp wit, a sometimes acerbic tongue, but always demonstrates common sense and a deep concern for Long Beach,” Foster said. “While we did not always agree, it was always a pleasure to sit with him and discuss city, state or national issues.” For journalist and former LBBJ editor Samantha Mehlinger, who worked at the Business Journal for nearly seven years, said Economides gave her the opportunity to work right out of university and cover business news in the city where she grew up. “I quickly learned George had created and sustained something remarkable,” she said. “In a time when the economy wasn’t doing so hot and the print journalism industry was doing even worse, the Business Journal was going strong. It still is.” Mehlinger added: “The community came to rely upon and trust in the publication to shed light on its accomplishments and struggles — and as much as they put their trust in the publication itself, they put their faith in George. He and the LBBJ could always be counted on.”

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A color portrait of George Economides, an older man with glasses, smiling.

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On a personal level, she said her boss saw things for her that she didn't dream for herself. "I will be forever grateful for his mentorship and trust," she said.

Another person whose life has been shaped by the Business Journal is Economides' daughter, April, who stepped in to run the business when her father suffered a stroke last year. Without April to keep things running, Economides said the paper would have shut down.

April grew up talking about the Business Journal at the dinner table because it was her father's passion, and she said it certainly influenced her own career path as a writer and business consultant. Her teenage daughter, Audrey, too, is a writer.

One could say April wasn't an only child — she said the Business Journal also was Economides's baby.

"He has always deeply loved Long Beach and has worked tirelessly to help improve the city," April said.

Economides was just 2 years old when he immigrated to Long Beach from Cyprus. He said his immigrant parents taught him the value of hard work, and the Business Journal was that — "It wasn't easy, but I loved the job," he said, adding that there were often weeks, including holidays, when he worked more than 80 hours.



George with his granddaughter Audrey, 2006.

At its peak, the Business Journal reached a circulation of 40,000, and Economides said lucrative offers

came in from potential buyers regularly, but the paper meant more to him than any of those offers.

"I'm so proud of what we achieved," he said. "We opened peo-
(Please Continue to Page 14)

Congratulations George Economides!



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George on a media panel with former Long Beach Mayor Beverly O'Neill, former Press-Telegram Editor Larry Allison, WestLand Construction founder Dave Neary and others.



George and his father, mid-1990s.

(Continued from Page 13)
ple's eyes on issues like firefighter overtime, city taxes, city salaries ... we were the voice of business."
Leaving the LBBJ in new hands is bittersweet for Economides, but he said he trusts the new owners, who will operate the Business Journal and Long Beach Post. He said, "I hope, and believe the Post will keep an eye on City Hall. They have an important role as watchdogs. Someone has

to keep an eye on how tax dollars are spent."
Other business owners and leaders, including Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Randy Gordon, agreed that Economides played an important role in advocating for businesses, even when it was difficult to do so.
"Although we sometimes disagreed ... I had tremendous respect for him and the mission of the Business Jour-

nal," Gordon said. "We loved talking local politics. He would have been a great political adviser. He knew where many of the political skeletons were buried, and I learned a lot from him."
With his phone ringing every few minutes, Economides said he's been honored to hear from so many well-wishers following the announcement of the sale of the publication. He said he's looking forward to having more time

to spend with friends and family.
In the meantime, he said the most important thing to remember is that the Business Journal deserves continued readership and advertisers: "The city needed a business publication when I started, and it still does. This legacy is going to carry on. I hope the business community continues to support the Business Journal." ■

To our longtime friend, George,
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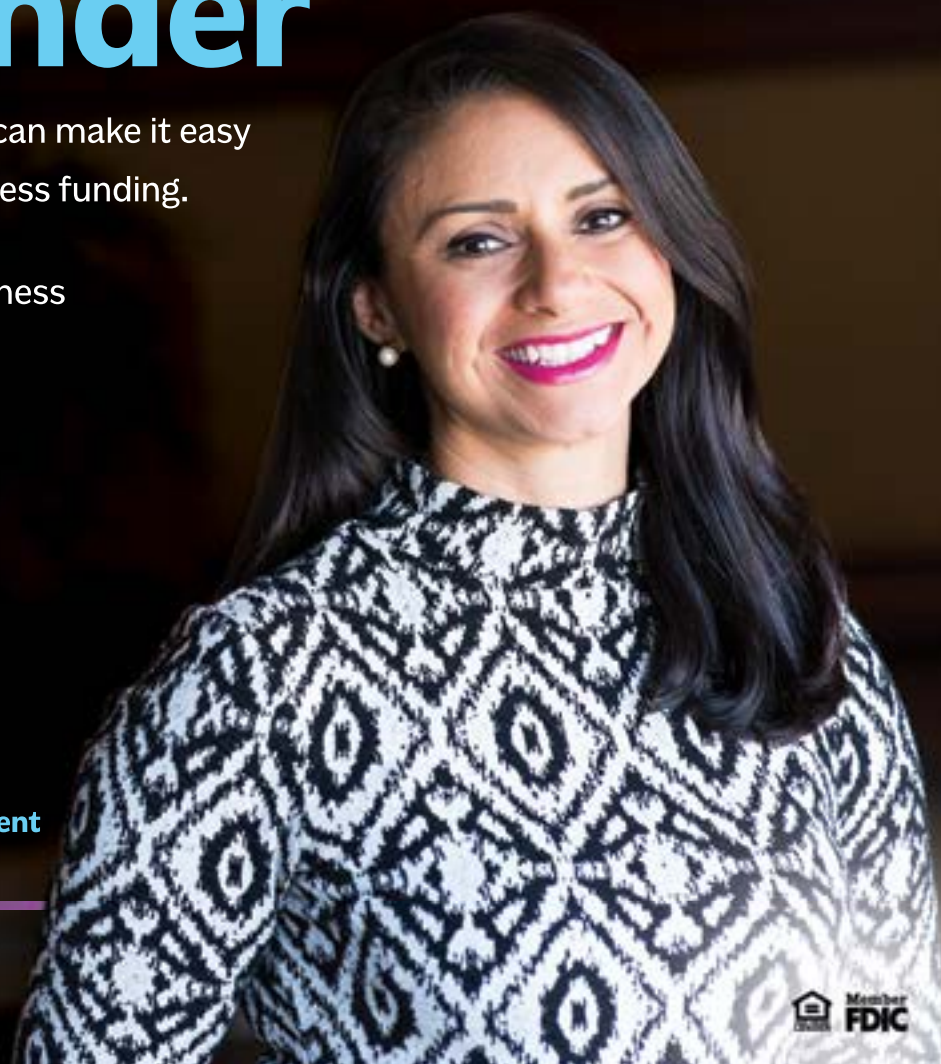
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Congratulations George!



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President/CEO
Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce

John Bishop
Chairman of the Board
Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce

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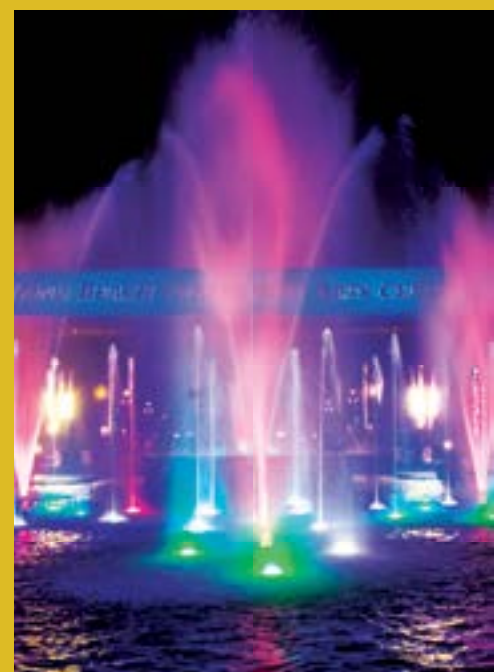


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Heritage Awards

(Continued from Page 1)
how best to preserve and rehabilitate them, and, annually, the group honors people at the vanguard of Long Beach's maintaining and improving the city's collection of architectural beauty and historical importance with its Preservation Awards, the 32nd edition of which will be held March 19 aboard the Queen Mary.
Among the award-winning homes this year is a pair of fairly heroic proj-

ects that rescued some examples of early Long Beach from obscurity, if not outright destruction.
Perhaps most notable is the Joseph and Carrie Torrey House in Willmore City. The 1911 Craftsman was declared a public nuisance by the city in 2010. It had no kitchen, heating or plumbing and was boarded up, though inhabited by squatters.
Slated for demolition in 2012, the Daisy Avenue home was rescued by Charles Nourrcier, who brought it back to life using local contractors, laborers and vendors to restore the

remaining original elements. An indication of the project's success is the fact that the home is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a poster child for preservationist work.
Another exhausting and extensive rehab project of a California Heights residence will be honored by Long Beach Heritage. Owners Kathy Costantino and Janice Watson put in nearly two decades to bring their 1931 Spanish Revival home on Falcon Avenue in California Heights back from a series of sorry alterations to bring the residence back to a prettier past.
They removed the lace stucco, aluminum sliders and 1970s brick, kept all the remaining features and installed era-appropriate fixtures and finishes and took the place back 90 years to its showroom condition.
Aside from the houses, other Preservation Award winners being honored at the ceremony include:
Preservationists of the year: Ana Maria and Kevin McGuan, longtime residents of the Villa Riviera. The couple helped the building secure a Mills Act contract, Ana served for several years on the city's Cultural Heritage Commission and Kevin was appointed to the commission in 2018.
Historic District Guidelines: Long Beach's Development Services Department launched an initiative to

create guidelines to each of the city's 18 historic districts. The guidelines explain the architectural styles that define each neighborhood and offer guidance on maintenance and alterations of residences.
Middough's sign on the Insurance Exchange Building: The building's homeowners association commissioned a restoration of the long-faded advertising sign for Middough's Boys' and Men's Shop, the original occupants of the structure built in 1925.
Trademark Brewing: A former auto shop in the Washington neighborhood was transformed into a craft brewery and taproom in a collaboration between owner/developer Millworks and its tenant Trademark Brewing. The building was adapted for its new use while keeping most of its original features, including woodwork, beams, metal trusses and doors.
Charles Phoenix: The hilarious and encyclopedic entertainer and frequent visitor to Long Beach will host the awards.
A no-host bar and silent auction begin at 5:30 p.m. and the dinner and presentations begin at 7 p.m.
Tickets start at \$125, with all proceeds supporting Long Beach Heritage. For details and tickets, visit tinyurl.com/va5981q/ ■

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Advertisement for Spring Aquatic Academy Course. Title: 'The Effects of Earth's Health on Human Health'. Text describes the course and its focus on human health and Earth's declining health. Includes contact info: 'When: 7-9 PM, March 4, 11, 18 and 25. Cost: \$40 for adults, \$25 for Aquarium members and students. \$10 extra for CEU credit in conjunction with CSULB CCPE (optional). Parking: We will validate parking for course participants. Where: Aquarium of the Pacific Honda Pacific Visions Theater 100 Aquarium Way, Long Beach, CA 90802 Advance Reservations Required. RSVP: (562) 590-3100, ext 0. For additional information, email Adina Metz at ametz@lbaop.org or visit aquariumofpacific.org/aquaticacademy'. Logos for Aquarium of the Pacific and Courtyard are included.

Advertisement for City of Long Beach Bid Opportunities. Table lists various projects with titles, bid numbers, and dates. Includes a section for 'Bidder Registration' with instructions on how to register and a link to the website. Also includes an 'AUTO LIEN SALE AUCTION' section with details on location, dates, and registration hours.

Demand for Downtown apartments will not slow, study says



A construction crane for the Shoreline Gateway luxury tower is pictured with the historic Villa Riviera in Downtown Long Beach. (Photograph by Brian Addison)

■ By **KELLY PUENTE**
Staff Reporter

AMLI Park Broadway, one of Downtown Long Beach's newest luxury apartment complexes, opened in April 2019 with starting rates of around \$2,150 for a studio and \$2,500 for a one bedroom.

Less than a year later, the 222-unit complex at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Broadway is more than 70% full. It's expected to hit more than 90% capacity by the spring, said assistant manager Mike Johnson.

"We saw a big demand for the smaller studios and one bedrooms," he said. "Those went pretty fast."

Long Beach is in the midst of a roughly \$3.5 billion construction boom that will add thousands of new residential units to the Downtown skyline over the next few years. But many of those units will be too costly for the average Long Beach resident as the city faces an affordable housing crisis.

Downtown Long Beach will likely become pricier in the future, and experts say the demand shows no signs of slowing down.

A study released this month from the Downtown Long Beach Alliance, a taxpayer funded property and business improvement district, showed the Downtown residential market had a 93% occupancy rate last year, despite add-

ing more than 500 new housing units.

The number was down slightly from 96% in 2015, due to several new apartment complexes opening last year, according to the study by CoStar Group, a leading provider of real estate information.

While rent per square foot increased last year, overall annual rent growth was just under 1%, which was lower than Downtown's three-year average of 3% from 2016 to 2019.

In total, Downtown's inventory passed 10,000 units, up 6% from 2017.

The study showed that Long Beach, despite its rental increases, remains more affordable than other beach cities and is below the regional average of \$2.55 rent per square foot.

"While annual rent growth in Downtown Long Beach is smaller in comparison to areas such as San Pedro and Downtown Los Angeles, additional metrics such as inventory growth indicate a stable, more affordable market," the study said.

Professor Edward Coulson, the director of research at University of California, Irvine's Center for Real Estate, said the area's high occupancy rates show a steady demand for new housing.

Downtown this year is expected to see more than 400 new units, but Coulson said he doesn't expect the new additions to have much of an effect on occupancy rates.

"Long Beach has long had this reputa-

tion as being relatively more affordable than many other parts of the Southland, and that's created this big construction boom that we're seeing now," he said. "At this rate, we know there's a big demand for high amenity areas and that's anything along the coast. Thousands of people want to live here, and the only thing holding them back is availability."

Coulson said he also doesn't foresee much of an impact on rental prices as more units become available because the demand remains so high, as indicated in the high occupancy rates.

"I think we might see a little slowing in rent increases, but I don't see them coming down," he said.

As for who's renting these pricier Downtown apartments, trends have shown a rise in single, college-educated workers who live alone. One of the fastest growing segments is so-called "metro renters" who comprise about 32% of the Downtown core, according to a 2018 DLBA report.

These residents' average age is about 33, with a median income of \$67,000.

Rising rents have been a major concern throughout Long Beach as city leaders work to address the affordable housing crisis.

Next month, the Planning Commission will consider an inclusionary housing ordinance that would require developers to include affordable units in their developments.

The ordinance is expected to go before the City Council later this year.

For now, many apartment complexes in the Downtown area say the demand remains strong, even for some of the costlier units.

Randa Issa, a spokesperson for Gallery 421, which opened more than a decade ago, said the newer developments haven't impacted occupancy rates for the luxury building at Broadway and Chestnut Avenue. Gallery is currently at 98% occupancy, she said.

"We initially thought there might be an impact but that doesn't seem to be the case," she said. "The demand is still there."

Long Beach's newest luxury complex, Oceanaire Apartments, opened on Ocean Boulevard in August and is at more than 40% occupancy, a spokesperson said. The complex is hoping to see a more than 90% capacity rate by the summer.

The Current Apartments has a 93% occupancy rate, with studios starting at around \$1,900 and one-bedrooms starting at \$2,300, said Jorden Kaufman, a leasing consultant.

Kaufman said occupancy rates have remained stable since the building opened near the corner of Ocean and Alamitos Avenue in 2016.

"We've been pretty steady and I think it speaks to all the amenities—the location near the beach, the walkability, we're close to everything," she said. "People love to live here." ■

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Building a better Long Beach: Expanding care, services for 55,000 vets in Long Beach area



Steel framing has been completed on new inpatient and outpatient facilities at the VA Long Beach campus. Lt. Colonel U.S. Army (Retired) and Chief Engineer Anthony J. Streletz, left, is pictured with Project Manager John Paul Devera at the construction site. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

Development of new outpatient and inpatient mental health facilities are well underway at the VA Long Beach campus,

with a new community living center not far behind. Built in the 1960s, current facilities are not equipped to keep up with advances in medical science as they pertain to utilities, particularly electricity, Chief



Crews are working on three buildings totaling 343,000-square-feet that will increase mental health services at VA Long Beach for 55,000 veterans. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

Engineer Anthony J. Streletz explained. Additionally, the current facilities do not meet modern seismic standards and it was more cost effective to build new than to retrofit the old.

The new inpatient mental health facility will consist of 82,000 square feet in a two-story building and include 45 individual bedrooms with in-suite bathrooms. The current inpatient facility has 30 beds, some of which are in multi-patient rooms. The new facility will focus on acute mental healthcare, particularly for those with symptoms that have reached a level where they are a danger to themselves and others, Streletz said.

“Mental health has always been one of those things that, because it’s not physically seen, a lot of people write off,” Streletz said. “But it actually can be the most detrimental aspect of veteran life.”

The outpatient facility will house mental health support programs, including individual psychiatric assistance, group meetings, drug rehab, social work and posttraumatic stress disorder assistance. The new building will include 80,000 square feet in a two-story building.

“These new facilities [will allow] the ability to bring providers to the veterans and provide space that is conducive to providing those services,” Streletz said. “The community living center: that facility helps to continue creating self-worth – being part of a community and being respected for what they have done.”

The community living center is divided into 10 “small houses” to create an “intimate and homelike atmosphere,” rather than being “just a bed number,” Streletz said. Each house will consist of 12 rooms and feature a dedicated kitchen and lounge area where residents can congregate. The three-story, 181,000-square-foot building also will include a communal lounge area where residents from all 10 housing groups can come together as a

larger community. The facility will house veterans for various lengths of time – ranging from a few weeks to the remainder of their lives – depending on the severity of their needs. The current community living center has 90 beds.

Construction of the mental health buildings began in September 2018 and the steel framing was completed Nov. 12. The two buildings are slated to open in spring 2021.

Site preparations for the community living center began in August. It is expected to open in fall 2021. The \$317 million project is being funded entirely by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

When the three new buildings are complete, demolition of the old buildings will begin. A new, state-of-the-art spinal cord injury and rehabilitation center is slated for the cleared site, Streletz said. The current spinal cord facility serves approximately 120 inpatients and offers rehabilitation services. It is the largest – and oldest – spinal cord facility in the VA system, he noted.

California has the largest population of veterans in the U.S., with about 1.8 million of the country’s 21 million vets calling the state home, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Los Angeles and Orange counties have some of the highest concentrations of vets in the state. VA Long Beach Healthcare System alone has around 55,000 veterans in its service area, Streletz said.

“There’s a lot of sacrifice – not only in body and soul when they put their whole life on the line, but also their families. Many of our veterans are deployed for long periods of time. Those hardships put a lot of strain on our veterans,” Streletz said. “As the department of veterans affairs, our job is to pay back our veterans, for their service, . . . allowing them to live a full life after their service to the country.” ■

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Rent control proposition returns, will appear on November ballot

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

A new measure that would allow municipalities to enact rent control laws on more residential units is headed for the November ballot.

Secretary of State Alex Padilla certified the AIDS Healthcare Foundation-backed initiative, dubbed the Rental Affordability Act, on Feb. 3. The new ballot measure follows the defeat of a similar proposal in 2018, Proposition 10, which voters rejected by a margin of nearly 20%.

“We cannot continue to allow tenants to be constantly pushed out of their homes without continuing to perpetuate the housing affordability and homelessness crises that we’re seeing in the state of California,” said René Moya, campaign manager for the ballot measure and executive director of the nonprofit Housing Is A Human Right, a division of the AIDS foundation.

“We keep asking, ‘Why is homelessness getting worse?’ It is getting worse because we are still not doing anywhere near enough to protect peo-

ple and keep them in their homes.”

The ballot initiative would replace the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act, a law that prohibits municipal rent control regulations for properties built after 1995. If passed, local governments could adopt rent control laws for buildings that are less than 15 years old, the same sliding scale used by Assembly Bill 1842, a statewide set of renter protections that cap annual rental rate increases to 5% plus inflation after going into effect Jan. 1 of this year.

The proposal also would allow for local ordinances limiting rental increases when a unit is vacated by a tenant, a regulation that Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles Executive Director Daniel Yukelson describes as an “absolute killer” for the apartment industry.

“There are a lot of owners out there who have rents that are way below market [rate],” Yukelson said. “Because of price controls in place under various rent stabilization ordinances, it’s impossible to catch up. The only chance they have . . . is when they have vacant units and they

can raise the rent to market.”

If passed by voters and adopted by local governments, the Rental Affordability Act would limit landlord’s ability to raise rent on a vacant unit to no more than 15% over the following three years in addition to other increases allowed under a local ordinance, such as inflation. Single-family homes and condominiums are exempt under Costa-Hawkins and AB 1842; however, the ballot measure would include such rental properties if the landlord owns more than two residences.

“If we don’t do something to help people stay in their homes, ultimately the people who pick up the tab for that are the taxpayers,” Moya said. “There is a balanced approach to take to protect more tenants and to keep those folks in their homes. That is a cheaper option than having to constantly rehouse people as they’re falling into homelessness as a result of skyrocketing rents.”

The full text of the Rental Affordability Act notes that more than 17 million Californians are renters, with the state’s homeownership rate

at its lowest level since the 1940s. Additionally, the initiative states that one-third of California renters spend more than 50% of their income on rent, while many others pay 30% of their income on rent.

Leading up to the 2018 vote on Proposition 10, a combined \$100 million was spent by proponents and opponents of the initiative, according to the association. In a statement following the certification of the ballot initiative, Yukelson said it would be more beneficial for the association and nonprofit to work together to spend money on creating housing rather than “littering front yards and airwaves with more advertising on an issue that has run its course.”

“We need to build more housing units and [this initiative] is only going to discourage that,” Yukelson told the Business Journal. “To defeat this, we’re going to have to raise another \$80 million or so to put up against Weinstein’s \$25 or \$30 million. It’s an incredible waste of money. We could be building houses.” ■

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Stem cell research

(Continued from Page 1)

Klein blames the federal government's resistance to embracing stem cell research for the lack of adequate treatment options that lead to his son's death. "My youngest son died. If they hadn't held it up in D.C., he would be alive," he said. "How many children, how many adults are going to die before they create enough stability to advance therapies that mitigate or cure these chronic diseases?"

For years, Klein – a wealthy real estate developer – had tried to affect change on the federal level, before shifting his attention to his home state. "I became focused on what California could do, because the federal government was encumbered by religious issues," he explained.

Despite having no experience in the field of scientific research, Klein was able to mount a successful campaign, with 59.1% of California voters approving the creation of a state-funded stem cell program and an agency to govern it. The California Institute of Regenerative Medicine held its first meeting in December 2004 and issued its first round of funding in 2006, after battling several challenges to the proposition in state and federal court.

Since then, CIRM's funding has enabled conferences, translational research projects and clinical trials exploring cures for various types of cancers, diabetes and neurological disorders. While a majority of funding went to the University of California's main cam-



Dr. Victoria Fox "feeds" stem cell cultures at Pathways to Stem Cell Science's lab in Torrance. Cultures must be fed regularly to replenish lost nutrients. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

puses as well as regenerative medicine companies and institutes in major hubs like San Diego and the Bay Area, California State University, Long Beach and Torrance-based Pathways to Stem Cell Science have also re-

ceived funds from CIRM.

"CIRM has created a new industry in California that has been tremendously beneficial for the California economy," Dr. Victoria Fox, president of Pathways, told the Business Journal. Her company, which offers stem cell extraction and education services, has received both direct and indirect funding from CIRM.

Last year, Pathways hosted the SPARK Annual Meeting, an event that highlights the scientific accomplishments of students in the SPARK high school summer training program funded through a CIRM grant. Fox's company also provides educational services through CIRM's BRIDGES program at CSULB, in which students from state and junior colleges compete for six-month lab positions at UC research labs.

"[These programs] are important to us, not only because they generate income to operate, but because they generate a workforce," Fox explained.

She said other companies often approach her in search of stem cell scientists. If voters decided not to extend funding for CIRM and its program in November, Fox said she'd be hard-pressed to find an equivalent network for talent acquisition. "I don't know where I'm going to refer companies to find talent. I really don't know."

Dr. Aaron Levine, an associate professor at the School of Public Policy at Georgia Tech, has focused primarily on the intersection between public policy and bioethics. In this context, Levine has followed and reviewed California's stem cell program for years, and he agreed that its impact has been transformative.

"CIRM stepped in to fill a gap when the National Institutes of Health was restricting its funding in this space," Levine said. "The research that CIRM has supported, as well as the training programs, has had quite a big impact on the field."

But Levine also pointed to what he de-

scribed as "missed opportunities," as the program enters its bid for renewal. One example is the new proposal's requirement to commit a certain percentage of funds to finding cures for specific diseases, such as Alzheimers and other neurological disorders.

"From a science policy perspective, I don't really like that. I would like the funding agency to have the flexibility to fund the best science they see submitted, the most promising science," Levine said. Klein argued that setting aside a certain percentage of funds for research on neurological diseases will ensure that they won't be left behind in favor of less costly research projects.

Levine also noted that the program has yet to resolve one crucial question: Who will pay for patients' treatment with costly stem cell therapies once they're ready to hit the market? Per-patient costs for stem cell therapies can easily reach several hundred thousand dollars and as research advances, more patients are expected to qualify.

"Suddenly, that's just such a substantial sum of money that it becomes a fundamental challenge to how we pay for healthcare, how we pay for medicine in the United States," Levine said. Subsidies for California residents, whose taxes helped pay for the research necessary to bring these cures and therapies to market, would be one option, Levine noted.

Despite these concerns, Levine said he supports the measure to extend the program. "Even though this is not the perfect measure, I think there's a lot of value in CIRM and it makes sense to continue it," he said. In the end, it will be up to California voters to decide.

"It largely will rise and fall on whether there's a motivated campaign for and against it and what people who've never really thought about stem cell research as a state ballot issue are going to think about this particular initiative when it comes in the fall," Levine said. ■



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Michigan heart surgeons bring innovation to Long Beach hospital

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
Senior Reporter

After three decades of working together, Dr. Marc Sakwa and Dr. Jeffrey Altshuler have developed a dynamic reminiscent of a married couple that has made it last, even through challenging times.

In conversation and in the operating room, the two cardiovascular surgeons know to play to each others' strengths, and perhaps most importantly, they trust each others' judgement.

"You build up a bond of trust," Altshuler said. "I know that in terms of surgical procedures or difficult cases, he would never ask me to do something he wouldn't do himself."

Now, the two physicians have joined MemorialCare's Heart and Vascular Institute, bringing with them an innovative technique: minimally invasive heart valve surgery. In addition to his role as a surgeon in the operating room, Sakwa will also serve as the institute's system chief of cardiovascular surgery and as medical director of adult cardiovascular surgery at Long Beach Medical Center. Altshuler will take on the

role of medical director of cardiovascular surgery at Saddleback Medical Center in Laguna Hills, while also performing surgeries at Long Beach Medical Center.

Coming from Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan, the two surgeons have built a reputation by specializing in minimally invasive heart surgery. When using this technique, the surgeon foregoes cracking the sternum—the medical term for the breastbone—to access and operate on the heart, instead accessing the organ and its surroundings through a small incision between the ribs.

"It's the same operation that everybody does through the big incision, we can just do it through the small incision," Sakwa explained.

The result isn't just a better cosmetic outcome – traditional sternotomies leave behind a highly visible scar along the breastbone. The technique also brings with it a lower risk of blood transfusion and an expedited recovery time, said Sakwa.

"There's a lot of advantages to it," he said. "It's not pain free. It's still an operation, there's still some recovery, but it's much quicker."

Minimally invasive heart valve



Dr. Marc Sakwa, left, and Dr. Jeffrey Altshuler recently joined MemorialCare's Heart and Vascular Institute. "Coming out here, we've met a lot of people who had a lot of energy to grow things and to take the next step in what they envision cardiac care to be," said Altshuler. (Photograph by Brandon Richardson)

surgery first picked up steam in the mid-1990s. The technique has its limitations. Depending on their individual anatomy, patients may not qualify for a minimally invasive procedure.

Conducting heart surgeries

through a keyhole incision also requires a high level of technical skill, a 2017 review of research and clinical trials published in the German medical journal *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* noted. But, "patients increasing-

(Please Continue to Page 24)



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LONG BEACH POST

(Continued from Page 23)

ly ask for a therapeutic approach that leaves the sternum intact,” the journal reported.

Altshuler and Sakwa would know. The physicians estimated that, together with another colleague at Beaumont Hospital, they had performed over 3,000 such procedures since 2008.

It’s not just their expertise in minimally invasive heart surgery that the two physicians are hoping to bring to Long Beach.

“The way that we ran our practice was that everybody had a niche, everybody had a role,” Sakwa said. The team of experts at Beaumont became a family, he said, as many team members spent decades working side-by-side.

That’s the kind of team Altshuler and Sakwa are planning to build here. Their first weeks at Long Beach Medical Center have been promising, Sakwa said.

“We’re fortunate that the team that’s in place has really bought into our way of thinking,” he noted. “They’re interested in being a cohesive group, so it’s like rebuilding a family again. Which is really important to getting good outcomes and building a strong practice.”

Long Beach Medical Center has a history of innovation in the field of heart health dating back to the 1950s, when resident cardiologist, researcher and educator Dr. Mervyn Ellestad co-invented the modern-day maximum stress test to detect heart disease at the hospital.

More recent achievements include the development of the first blood test to determine the severity of a myocardial infarction, the creation of a cardiology computer registry and the first computer program to detect the size and location of a myocardial infarction. The MemorialCare Heart & Vascular Institute, which spans three campuses in Long Beach, Fountain Valley and Laguna Hills, delivered nearly 20,000 cardiovascular diagnostic tests and treatments last year, according to a press release.

That history was enticing to Altshuler and Sakwa.

“Jeff and I are adventurous guys who were looking for one last change in life. This was an opportunity we couldn’t pass up, based on the reputation and the willingness of the hospital to support what we like to do, which is approach complex cardiac issues in a less invasive way,” Sakwa said. “The weather had nothing to do with it,” he joked. ■



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Philanthropic group pledges \$500K for new adolescent gym

■ By **BRANDON RICHARDSON**
Senior Reporter

The Miller Children's Hospital Long Beach Auxiliary pledged \$500,000 for a new adolescent rehabilitation gym in the new Cherese Mari Laulhere Children's Village, currently under construction on the Long Beach Medical Center campus.

"We have supported various programs that care for younger patients, but we wanted to do something for teens, since they often are overlooked," auxiliary president Linda Dilday stated. "We know that a hospital isn't the coolest place to be for a teen, but the rehabilitation team is creating a space that will offer teen patients moments of happiness and fun while receiving therapy."

A full wing of the new four-story, 80,000-square-foot Children's Village building will be dedicated to three rehabilitation gyms – infant, developmental and adolescent. The gyms will be connected, allowing care teams to share resources and improve group treatments. The adolescent gym will feature floor-length windows facing an outdoor therapy yard that includes a play structure, a track for walking, running and biking,

a rock wall and more.

Designed for patients over 11, the adolescent gym will feature a multitude of equipment options, including treadmills, elliptical machines and weight machines. The facility will serve patients who need specialized physical, occupational and speech therapy, and assist them in increasing their mobility and building their confidence, according to a press release.

"Because the rehabilitation needs of a 2-year-old widely differ from the needs of a teen, it was important that we designed a space for older kids, where they felt supported and comfortable being surrounded by peers of their own age," explained Dr. Graham Tse, chief medical officer for Miller Children's & Women's.

The half-million-dollar contribution is part of a \$60 million campaign to support the construction of the Children's Village, as well as programmatic needs of the state-of-the-art facility. Future services of the facility include a laboratory, a pharmacy, imaging and pediatric doctors in more than 36 specialties.

Funding for the adolescent gym will be raised during the auxiliary's annual designer fashion show, which is sched-

uled for Saturday, Feb. 22, as well as its annual holiday shopping fair and through its operation of the hospital's gift shop.

Since its inception, the philanthropic group has donated more than \$15 million to the Miller Children's & Women's Hospital. Previous donations went to support the surgical center, general pediatrics playrooms, and the Neonatal

Intensive Care Unit Family Center.

"The auxiliary has made a profound impact on children's healthcare for our community," said Sharon Thornton, president of the Miller Children's & Women's Foundation. "They are an amazing group of women who have supported us since we opened our doors 50 years ago." ■

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Caring for the spine



Dr. Philip Yuan

■ By **PHILIP YUAN, M.D.**
Orthopedic surgeon, Spine Center,
MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center

Each year, millions of adults experience chronic back pain that limits certain everyday activities. Back pain can significantly impair a person's quality of life, which is why spinal care is so important.

Tips for a Healthy Spine

Each person's spine is unique and complex, and should be handled with special, careful attention. The spine connects the brain with the rest of the body. It also provides the body with structure and support. When the spine is affected by strain, injury or disease that causes pain, it can seriously impact a person's health and well-being.

There are many factors that can cause acute or chronic back pain. The key to avoiding back pain is prevention. These are some ways you can protect your spine every day:

- Stay active: The spine is meant to move. Your physician can recommend low impact, age-appropriate exercises to keep you safely moving.
- Stretch regularly: This is especially important before strenuous physical activity. Stretching can reduce overall risk of injury and promote spine health. It also helps the body maintain flexibility, promote good joint function and range of motion.
- Get a good night's rest: Sleep heals the muscles and ligaments of the

spine, and the rest of the body. Use a mattress and pillows that provide supportive, comfortable rest. The best position for sleep is on the side because it allows the spine to rest in its natural alignment.

- Reduce sitting time: The pressure applied to discs in your lower spine is three times greater while sitting compared to standing. If your job is sedentary, ensure that your workspace is ergonomic and that you maintain good posture while at your desk. Try to get up and walk around every 20 to 30 minutes.

- Maintain a health weight. Weight, especially around the waistline, strains lower back muscles. A healthy diet will help reduce and prevent excess weight gain and pressure on the spine.

If preventative methods like these are unable to help, work with a physician to identify at-home and/or conservative treatment options that can provide relief. When back pain limits daily activities, and conservative treatments options are unable to help, it may be time to consider surgical spine options.

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back pain should schedule a consultation with an orthopedic spinal surgeon who can provide them with an expert evaluation and diagnosis. Patients seeking spine surgery options can find reassurance in knowing that there is a revolutionary technology called ExcelsiusGPS®. A robotic navigation technology, ExcelsiusGPS elevates precision in spine surgeries to improve surgical accuracy and enhance safety and patient outcomes.

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