

MICROSOFT AND BLIZZARD • NEW NATURE GARDEN • CHEESY PORK KATSU

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Dally  
in the  
Valley

COACHELLA  
IS BACK WITH A  
STELLAR LINEUP  
BY BRETT CALLWOOD



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## CONTENTS

### NEWS: 2

Microsoft moves closer to approval to buy Blizzard Activision.  
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

### NEWS: 3

A new Nature Garden has opened in Bommer Canyon.  
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

### MUSIC: 4

Coachella is back with a stellar lineup.  
BY BRETT CALLWOOD

### FOOD: 7

Hako's cheesy pork katsu is worth the wait.  
BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



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## MICROSOFT EXPECTED TO SECURE TRUST FOR BLIZZARD PURCHASE

### NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH NINTENDO AND NVIDIA COULD HELP SWAY REGULATORS.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Despite international pushback against Microsoft Corp.'s proposed \$69 billion acquisition of Blizzard Activision, recent developments suggest the Xbox manufacturer is shifting regulatory opinions of the merger in its favor.

Newly announced licensing agreements with gaming giants Nintendo, NVIDIA, and Ubitus and Boosteroid – a pair of well-known cloud gaming distributors – have given Microsoft some notable industry co-signs.

Now, Microsoft hopes these new partnerships will help the company secure the regulatory trust needed to acquire Blizzard in June.

On Tuesday, Feb. 21, Microsoft announced a new partnership with NVIDIA, a well-known GPU manufacturer, and Nintendo. The 10-year partnership will enable Xbox PC titles to be played across multiple platforms via the NVIDIA GeForce NOW cloud gaming service.

Brad Smith, Microsoft Vice Chair and President, said the overall goal of this new partnership will be to bring titles – specifically mentioning Blizzard's *Call of Duty (CoD)* – to Nintendo's Switch console across the globe via GeForce Now.

The company also has plans to bring *Minecraft* and other notable games to Chromebooks and Apple operating systems.

Part of the previous concern surrounding the merger piqued around the

possibility Microsoft would dominate competition – and eliminate access to competitor titles.

However, these recent partnerships could demonstrate Microsoft would be willing to offer these titles to customers transparently.

During a conference in Brussels coinciding with Microsoft's announcement on Feb. 21, Smith explained that Microsoft also met with European regulators regarding its proposed purchase of Blizzard Activision.

While Smith did not elaborate about the context of discussions with the European Commission, he did provide more insight to Microsoft's vision, as it pertains to the merger.

"For us at Microsoft, this has never been about spending \$69 billion so that we could acquire titles like *Call of Duty* and make them less available to people. That's actually not a great way to turn a \$69 billion asset into something that will become more valuable over time," Smith said. "To the contrary, since day one, we have been focused on one thing, using this acquisition to bring more games to more people on more platforms and devices than ever before."

The merger had also been met with opposition in Europe. However, while nothing has been finalized, given Microsoft's newest partnerships, once-skeptical European regulators are expected to approve Microsoft's multi-billion dollar purchase as soon as April 25, according to Reuters.

# NATIVE HABITAT EDUCATION AND RESTORATION IN BOMMER CANYON

## THE NEW NATURE GARDEN HAS OPENED INSIDE THE IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Spring is here, and the Irvine Ranch Conservancy has introduced a brand new Nature Garden in Bommer Canyon, ripe for outdoor education.

Located near the Bommer Canyon Cattle Camp, the IRC has transformed a once-overrun portion into an outdoor Nature Garden, designed to provide education about the native habitats within Irvine's acres of protected land.

Detailed through interpretive panels installed by the Planning and Infrastructure team, the Bommer Canyon Nature Garden gives visitors an inside look at the history of the IRC, which includes ranching history and detailed information about the area's native plants – the coastal sage scrub, riparian and grassland ecosystems.

Irvine is home to giant birds of prey like the nationally cherished bald eagle, and also to smaller, lesser known amphibians like the arboreal salamander. Yet these rare species are just fractions of the ecosystem integrated within the historic landmarks of the Irvine Ranch, which has served as Orange County's naturally preserved, 93,000 acre secret garden of biodiversity for more than a century.

Brian Hughes, Interpretive Activities Manager for Irvine Ranch Conservancy, said preserving the history of the IRC is just as important as protecting the land within the Irvine-based conservancy.

"The new Bommer Canyon Nature Garden is all about the past, present and future of the Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks," Hughes said. "IRC staff and volunteers worked closely with the City



Irvine Ranch Conservancy

of Irvine to help create and maintain the Nature Garden, so visitors can learn about Bommer Canyon's history and why the area was developed into a nature preserve."

For more than 15 years, IRC's long list of accomplishments has enlisted the involvement of more than 1,200 local volunteers who have dedicated more than 300,000 hours to overseeing conservation efforts within the historic landmarks of the Irvine Ranch.

"A big part of the success of the Bommer Canyon Nature Garden is the dedication from our IRC volunteers," Hughes said.

Hughes said months of volunteer efforts of weeding, planting and clearing trails made this project possible.

that will be constructed with fire resilient material.

Heading into 2023, specially trained volunteers can help support the IRC's restoration efforts in a variety of ways. Currently, the Native Seed Farm in Irvine is hosting weekend activities. With activities ranked by difficulty, volunteers can choose their preferred type of environment from working on flat stable ground to more expert level work including off-trail and canyon-based remote activities.

In addition to the Native Seed Farm, volunteers can participate in other restoration projects like bird watching. IRC's "community science" bird monitoring efforts within OC Parks' Limestone Canyon Nature Preserve, Agua Chinon Canyon and Weir Canyon are making a difference in the preservation of Orange County's urban wildlands. IRC works with trained volunteers to go between six routes within the canyon sites to survey bird populations several times a year.

Robert Freese, Restoration Ecologist and Program Manager for Irvine Ranch Conservancy explained that bird watching is a great way to gauge the impact natural disasters have on local wildlife populations.

"Our volunteers are very accomplished birders involved with the Audubon Society," Freese said. "The data they collect help us understand migratory bird populations, and how they are impacted by natural disasters like wildfire."

While birds typically migrate during the spring and fall – between April and June, and again between September and October – experts take an additional count of "overwintering birds" in January.

"It's hard to truly see patterns unless you take a long-term perspective. Trends may not materialize for a decade or more, but this work creates a baseline for future surveys," said Freese. "As we do this on an ongoing basis, the longer these surveys are conducted, the more valuable our data sets are. They help us conceptualize the impact of our efforts to rehabilitate our lands and improve habitat for wildlife. The contribution of our volunteers is so important to this effort and will have a tremendous impact on the land for years to come."

"With the plants well established, trails complete and signage installed, the Bommer Canyon Nature Garden is ready to become part of the seven-day access trail system on the Landmarks," said Hughes. "It sits perfectly next to the Nature Loop Trail in Bommer Canyon and is a great spot to rest and learn more about Orange County's urban wildlands."

For the last two years, IRC staff has worked to bring the Native Seed Farm to health, replacing damaged infrastructure and replanting native species for future wildlife restoration projects. However, there is still more work to be done, including the completion of a 3,500 foot irrigation system that includes an intricate system of pipelines and sprinklers

# MUSIC

## DALLY IN THE VALLEY

COACHELLA IS BACK WITH A STELLAR LINEUP.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



Bratty. Photo by Alan Cortés

It's Coachella time again, so we know what that means. Outfits are being chosen, accommodations booked, and the lineup is being carefully scanned as attendees circle the acts that they simply cannot miss. There's nothing quite like a giant music festival, and they don't get any more gigantic than Coachella (at least not in this country).

As ever, the lineup is impressive in its diversity of genre, era, gender and culture, and simply the high level of quality. Headliners Bad Bunny, Blackpink and Frank Ocean have enough pulling power between them to excite a massive amount of people from a huge array of fanbases. But the lineup is overflowing with gems, top to bottom, Friday to Sunday (both weekends).

Perhaps the most "vintage" band on the bill is Blondie. The band that arguably invented pop-punk by being both of those things back when nobody thought that you could, has always managed to attract a varied fan base, thanks to the genre-defying music and the undistilled charisma of frontwoman Debbie Harry. They perform on the two Fridays.

"My nieces are very excited about going," says Blondie drummer Clem Burke. "Within Blondie, our audience is pretty widespread over the generations. Our audience and music is pretty diverse, so it seems to translate to a lot of different generations. We played in Mexico City last night, we did an arena show. The audience was quite young and they were very receptive. We're kind of on a roll. We've been on an arena tour of the UK and that was a very mixed audience. So I don't think it'll be challenging. I think the legacy of the band is the music, the songs. And I think a lot of young women appreciate what Debbie did in the '70s and what the band did in general. It all goes hand in hand."

In-between the Coachella weekends, Blondie plays a headline set at the Greek Theatre. Naturally, that will be a longer set than the festival show they present at Coachella, but the band never disappoints regardless of the setting.

"We're probably going to have a special guest or two [at Coachella]," Burke says. "A few surprises. When we're doing a festival and we're not the headliner, we usually do about 60 minutes from our

Los Bitchos. Photo by Tom Mitchell



two hour show. A lot of hits, a couple of deep cuts, and then a couple of surprises. We'll be ready for it. We're playing the Greek in between the two Coachellas. That'll be the full Blondie show."

Appearing on the Sundays are alt-rockers Momma, a band that has recently been out on tour with Death Cab for Cutie. They're psyched to be on the Coachella bill

"I was actually pleasantly surprised with the lineup," says Allegra Weingarten. "I've been a fan of Underworld for a couple years, and never thought I'd ever have the opportunity to see them live. Same with the Chemical Brothers and

Gorillaz. So I'm really, really excited. As always there's kind of a shortage of rock bands, but that's OK. We were all kind of hoping for Blink 182 to headline."

Weingarten says that they haven't really planned the set out.

"That sounds bad, haha," she says. "We're probably gonna try to put some cool visuals up during our set. But we don't necessarily have any tricks up our sleeve. We're just gonna wear some cool outfits and shred. Easy!!"

Etta Friedman says that they are planning on having a great time though.

"We have friends who are also playing the festival, so I am really excited to hang

out with all of them in the desert," she says. "Plus, my brothers are going to be there the first weekend, and we always have the best time together."

Genre-blurring pop star Ashnikko is equally thrilled.

"This year's lineup is insane," she says. "Frank Ocean, Jai Paul, Rosalia, Björk!! I don't know about y'all, but I am going to have a GOOD time. I have never performed at Coachella, but it has always been the dream festival to play. I feel so grateful that they asked me. I went last year just as a guest and had a silly little time watching Idles, Carolina Polachek, and BROCKHAMPTON."

The singularly-monikered Chris, of Christine & the Queens, has performed at Coachella before.

"I did perform twice there, on my two previous records," Chris says. "The first Coachella was very impressive, quite a milestone for a French artist like me at the time. Got me dreaming a bit bigger but you also know as a performer, a stage is a stage, I remember the sand in my nose and my dancers so thrilled to be there and our white t-shirts in the desert, and my big stilts cause I did Saint Claude perched on them, theatrics as always. The second Coachella was a deep performance at night, then my whole life

# MUSIC



Momma. Photo by Ashley Zhang



Blondie. Photo by Danielle St. Laurent



Ashnikko. Photo by Vasso Vu

changed so I remember less the festival than the city where my world shifted forever. Love you mum."

Rising alt-pop star Bratty, from Mexico, is about to embark on her first ever tour of the United States as she promotes her third album. In fact, this will be her first-ever visit to the US. Obviously, it's her first Coachella, though she has played other large festivals.

"You know there's going to be people that don't know you, and you don't expect how it's going to come across at the

end," Bratty says. "You have 20 minutes or a little time, so you have to play super fast and connect super fast. It's fast, and you have to expect that a lot of people won't know who you are, so you have to present your product in the best way. You know people who attend your own concert know you, they know who you are and they know your songs. It's a different feeling. It's more intimate, more like talking to friends."

Bratty will be performing new songs at Coachella.

"We're going to play new songs from the third album," she says. "We'll play the hits, obviously. We're planning to elevate the shows in general. The costumes, stage production, visuals. We're focusing on a show that is more professional. I'm going to release a new song and hopefully we're going to be playing that at Coachella, too."

Brit-based, multi-national, instrumental party band Los Bitchos say that festivals are where they're in their element.

"I think one of the things I've enjoyed about being in this band is getting to play so many cool festivals," says drummer Nic Crawshaw. "I've grown up watching other bands play outdoor shows and it looks like such a good time. There's something about festival crowds that is really unique. It's just a great time."

They insist that their set is going to be a ton of fun, full of bangers.

"We're gonna throw in a couple of newbies as well, I'm hoping," says guitarist Serra Petale. "We've been playing our debut album quite a lot in the last year, which has been amazing, but we've been working on some new stuff together. It's been a real buzz to be able to play those, just to pepper those in over the last few weeks while we've been on tour."

We can expect new music from the Christine & the Queens set.

"As much as I'm allowed ahead of the album release, but what a release

indeed to finally flesh them out inside my bones - for the next album is a heart opener," Chris says. "Theatrics, poetry. Angels in America inspired set. Killer musicians. A stage design that nods to all I love about musicals and art brut. The stage will give you a sense of the journey I went through, a high distillation of my encounter with the angels. Wings. Little altars. Beings of light. Friends. True love."

Regardless of age and genre, all of the artists are thrilled to be performing at Coachella, and checking out other acts.

"The Gorillaz are on the same day as us, and I really like them," says Clem Burke. "Damon [Albarn] is a diverse musical talent. Blur are headlining two shows at Wembley Arena after this in the summer. But Gorillaz, I'm looking forward to seeing. Or seeing their visuals - you don't really see the band."

"I'm so excited to see Blackpink, Rosalia, Snail Mail," says Bratty. "If I take a picture with some of them, that will be great. Say hi backstage."

And Agustina Ruiz of Los Bitchos says, "I can't wait to see Blondie. We're playing on Sunday. Shit, is Blondie on the Friday? We're there on Saturday and Sunday. That is devastating news. I'm looking forward to seeing Bjork. Also, Blackpink because we've never seen anything like that before."

For all of the festival information, visit [coachella.com](http://coachella.com).

# HAKO'S CHEESY PORK KATSU IS A BEST SELLER IN IRVINE

LOCATED IN THE NORTHWOOD SHOPPING CENTER, IRVINE RESIDENTS HAVE PROVED THAT A 30 MINUTE WAIT IS WORTH HAKO'S CHEESY PORK KATSU EXPERIENCE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

**H**ako Restaurant has become a frequented establishment for Irvine locals seeking to satisfy their katsu cravings. While the crux of Hako's menu caters to various forms of katsu and tonkatsu dishes, *Irvine Weekly* spoke with Hako's owner Paulo Chen, who explained why his cheesy pork katsu has become a best seller in Irvine.

Chen, 36, can still remember his first time eating his mother's home cooked katsu as a child.

"It was a household item – if not once a week it was every other week. It's something my mother made – she fried it in our kitchen, breaded it herself," Chen recalled. "A lot of that has been grandfathered into my restaurant."

So much in fact, that he has parlayed a career in the real estate industry into katsu restaurant ownership.

"I really liked surfing in Newport, I was looking for a place to eat after surfing – I'd always ended up in Irvine," Chen explained. "I just thought that I needed to share my family's recipe with Irvine and Orange County."

For the uninitiated, Hako's cheesy pork katsu is a thick, panko crusted pork loin stuffed with cheese. The cheese stuffed panko-pork is then deep fried, creating a flaky, golden brown cut of pork oozing with melted cheese.

Starting with his mother's recipe, Chen said Hako's cheese-forward dish is the product of a lengthy research and development process, and is still made by hand at Hako each day.



Cheesy katsu



"Every katsu is made by hand – crafted specially by professionals. We put our spices on there, we keep it simple," Chen explained. "No MSG, no artificial flavoring – just salt and pepper, we wrap it, and we have a secret batter that we use in house."

Hako also takes an extra step with its katsu breading.

"Our breading is not just breading, it's three different breads. We source two of them locally, the other comes straight from Japan," he explained. "We have a recipe for the bread as well, so the batter and the bread is our speciality – and the meat as well, because it's very expensive meat."

Chen added that Hako makes each katsu per order.

"I think that's why we have the response that we have," he said. "I wanted to do some special katsu, not the pork katsu, not the chicken katsu. The cheese is something we just R&D for months and months, so we finally got a good recipe for that cheese. We found the perfect template – it was hard in the beginning, it always came loose, it was hard to fry it

because the cheese would exit the pork and be a mess in the fryer."

In Irvine, Hako has plenty of katsu competition. In addition to ethnic eats, Chen understands that Irvine locals have plenty of options when it comes to quick bites. But as far as katsu goes, Chen said his mother's recipe still reigns supreme.

"I think Irvine has every single food," he said. "There's a lot of people doing this – Champion's Curry, CoCo CurryHouse, J San Ramen – I can count five different katsu houses, but they just didn't do it like my family. Don't get me wrong – I really like their katsu, but I wanted to share my family recipe."

Despite the location being tucked behind a set of stairs in the Northwood Town Center, Hako – which translates to 'box' in Japanese – is anything but boxed. Opened in 2018, Chen explained that business began slowly, but has exponentially increased in the years since the pandemic.

"It was a slow start in the beginning, and the pandemic really killed us. But, through hard work and perseverance – it just exploded after the pandemic," he said.

While pandemic-caused setbacks for the restaurant industry became a living nightmare for workers and owners, Chen looks back on the situation as a blessing in disguise.

"I was forced to market, I was forced to do a lot of internet marketing – Door-Dash, different portals and platforms – that really gave my restaurant a face to the rest of the world. Now, three years later, my restaurant is not 90% asian, it's 30% asian, and the rest is white, Hispanic, African, Indian – and now if you come on a Wednesday or Thursday night – you're going to wait about 30 minutes."

Currently, in the process of rebranding, Hako will soon undergo a name change to Katsu House, which Chen said is more representative of the experience. In addition to rebranding, Chen said expansion is also on the horizon.

"The demand is there, everyday I have customers asking to open in their city," he said. "I realized this food isn't just for Asians, this food is for the world, and I think this food should be available to everyone."