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IRVINE WEEKLY

JULY 16, 2021 VOL. 3 • NO. 17



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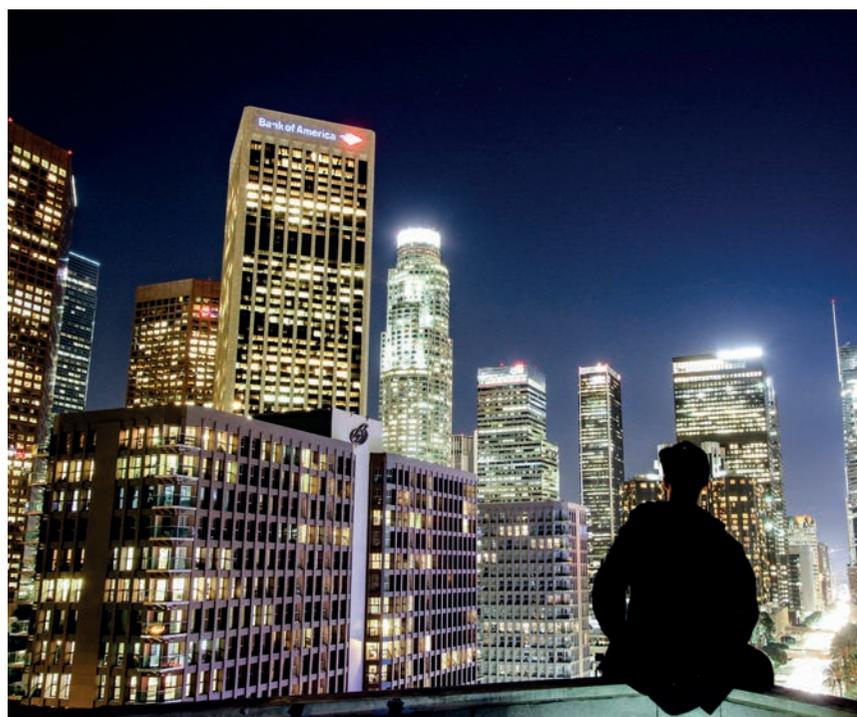
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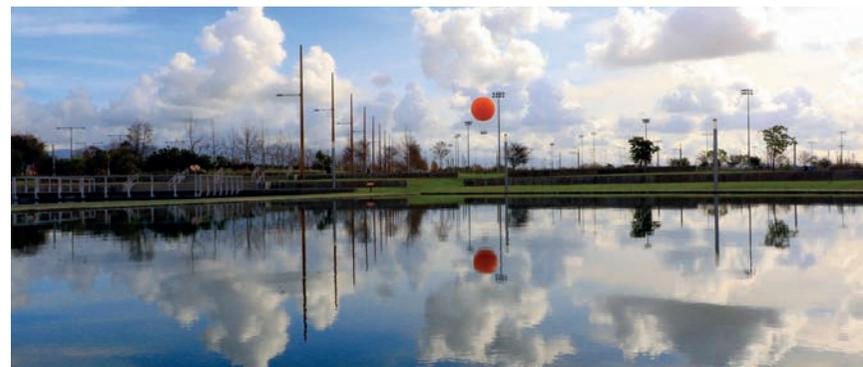
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NEWS FROM AROUND IRVINE

IRVINE WELCOMES WILD RIVERS, VETERANS GROUPS CONTINUE TO BOYCOTT VETERANS CEMETERY IN IRVINE, AND O.C. HEALTH CARE AGENCY DECREASES COVID-19 REPORTING.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



WILD RIVERS BREAKS GROUND, EYEING SUMMER 2022 REOPENING

Irvine's long-awaited waterpark project has acquired the necessary funding needed to begin construction. Now, with the official reopening date on the horizon, members of the Irvine City Council joined Wild Rivers President Mike Riedel in the official groundbreaking ceremony on Wednesday, July 7.

While the \$60 million water park project was expected to break ground in

April, Mike Riedel, president of Wild Rivers, explained that selling the bonds for financing was a "rocky road" to endure, but being able to solidify funding was a monumental step in this project.

"Even in the last week, the deal blew up four times, and had to be put back together," Riedel said during a phone call with *Irvine Weekly* on Thursday, July 1. "But, calm heads prevailed and we ended up getting it done, and there are a lot of people responsible."

With city approval already in place

for months, Riedel explained that while funding was a secondary component, it was the most critical in moving this project into construction. Riedel added that the last few months have been frustrating, admitting that the process of acquiring the necessary funding was "incredibly difficult" for him and his team.

"It's been a very rocky road. It's come with a lot of hardships and events that were just uncanny – unbelievable things that would have to happen to

make it not work," he said. "But at the end of it, I've got a better team – I've got a stronger team – I've got a team I believe in more than any group of people I've had before."

In addition to the waterpark's official groundbreaking ceremony on Wednesday, July 7, Irvine City Councilmember Anthony Kuo, along with Riedel, held a Town Hall Meeting for the public to ask questions and address concerns for this project.

"We've been planning this town hall for a couple of weeks now, but this morning he let me know that all the financing has been secured," Kuo said. "With all that, with all the permitting done, it's just a matter of breaking ground and getting into construction."

Kuo, a life-long resident of Irvine, expressed excitement for the project, adding that the waterpark has been somewhat of a staple in Irvine. Kuo also said that his conversations with Riedel have led him to estimate that Wild Rivers Irvine could open by mid-Summer 2022.

"I don't think it'll be the beginning of next season, but probably the middle of next season – so probably 12 to 13 months from now," according to Kuo.

As for Riedel, he hopes to be relaxed and doesn't plan too far ahead for town hall-style events. But he said he was prepared to share the differences between Wild Rivers 2.0, and is hopeful the larger site design and newer attractions will get people excited for next summer.

"I know my project, I know the history well. We'll do a general overview of what to expect, how it's different. I would certainly express the fact that the waterpark is much bigger, the rides are much better," Riedel explained. "Wild Rivers 1.0 had a number of weak rides, and a number of great rides that you couldn't recreate because of the regulatory requirements, but these rides will be more tried and true than the Wild Rivers 1.0 rides."

132 VETERAN GROUPS FROM COALITION FOR VETERANS CEMETERY

More than 130 veterans groups, which represent thousands of veterans from Orange County, have formed the Orange County Veterans Cemetery Coalition, sharing a common goal of getting a veterans cemetery built in Orange County.

The caveat to that goal, however, is that it will not be built in Irvine.

With the help of elected officials, spe-



06/28/2021

VIEW B - ARTIST RENDERING GYPSUM CANYON CEMETERY DEVELOPMENT ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

cifically Third District Supervisor Don Wagner, momentum is quickly shifting away from the decade-long debates of building an Irvine-based veterans cemetery.

Now, the Veterans Cemetery Coalition, which is comprised of more than 130 veterans groups in Orange County, and Wagner, have shifted their sights to property in Anaheim Hills.

Following the buzz from the press conference at the Anaheim Hills site on Thursday, July 1, momentum is building.

For some veterans, the momentum is palpable.

Nick Berardino, a Vietnam War veteran, and president of the Veterans Alliance of Orange County (VALOR) said after years of stagnancy in Irvine, the current shift in momentum in favor of the Anaheim Hills site is a welcome jolt for local veteran groups.

"This thing is like a rocket going up,"

Berardino said during an interview with *Irvine Weekly*, emphasizing the momentum behind the Anaheim Hills site is not imaginary.

"It's a combination of things. It's property that's away from the urban environment that hasn't garnered opposition from residents," Berardino said. "Veterans are fed-up, and they formed a coalition giving themselves voice for the first time in Orange County history – those two things have put this on the fast track."

Berardino has spoken at length to *Irvine Weekly* regarding his support for a veterans cemetery project in Orange County, likening the years-long debate in Irvine to a political football game.

"Irvine kept pushing and pushing, and took it to the 20 yard line, fumbled – and the veterans picked up the ball, and ran it to the two yard line – that's kind of how this happened," he said.

Wagner, who represents portions of Irvine as Third District Supervisor, said he is in the process of trying to determine project logistics for the Anaheim Hills site, adding that the new site, commonly referred to as Gypsum Canyon, still needs to be designated by the state.

"We're getting an analysis of the site, what's going to be necessary to build it out, in terms of infrastructure, grading etc. We're trying to come up with some reasonable cost estimates, and how to phase the development of the project," Wagner explained in a phone call with *Irvine Weekly* on Wednesday, July 7.

"We're hoping to find that the state will amend the Senator Umberg bill that is on the floor right now to designate our site – or designate Orange County so it doesn't need to be specific."

Wagner, who has been the most vocal member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors in moving this project out

of Irvine and into Anaheim Hills, shared the newest renderings of the Gypsum Canyon veterans cemetery via Twitter, emphasizing that with the help of the Veterans Cemetery Coalition and the support from the Board of Supervisors renderings would soon become a reality.

On Monday, July 5, state Senator Tom Umberg, who introduced Senate Bill 43, sent a mass email to the Veterans Cemetery Coalition, announcing that he will pause SB43 on the Senate floor.

The email, obtained by *Irvine Weekly*, indicates that Umberg will wait until January 2022 in order to give local groups and elected officials the time needed to pursue the Gypsum Canyon site further.

"Although the bill has not changed since it was presented in the Senate, I have decided to postpone the hearing on SB43 until January 2022. By then the

Mayor Farrah Khan speaks at the Wild Rivers groundbreaking ceremony.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE

As of July 7, LADPH reported 1,253,536 cumulative COVID-19 cases, including 24,514 deaths.

In HCA's last daily update, on Tuesday, July 6, O.C. recorded 331 new COVID-19 cases between July 3 and July 6.

In Orange County, the recent July 4 weekend marked the first official holiday weekend residents were able to celebrate without COVID-19 restrictions in place.

Yet, while the county is set to decrease the frequency at which it will report COVID-19 statistics, Dr. Clayton Chau continued to emphasize the importance of vaccination as the main defense against COVID-19.

"Since the reopening of our state on June 15, with many people no longer wearing masks or physically distancing, we've seen a slight increase in our seven-day positivity rate from 0.9% to 11% in the lowest HPI quartile areas. Of most interest is the fact that over 90% of new positive cases were among people who are not fully vaccinated," Chau said in a Wednesday, June 30 statement. "In fact, over 95% of persons hospitalized with COVID-19 had not been fully vaccinated. We know the vaccines work. We are continuing to offer them to our community and encourage everyone who are not vaccinated to do so."

As of July 6, there were a total of 73 patients being treated for COVID-19 in O.C. hospitals, with 11 in the intensive care unit.

Since June, the county's ICU has yet to see a total lower than six, while the number of patients hospitalized for COVID-19 reached a low of 40 on June 26.

proponents of the cemetery at Gypsum Canyon will have an opportunity to demonstrate viability."

O.C. HEALTH AGENCY MOVES TO WEEKLY COVID-19 REPORTING

It has been a month since Orange County celebrated the post-pandemic reopening of its economy on June 15. While health officials are touting COVID-19 vaccination milestones, experts say remaining cautious is the best strategy.

On Tuesday, June 30, the Orange County Health Agency reported that 70% of O.C. residents 18 and older have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

As of July 7, the HCA website indicates that 1,808,022 eligible Orange County residents have been fully vaccinated.

Yet, despite the optimism surrounding reopening, county health officials say there is still reason to exercise caution regarding COVID-19 – even as the county reaches vaccination milestones.

Simultaneously, the county's health agency has announced that it will no longer report daily COVID-19 case totals, and is shifting to a weekly report. The report, according to HCA, will be published every Tuesday, by 5:00 p.m.

With this shift in reporting, local health

experts, like UC Irvine Epidemiologist Andrew Noymer, say that continuing the daily COVID-19 cases counts might actually help – especially considering the county is fully reopened.

"I've looked at those numbers every day since they started publishing them – for the last 400 days in a row without fail," Noymer said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "They announced this [weekly COVID-19 reports] some time ago, it went under the radar, and it was in the fine print, but now they've finally started doing it."

Noymer added that he thinks sooner or later the county will need to go back to daily COVID-19 case counts.

"We're in a lenient period in the summer, the seasonality of the virus is becoming apparent, and a lot of the U.S. population has been vaccinated – not enough, but a lot," Noymer explained. "But, that doesn't mean the pandemic is over. If there's one thing that's consistent messaging is that it's not over yet."

Noymer emphasized that he was not shocked, nor appalled at HCA's decision to shift to weekly reports, but said the data would be welcome from a social standpoint, just to see "what're the COVID numbers doing these days?"

Looking outside of Orange County, Noymer pointed to Los Angeles, where a face mask recommendation is still in

place.

"[Dr.] Barbara Ferrer has gotten a lot of attention lately for recommending masks – even indoors, even for vaccinated people," he said. "Yet, Orange County sees fit to reduce the frequency of COVID reporting, from seven times weekly, to five times a week – to weekly."

On Thursday, July 8, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health reported 515 new COVID-19 cases with 8 new COVID-19 related deaths.



From tracking an arson suspect with infrared cameras along the 241 Toll Road, to ensuring the safety of Silverado Canyon residents when roads were inaccessible from mudslides, the use of aerial drones could very well be showcasing the future of law enforcement in Irvine.

Equipped with a fleet of 11 DJI drones, the Irvine Police Department's aerial drone unit has flown in more than 300 missions since its establishment in 2019.

For drone enthusiasts, DJI is a pioneer in creating accessible drone technology for the public.

Now, a partnership with the Orange County Fire Authority allows the Irvine Police Department drone unit to directly assist OCFA in search and rescue missions, terrain mapping and general wildfire monitoring.

Officially known as the Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Team, IPD's drone program was adopted by the Irvine City Council on September 25, 2018, with an initial budget of \$29,000.

Since then, the IPD's drone unit has grown from a small team of four officers, into nearly a dozen officers, working the UAS Team as collateral assignments.

Officer Christopher Bees, a sergeant with the Irvine Police Department, explained that all the members of IPD's drone unit are on collateral assignment, meaning they work a normal shift, while manning the drone equipment in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities.

"We recently upped to 11, so we now have eight officers, one civilian, myself and one lieutenant," Bees explained. "The drone team is a collateral assignment at Irvine PD, so none of us are full-time. It's similar to our SWAT Team or Crisis Negotiation Team. It's our normal job, plus we do drones."

Bees, is currently a patrol sergeant who has been an Irvine police officer since 2007, and also helped author the UAS policy and is currently the team's lead sergeant.

In terms of aerial equipment, Irvine PD's fleet of DJI drones, the Matrice 300, operates on approximately 35 minutes of flight time.

DJI's Matrice 300, which Bees refers to as the M300, is an intuitive aerial device, as it can host a variety of attachments including infrared cameras. The M300 retails for a base price of approxi-

DRONES OVER IRVINE

HOW LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT IS EVOLVING WITH THE USE OF DRONE TECHNOLOGY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE IRVINE POLICE DEPARTMENT



ogy spans a variety of situations in Irvine and within greater Orange County, while assisting OCFA.

"We have a partnership with Orange County Fire Authority, so we meet with them regularly, train with them regularly and fly with them regularly," he explained.

Bees said the drones are now being used as a tool in mapping traffic incidents and have even been used to provide a visual deterrent while executing surveillance in criminal investigations.

"It helps us do our jobs safer, and reduces the risk to both officers and the public," he explained. "It allows us to see into a place without having to put that officer in danger – or search areas that we couldn't necessarily get to without putting the officer at risk."

While drone technology is anything but new, there is still plenty of public skepticism regarding the ability of law enforcement agencies to overreach boundaries when using this type of surveillance technology.

As one of the authors of IPD's drone unit policy, Bees says he is aware of the negative public opinion involving drone technology, but said privacy and legal-

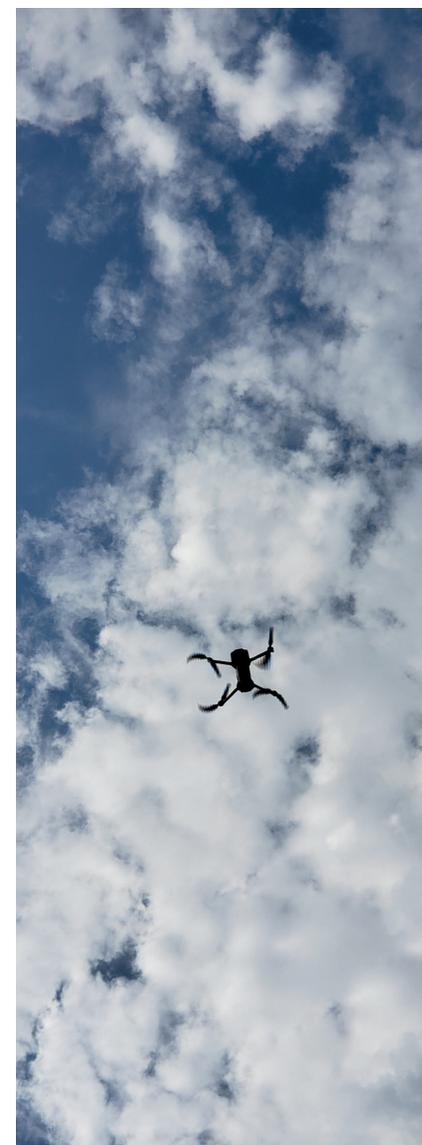
mately \$10,000.

"The M300 is the larger platform, and it has about a 35-40 minute flight time, and it has the ability to house different payloads – you can put a camera on it, a thermal camera, a spotlight, a megaphone," he explained.

Alternatively, Bees added that drones have also become a welcome use in assisting the Irvine Police Department in criminal investigations, as they can become high-intensity situations.

"Often times a drone is a great deterrent – like if you were [a suspect] considering running and you saw a drone nearby, you're probably going to rethink that, right?" Bees points out.

Considering the context of the 300 missions IPD's drone unit has flown, Bees explained that the use of drone technol-



ity were primary focuses when creating IPD's UAS policy.

"I think you can break it down into a couple different points – one would be legality; whatever drone use we're doing, we want to make sure it's in compliance with whatever laws we have," Bees said. "Privacy is a huge one, because we want to utilize these [drones] but at the same time respecting everybody's privacy."

As drone technology becomes more commonplace, Bees said he is willing to bet that more industries outside of law enforcement will continue to incorporate the devices.

"I think it's a matter of time before everybody's utilizing it," Bees said. "Every business, whether law enforcement or not, is looking to use the best technology for the job. Especially as these commercially available drones become more affordable, able to fly longer – it's a lot easier to do our job safer, utilizing these tools when appropriate."

MAGICAL TIKI VIBES

A ROTATING CAST OF MAGICIANS PERFORMS FOR INTIMATE CROWDS AT STOWAWAY.

BY SCOTT FEINBLATT

Both aficionados of tiki culture and anyone who has imbibed in tiki drinks know that the exotic, rum-based, fruity beverages are deceptively powerful potions. Also, there is a mystical quality about the aesthetic of Polynesian pop. Thus, it is very fitting that Stowaway, a charming tiki bar located in The District at Tustin Legacy, should host magic shows. A rotating cast of magicians takes the spotlight for two performances a night, on select evenings, for ticketholders of their intimate Enchanted Escape Magic & Cocktails shows. To get a glimpse behind the magic curtain, this reporter spoke with one of the event's performing founders, Derek "Hubb" Irwin, and checked out his show.

As is the case with many magicians, Hubb's journey started with being fascinated by magic from a young age. "I always liked it as a little kid. I had magic kits; I was watching all the Penn and

Teller stuff; I watched everything on TV – even *The Masked Magician* stuff – I mean, I just loved it," Hubb explained. "There was a magic shop that I would go to called Best Magic; it's off of Magnolia and Orange, in Anaheim. I would go there all the time."

However, it took a while before he was ready to perform. Hubb recalled, "I was always a little intimidated by doing the magic. I was never one for performing, and I kept it kind of a secret that I practiced magic for many years... Then, it started to get out that I could do card tricks and magic and stuff, so people started introducing me as, 'Oh yeah, he's a magician.' And I would be like, 'No, no, no. Don't tell them! I'm not that confident yet!'"

Eventually, his wife helped him change his attitude. "My wife took me [to The Magic Castle] for my birthday," he said. "I didn't even bring a deck of cards. I was like, 'Nope!' But, talking to



a bunch of magicians that I knew of – who now I'm fortunate enough to get to call friends – they were like, 'You should try out; you'd [become] a member, no problem.' So the second time I ever walked in that building was to audition, and it was the most nerve-racking thing I've ever done, for sure. And I got accepted!"

After that, Hubb started visiting The Magic Castle on a weekly basis, where he quickly overcame his apprehension about performing and honed his skills. "I remember ... I would sit behind the table waiting for a crowd, and if I heard somebody coming, I'd get up and run

right away because I was so nervous," he recalled. Before long, he was performing 20-minute sets, one after the other, to anyone who would sit down. Then he began winning competitions that were held there.

Now, when he holds court at the Enchanted Escape Magic & Cocktail show, he is a beacon of enchantment. He and the crew at Stowaway greet guests with smiles and joviality – instantly putting them at ease and getting them in the mood for a mystifying and funny show. Of course, the magic and humor of the performance comprise just the tip of the iceberg. As soon as guests enter Stowaway, they are transported far from the atmosphere of the industrial-chic market of The District's collection of other restaurants, boutiques and food stalls. Exotic, island, lounge music permeates a colorfully lit environment comprised of bamboo and thatched paneling adorned with tikis, masks and other decorative elements that are standards of the Polynesian pop aesthetic.

Depending upon the date of the show, guests may experience the magic of Hubb or one of his fellow founding or guest performers. Hubb recalled how he and fellow Magic Castle performer Jeremy Chan started the Enchanted Escape Magic & Cocktails event.

"Jeremy Chan has a thing called Taste of Magic ... and I know he did a show [at the castle] a couple times, and he does more parlor style, so he sets up the room totally different. He doesn't work behind the bar like me or Lauro [Castillo, who also performs at the tiki bar]. ... During COVID, I kind of reached out to [Jeremy], and was like, 'Hey, I've always wanted to do something.' And we went down to Stowaway, and met there, and talked.



PHOTOS BY JEREMY ESTABILLO CHAN



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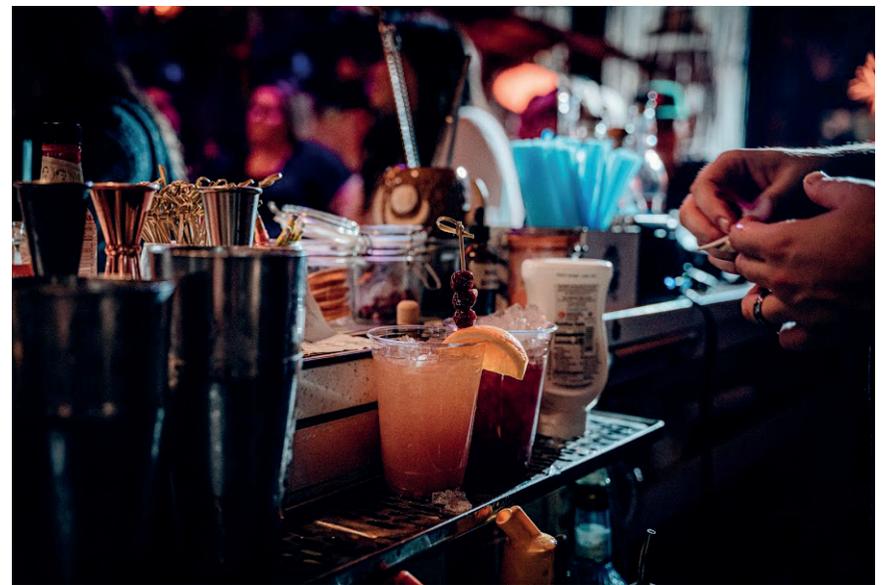
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CULTURE



And I was like, 'Dude, this spot would be perfect for bar magic,' and he was open to it; the owners were open to it, so we set it up, and that's how we got it ... then I met one of their reps for Papa's Pilar [Rum], who came out to the show. She loved it. She reached out to the brand manager out here and told her all about it. We had a conversation; she loved the idea. So they decided to sponsor us. So we're moving forward with doing more with them."

The sponsor's influence is evident in the name of the event's signature drink, Papa's Pog, which is as delicious as it is potent. Other similarly delicious and powerful drinks on the event's drink menu include the Wubba Lubba HUBB HUBB, Hurricane Ash, Mai Tai, Tide Pool, and Frog Grog. In total, the menu has 10 exotic drinks, which range from \$12 - \$15. Popcorn and mixed snack crackers are

complimentary with the drinks, which are served for the first hour of the event – prior to the start of the magic show. While the event is fairly intimate, with about 12 seats per performance, the folks who get there early will snag the best seats, right upfront, at the bar.

Given the tense and contentious attitudes that have abounded throughout the world for the last several years – and as the country is gradually starting to open up as COVID cases dwindle [knock wood] – some elixirs, a little escapism, a little humor, and a little magic are just what the witch doctor ordered.

Tickets for the Enchanted Escape Magic and Cocktails show are \$35. For event dates and times, and to purchase tickets, visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/enchanted-escape-magic-cocktails-tickets-142047717547>



THE ORANGE COUNTY FAIR RETURNS

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE OC FAIR & EVENT CENTER



Hot Cheeto 'n' Cheese Pickles

Key things to know about the 2021 OC Fair

- A limited number of tickets are available each day.
 - Advance online ticket sales only – no transaction fees.
 - Tickets are good only for the date purchased; please choose dates carefully – no refunds.
 - Same-day fair admission is included with tickets to concerts during the fair.
 - OC Fair is not currently planning to increase capacity.
 - Ticket prices will not increase.
 - Sales are no longer restricted to California residents.
 - Masks are required indoors for unvaccinated guests.
- Tickets are \$12 for weekday general admission (Wednesday, Thursday) and \$14 for weekend general admission (Friday, Saturday, Sunday). Admission for seniors (60+) and youth (ages 6-12) is \$7 every day and children 5 and younger are free.

The Orange County Fair will open to limited capacity from Friday, July 16 through Sunday, August 15.

In addition to adorable baby pigs at Centennial Farm and more than 70 food vendors, entertainment is coming back to the fair's Pacific Amphitheatre, in The Hangar, on community stages and throughout the fairgrounds.

On hand to keep fairgoers fed, food vendors include Australian Battered Potatoes, Chuckwagon Wild Hog BBQ, Dutchman's Funnel Cake, Orange Julius and endless hot dog, burger, cotton candy and chicken options as well as Orange County's own Dole Whip.

New menu items for 2021 include Taco de Lengua and Taco de Tripa from Pepe's Mariscos Fresh Mexican Seafood, a 50/50 Brownie Parfait featuring layers of Mom's 50/50 Brownie and Bavarian cream, piled high whipped cream and mini chocolate chips from Mom's Bakeshoppe and deep-fried Hot Dog Bites (choose spicy or regular from Pink's Hot Dogs). Chicken Charlie's will be offering their Waffle cone with buffalo chicken and mac & cheese as well as Chicken Lumpia topped with ice cream. For adventurers, there's also Hot Cheeto 'n' Cheese Pickles, with fresh-brined, extra-thick crinkle-cut dill pickle chips topped with melted cheddar cheese and crunchy Flamin' Hot Cheetos, which can be topped with sliced jalapeños upon request.

This year's Toyota Summer Concert Series in the Pacific Amphitheatre opens with Brantley Gilbert on July 29 and features Rebelution, Cheap Trick with Blue

Cheeto Burger



Oyster Cult, Dwight Yoakam, X with Los Lobos, Cole Swindell and more. Comedian Jo Koy will close out the run of fair-time shows.

In The Hangar, this year's lineup of tribute bands and more opens with Dead Man's Party on July 16 and concerts include ABBA L.A., Elton – The Early Years – A Tribute to Elton John, No Duh/Red Not Chili Peppers, Queen Nation, Mariachi Sol de Mexico de Jose Hernandez and closes with Atomic Punks/Motley Inc. on Aug. 15.

And yes, the All-Alaskan Racing Pigs will be returning as well on a new track.



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TRADE FOOD HALL



People will always be hungry for more. That goes for variety as well as for portions. Luckily for Irvine diners, TRADE Marketplace is adding an eclectic assortment of colorful eateries that are sure to make people lick their chops. With the recent additions of Champion's Curry and SmörBurgers – and the soon-to-be-added Yomie Yogurt and Presoteca – diners have some delectable new reasons to lower their masks.

Champion's Curry, which joined TRADE's collection of restaurants and retail shops in May, is the second U.S. location of a chain that opened its first location in Kanazawa, capital of the Ishikawa Prefecture, in Japan, in 1961. Last year, the company's first U.S. location opened in L.A.'s Little Tokyo. Now, both SoCal locations serve up a modified version of the "Kanazawa curry," which was Chef Yoshikazu Tanaka's own varia-

NEW DINING OPTIONS TO DROOL FOR AT TRADE

BY SCOTT FEINBLATT

tion on a traditional curry recipe. Their recommended dishes include curry rice with the option of freshly fried beef, pork or chicken katsu served on a bed of steamed rice and katsu sandwiches, which are served on a brioche roll with a cup of original or spicy curry for dipping. The full menu can be seen at their site: japanesecurry.com.

Naturally, this writer had to give it a try. As it turns out, there are non-regular dishes that Champion's Curry adds to

its menu for limited promotions, and the Irvine location's general manager, Daichi Koga, recommended that I start out with their Wagyu Steak Curry. This premium specialty dish will likely no longer be available at the time of this article's publication but serves as an example of the varying specialty dishes that Koga said will be featured from time to time, as supplies last. While most of Champion Curry's main entrees range from \$11 (for vegan-friendly

Grilled Veggies) to \$13.50 (for most of their katsu sandwiches and plates), the Wagyu Steak Curry was priced at \$18 and featured medium, slow-cooked Wagyu steak, cut into bite-sized pieces, curry, tomato rakkyo salsa, and rice. For variety's sake, I also took a Chicken Katsu curry dip sandwich, which I would consume upon the digestion of my very filling steak dish.

The steak was cooked perfectly. The original curry was tasty with a fruity zestiness about it, which was complimented perfectly by the recommended beverage, a yuzu-flavored sparkling beverage from the Japanese company Kimino. Later, when I had my katsu chicken sandwich, with a sampling of the spicy curry, I enjoyed that as well. I liked the spicy kick, but both flavors were enjoyable. Koga pointed out that the curry recipe was slightly altered from the original based on available



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TRADE FOOD HALL

will think about offering franchises.

SmörBurgers was the next stop. Situated directly to the left of Champion Curry's location at the TRADE food hall, SmörBurgers similarly opened its first location last year (at Santa Ana's 4th Street Market). Created and operated by celebrity chef Joe Youkhan, the *Chopped* champion's fare gives new perspective to the concept of ordering a burger and fries. The menu features 10 uniquely styled gourmet burgers (ranging from about \$9 - \$14), including the Classic Cali, Bourbon BBQ, Spicy Italiano, Peruvian Pork Belly, Ultimate Mac & Cheese, and Veggie. To read the ingredients for each of these burgers, as listed at their website, smorburgers.com, is to transcend most people's previously held notions about the nature of a hamburger. As apparent from their titles, the burgers (as well as their gourmet ingredients) are themed to reflect international flavors. The seven different types of fries are equally eccentric (ranging from around \$5 - \$14) and include: West Coast Fries, Bacon Mac & Cheese, Loaded Nacho Fries, Peruvian Pork Belly Fries, and Sweet Potato Fries.

At Chef Youkhan's recommendation, I had an Umami Bomb and Black Garlic Truffle Parmesan Fries. The burger consisted of two certified Angus beef patties (as do all of their burgers, which can also be substituted with a vegetarian patty), cave-aged Swiss cheese, house fermented black garlic bacon jam, slow-roasted tomato, grilled mushrooms, and truffle aioli. All of their burgers are served on garlic-herbed Portuguese buns. The fries were tossed in house fermented black garlic herb sauce with a side of truffle aioli, and I was invited to sample seven different choices of gourmet dipping sauces: Bourbon Barbeque, Calabria Aioli, House Special, Black Garlic Ketchup,

Tequila Lime Aioli, and the Black Garlic Truffle Aioli.

Fry orders come with your choice of two sauces; they were all great, but I particularly enjoyed the house sauce and the truffle aioli. In short, the Umami Bomb is my new most favoritest burger in the world, and the fries were a worthy complement.

Second-generation chef Youkhan's diverse approaches to the popular comfort food were influenced by the multi-cultural, culinary influences he experienced growing up in New York. Additionally, he pointed out that if people continue enjoying his brand, he would love to expand to a brick and mortar operations, which he refers to as "Smöre 2.0," with expanded menus, featuring beer, wine, and cocktails – both within and beyond Orange County.

Later this year, Yomie Yogurt and Presotea will be expanding their respective companies by adding locations to TRADE's eclectic collection of eateries. Yomie currently has a location in Rowland Heights, CA – as well as locations in several countries – where they serve a unique assortment of variations on traditional yogurt, featuring natural vitamins, probiotics, milk, and purple rice from a variety of sources around the world. Presotea is a boba tea company, which was founded in Taiwan, in 2006. The uniqueness of their product is based on the ideas that they have developed their own tea blends, which they manufacture using innovative brewing technology.

With all of this variety, TRADE definitely presents diners with some enticing reasons to lower their masks and join the rest of the outdoor diners.

TRADE Marketplace is located at 2222 Michelson Drive, in Irvine. For more information, visit www.tradefoodhall.com

ingredients and as a means to cater to the American palate. We'll see if this company catches on in the states, but at present, the corporation has already

got plans to open its third US. location in Berkeley in the fall; they're currently scouting potential locations in Austin, Las Vegas and Seattle; and soon thereafter

IRVINE NATIVE WINS FOOD NETWORK'S GREAT FOOD TRUCK RACE ALL-STARS

CHEF DANIEL SHEMTOB IS VICTORIOUS ONCE AGAIN WITH HIS POPULAR BORN FROM THE LIME TRUCK.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



opportunities away from the Food Network series.

While winning this recent round of competitive cooking on the Food Network has fueled his desire to expand, Shemtob confessed that his real passion lies within entrepreneurship.

As the co-owner of Hatch Yakitori + Bar in Los Angeles, and an ownership role in a service-industry footwear company Snibbs, it is clear entrepreneurship is in Shemtob's veins.

With The Lime Truck's roots based in Orange County, a brick and mortar at the Irvine Spectrum, along with Westwood, near UCLA, Shemtob has operated The Lime Truck since 2011.

Now, approaching the brand's 10-year



Native of Irvine, Chef Daniel Shemtob, owner of Born From The Lime Truck, became the newest winner of the Food Network's *Great Food Truck Race All-Stars* show, giving his Cali-Mex brand nationwide recognition, and making him and his team \$50,000 richer.

"Winning that was obviously huge, because it's like the best-of-the-best food trucks," Shemtob said to *Irvine Weekly* after claiming his victory. "It was so cool – the prize is \$50K and a belt – the belt is pretty cool."

Featuring Cal-Mex style fare, Born From The Lime Truck features all the well-known culinary staples – a California burrito, tacos, burrito and poke bowls, quesadillas, and a heap of other tasty snacks all made from scratch, with an organic twist.

Shemtob explained that sustainable growth remains a core goal for the future of The Lime Truck. Shemtob hopes to achieve this goal through offerings like Aspen Ridge Sweet and Spicy Steak, Beeler's Pure Pork Slow and Braised Seasoned Pork Belly, Ponzu Marinated Shiitake Mushrooms, and other sustainably sourced eats.

"We're going to open three more corpo-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIEL SHEMTOB

rate stores – we went to doing scratch-made tortillas, so I'm obsessed with masa right now. We have really sick masa in the store, right now. I just want to continue to do the best that I possibly can with what I've been given," he said.

With Born From The Lime Truck's second successful experience competing on the *Great Food Truck Race*, Shemtob's latest culinary victory may seem like an impressive milestone, although he admits his sights are set on bigger

anniversary, Shemtob says the vision for his brand shifted in the sense that it no longer needs to be exclusive to Southern California.

In an interview with *Irvine Weekly*, Shemtob explained that the next phase for the Born From the Lime Truck concept is to introduce a coast-to-coast franchising model that will transport The Lime Truck's organic, signature flavors across the nation.

"I'm absolutely obsessed with entre-

preneurship – there are two conflicting things that pushed me to franchise. One, I have national media – which is really hard to get for restaurants and food trucks – especially in quick service," he said. "Being able to say, 'We're the best of the best food trucks,' but I can only run it in Orange County and L.A. I want to give this to the world, especially because I've had it for so long – it's tattooed on my body – it means so much to me – the idea of sharing it with the world is the ultimate when it comes to entrepreneurship."

Considering his leap into franchising Born From The Lime Truck, Shemtob adds that along with his passion for entrepreneurship, he hopes to find a common ground with other entrepreneurs through collaboration – an inevitable aspect of The Lime Truck's newly announced franchising opportunities, which Shemtob estimates will be

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a welcomed challenge.

"I love working with entrepreneurs, I love being an entrepreneur – I love helping other entrepreneurs. It might be considered intrapreneurship because I'm giving them the building blocks," he said. "I understand there's a chance that some of them will hurt the brand – that's a given – but what I'm hoping, is for these people to excel the brand and make it better, and work together in collaboration."

As a recipient of the Zagat 30 Under 30 Award in 2013, the recent The Great Food Truck Race Champion admits his 10-year residency in the food services industry has matured his way of thinking – with a direct result on how he chooses to build his menus.

"What's the next 10 years going to look like; and that's where I got really inspired – I switched the menus, no hormones, no antibiotics – good quality meat, where I know the farmers," he

said. "I went to five meat alternatives, dropped some of the meat we use because I want to be more sustainable. How do we do a better job for the world? It's still tough when packaging is \$0.90 when you use fully-recyclable packaging, compared to the \$0.15."

Undoubtedly amped from the recent Food Network win, Shemtob says his current five-year plan for Born From The Lime Truck's places 100 franchised stores across the nation.

To jump-start his vision, Shemtob explains he has hired a restaurant operator that pioneered the sandwich building system that Subway utilizes.

"He's probably a little bit too senior, but I'm like the visionary. I want someone that's just epic at restaurant operation," he said. "I brought this guy who invented the assembly line at Subway and Chipotle – he invented it, that's his claim to fame – he's been doing it for a while."





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- Jim and Carol Hoffman

THERE GOES MY HERO

MARVEL'S BLACK WIDOW FINALLY GETS HER DUE THANKS TO SCARLETT JOHANSSON.

BY LINA LECARO



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By now, the fate of Marvel's superhero known as Black Widow, aka Natasha Romanoff, is probably known to all, even those who are not really avid MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) followers. This writer needs to admit right off the bat to being part of the latter camp. I've only seen the first of *The Avengers*, *Iron Man* and *Thor* movies and the second *Captain America*, but I have seen both *Ant Mans*, both *Guardian of the Galaxy*s, plus *Captain Marvel*, *Dr. Strange* and *Black Panther*. *Spiderman* is my favorite so I've seen all of those. Clearly, there are holes in my recognition and understanding of the universe, or rather multiverse, due to what I haven't seen, which, if you count all the Disney+ stuff, is a lot.

Irvine Weekly's resident expert broke down the MCU films and their connection to Disney+'s TV shows in her excellent cover story about *Wandavision* earlier this year, but there's a lot to understand

and it takes effort. Fans love it, but some of us just aren't that invested beyond the action and excitement we all know these movies deliver, especially since the powerhouse visionaries at Disney took over.

So yeah, you don't have to be a Marvel uber-nerd to enjoy the latest "origin story" based movie starring Scarlett Johansson. In fact, it's so well done, you kinda don't even need to know anything about Marvel to be entertained on a face-value level. There's a lot of fighting and expertly-measured CGI-infused fanfare as you might expect, but there's also a lot of chemistry between the leads who are really at the top of their game here, making us believe they are real people with real inner struggles and real relationships with each other.

In terms of learning more about Natasha, we get to see her smalltown American childhood and her "family" life in the opening scenes, which quickly takes a turn to showing us

how she became an assassin in Russia (before she became an Avenger) along with her younger "sister." We come to learn the two siblings were separated and became estranged over the years, with sis Yelena (played with irresistible moxie by *Midsommar's* Florence Pugh) also getting swept up in spy life only to discover that it was due to mind control. In fact, all of the "widows" in Russia have been forced to kill and do nefarious deeds against their will as Natasha once did, thanks to Dreykov (Ray Winstone), who works out of an HQ called the "Red Room," and sends out a masked robot-looking killer by the name of Taskmaster to stop the sisters from learning more. Also, he probably wants revenge on Natasha for killing his daughter, which (thanks Google) was apparently mentioned by bad guy Loki in the original *Avengers* movie.

The connection between the two female leads makes for the heart of the

movie and after playing mostly supporting eye candy in the *Avengers* films, it's truly nice to see Johansson spread her wings and tell Black Widow's story in full. She's still a somewhat dark character (the whole sterilization aspect of her backstory isn't explored deeper, only referenced) but the movie has a lot of light moments thanks to Pugh, and to the comically slanted Alexei Shostakov aka "The Red Guardian" – a perfectly cast David Harbour. He brings the lovability of his *Stranger Things* sheriff to this role as the ladies' "father" and his audaciousness and complexity reminds you that nobody, not even comic book villains, is really all good or all bad. Same goes for Rachel Weisz as the "mom" in this deadly and dysfunctional faux family.

Though the film is mostly set in between *Captain America: Civil War* and *Avengers: Infinity War* (when Romanoff was on the run from the government), by the end and requisite post-credit scene, we are back to the present and – no big surprise – there's a set-up for something new on Disney+ in the works. It appears that Pugh will probably be seeking revenge against Jeremy Renner's Clint Barton in Disney+'s *Hawkeye* due at the end of this year for what transpired in *Avengers: Endgame* (thanks again, Google).

Directed by Cate Shortland and co-produced by Johansson herself, the film does a great job of fleshing out the title character and explaining things that were in some cases, only utterances in previous movies. And again, no matter how much of the franchise you've seen or comprehend, the details enrich the film and backstory on its own.

Is there a feminist subtext that overtly at times and subtly at others, addresses the box Johansson has been put in the past several years by these movies? Totally. And that's what makes it so good. *Black Widow* makes a statement in how Natasha is written, what she wears, who she spends time with and mostly within the full narrative concerning young women turned into Stepford-esque fembots who dress alike and do stuff they don't want to do, all because of a man. Pretty meta if you think about it. You don't have to get every Marvel easter egg, or read comics or watch Disney+ to see it and get it. This is a movie about rebellion, and it's a proper sendoff for one of the *Avengers'* most complex heroes. If her sacrifices in previous films didn't make her supreme badassery obvious, this one does once and for all.

MAKING A SPLASH

ALT-POP BAND WATERPARKS PUT OUT THEIR GREATEST HITS.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



PHOTO BY JAWN ROCHA

Back in May, we published a couple of short articles about alt-pop band Waterparks – a Calendar Pick and one of our “My Favorite Album” columns. Frontman Awsten Knight chose Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet*, so we went with the throwaway gag “Waterparks Man gets Childish” headline. The response from the band’s rabid fanbase was a mixture of ecstatic glee and incredulous disbelief, en masse. So hey, time for a bigger feature. They deserve it.

Waterparks, originally from Houston, Texas, formed nearly 10 years ago and have now put out four albums. Knight is a driven, highly motivated and undeniably hyper cat who seems to have his band’s career mapped out. It’s always been that way.

“I get obsessive with shit,” he says. “If I focus on something, I’m hyper-focused, and I’ve got a lot of goals. I’ve got a big bucket list. So many of them have to do with music and the band that it keeps me pretty stuck to it. Tunnel vision.”

Waterparks’ debut album was *Double Dare* back in 2016 and they were instantly *Alternative Press* darlings thanks to the alt-pop / pop-punk sensibilities. But there was always so much more going on; elements of synthpop, R&B and even hip-hop make their way into the sound, and that blend is something Knight continues to be determined to explore.

“It’s gone off in so many different directions,” he says. “Harder directions, more hardcore. In jazzier directions, R&B, pop – it’s just gone in a million different ways. Industrial, gothy. I like so many things, and I’m thankful because we’re in a time where if you love different kinds of music, you don’t have to be like ‘we’re a rock band,’ ‘we’re a pop-punk band so we make a pop-punk album.’ With our stuff, every song has to be different from each other otherwise they’re not gonna make it on the same release.”

The core of the lineup – Knight, guitarist Geoff Wington and drummer Otto Wood – have been together since 2012, as bassists have rotated in and out. The singer says that’s down to the fact that everyone has a role.

“[[It’s about] seeing how everyone works and thrives, people knowing where to step away and let someone else handle something and where to be more hands-on,” Knight says. “With our merch, I’m the one who knows how to design that so people know to leave me alone and let me do that. I know how to do this, I know what’s gonna look good, I know materials and all that. We know our roles. I’m the most hectic, but the guys being easy-going about stuff keeps it flowing.”

The new album is called *Greatest Hits*. Don’t be confused though; it’s not a “best of” record. It all comes

back to Knight’s meticulous attention to detail. And his hair.

“I knew it was going to be called *Greatest Hits* in 2015, I just didn’t know why,” he says. “I’ve got notebooks where I’ve got it sketched out – the album titles. So much got made for this album, I wanted it to be a “greatest hits” of different eras that people never got. An alternate timeline of us. Normally, our eras are separated by colors. Album one, I had blue hair. The second one, I had purple hair. *Fandom*, I had green hair. For *Greatest Hits*, this is multiple eras which is why I have multiple things going on. The logo for *Greatest Hits* is a bunch of different fonts in different colors. I wanted to make sure that even though it’s supposed to feel like a collection, it’s still cohesive.”

There is a concept, with the events on *Greatest Hits* taking place over the course of one night immediately after the events of *Fandom*. The whole thing is very meta, with Waterparks playing the role of a band within a band. And Knight is always getting inspired.

“I’m always recording what’s around me, especially if there’s some kind of significance, or a vibe or whatever, just with my phone,” he says. “The day *Fandom* came out, I was recording traffic sounds in New York. Also, right when we got back from *Fandom*, it rained in L.A. which it never does. I was walking around my building, recording the rain sounds. I got the sounds from right when *Fandom* was coming out and when it was over, and layered them. I took the clock ticking sounds from the end of *Fandom*, the album ends with those. I started the new album with that.”

The album was recorded during lockdown, both in the studio and at Knight’s desk. The abundance of time that the pandemic offered was used to create, create, create.

“Normally, the writing would happen if there was a week or two between tours,” Knight says. “We’re always gone. But since we were stuck inside for over a year, I was gonna do what I normally do but there was so much more time. There were literally 108 songs made for this album. We had to cut it down from so many songs, that I love. Everything has to be a different style or it’s not going to be on the same album. So it’s like asking if you prefer Italian, Chinese or Mexican food. It’s all different – whatever you’re in the mood for that day.”

Knight moved from Houston to Los Angeles in 2018, so that he could be closer to the label, management, studio, etc. The other two are spread out, but they make it work. The internet has made the world a very small place.

“We’ll get together before a tour and rehearse for a week or whatever, so things still get done,” Knight says. “We make it work and use time wisely.”

We would expect nothing less from Knight, the ultimate organizer. With that in mind, Waterparks are preparing to tour *Greatest Hits* this year.

“It’s selling faster than any U.S. tour we’ve done, which is awesome,” he says. “We’re doing the biggest rooms we’ve done in America. We’re playing the Wiltern in L.A. on December 6.”

Should be a blast.

Waterparks’ Greatest Hits is out now. They play at 6 p.m. on Monday, December 6 at the Wiltern.

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