



UC Irvine and local business team up to produce new type of mask

BY BEN BRAZIL

UC Irvine physicians and a local fabric cutting business are working together to produce thousands of face masks for hospital workers from a material used to sterilize surgical equipment.

Dr. Aditi Sharma, a resident physician in the UC Irvine Health dermatology department, said the sterilization wraps can be used in masks that filter up to 87% of particles, which is almost as effective as N95 masks, which have a filtration efficiency of 95%.

Sharma believes the masks can be produced in abundance, helping solve the national mask shortage in hospitals. It would also allow for hospital personnel to be well protected, while preserving N95 masks for important procedures.

"I am not suggesting we would use this instead of the N95," Sharma said. "But I think that this brings out a huge discussion about universal masking. Maybe this is the mask that all the custodial, cafeteria and healthcare workers are wearing, then we save the N95 for truly aerosolized procedures or patients who have tested positive."

Sharma started working on the masks after she read an article about a month ago by University

of Florida researchers that said the surgical wraps could possibly be used for masks. However, there wasn't enough data to show its efficacy.

Helping solve one of the pivotal obstacles facing the health-care industry during the pandemic is a natural role for

"We are in the same situation as most of the country: if we don't start thinking about these reusable, innovative options, we are all going to be in a crunch."

— Aditi Sharma

Resident physician in the UC Irvine Health dermatology department

Sharma, who has an undergraduate degree in biomedical engineering. She also worked at the National Institutes of Health, focusing on bioterrorism and biowarfare agents with Dr. Anthony Fauci, who serves as the Trump administration's foremost medical expert in the COVID-19

pandemic.

Sharma and UCI anesthesiologist Dr. Melissa Chang set out to prove the effectiveness of the material. For this, they partnered with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Greg Rutledge, an MIT chemical engineering expert, tested the masks sent over by the UCI physicians, finding that the material could filter up to 87% of particles when a double layer was used.

The UCI physicians sent over Halyard H600 sterilization wraps. Hospitals also regularly use Gemini wraps to clean surgical equipment, but a double-layered mask of that material only filtered up to 74% of particles.

"It's not as great as the N95, but far superior to the cloth masks being handed out that only filter 26%," Sharma said.

Currently, both types of sterilization wraps are used strictly to sterilize surgical instruments. The equipment is wrapped in the material and run through a sterilization machine. The wraps are then thrown away.

But the physicians believe repurposing the wraps for masks is a way for hospitals to recycle and limit waste. The masks could also potentially be run through the sterilization machine to make

See **Masks**, page R6

TOP PHOTO: Jenny Farrell, right, with OC Cutworks and her mother Preechar Sullivan work on a pattern to create face masks. **BELOW:** Dr. Melissa Chang, left, and Dr. Aditi Sharma from UC Irvine set out to prove the effectiveness of the surgical wraps to filter up to 87% of air particles when worn.

Photos by Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer



Seal Beach sues oil producer, alleging millions in unpaid taxes

BY JEANNETTE ANTONGIORGI ANDRUSS

Does one of California's biggest oil companies owe one of Orange County's smallest coastal cities millions of dollars?

The question could be answered in court.

Seal Beach, population 24,000, recently sued California Resources Corp., which describes itself as "the largest oil and natural gas producer in California on a gross-operated basis."

The complaint seeks "a court's order to stop CRC from operating without a business license and for the payment of back taxes," according to Seal Beach City Atty. Craig Steele.

The lawsuit filed in Orange County Superior Court has yet to be served because of delays related to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Sometimes large companies feel like they can get away with not following the proper laws because we are a small City," Councilman Thomas Moore wrote in an email. "I hope this sends a message that Seal Beach will not put up with that."

For the past 18 months, prompted by research from an outside consultant, Seal Beach has been demanding CRC obtain a business license for its slant drilling operation that pumps crude from wells bottomed off the coast of the city to an oil processing island owned by and located in neighboring Long Beach. Started in 2005, the roughly 30 wells are bottomed within Seal Beach's municipal boundary but are on land owned by the state that is leased to CRC.

CRC maintains it does not need a Seal Beach business license and points to past case law and the city's own municipal code as its evidence.

The city previously said CRC owed more \$9 million.

"It is unfortunate that the City apparently intends to waste residents' tax dollars on a meritless claim manufactured by a consultant the City retained under questionable circumstances," Michael Mills, outside counsel for CRC, wrote in a statement.

Steele did not specify a dollar amount being sought and wrote: "The City will seek the full amount of the back taxes due for the oil CRC has extracted from the City, in an amount to be proved, as well as attorneys' fees and costs of collection."

After months of negotiations, the city set a March 31 deadline for CRC

to get a business license and pay taxes due from September 2018 to the present "after which the city would agree to discuss the amount of back taxes due," according to Steele.

The lawsuit came days after reports CRC was considering bankruptcy amid its rising debt and crashing energy prices. CRC issued a news release regarding the speculation that read, in part, "We will continue to consider all options with our advisors as we work through this unprecedented downturn."

"That was part of the reason for taking legal action at this time," Seal Beach Mayor Pro Tem Joe Kalmick said in a phone interview. "It protects our legal position if they do go bankrupt because we are suing them for back taxes."

'FREE CONTRACT'

The city's consultant is Laguna Niguel-based Greg Kirste doing business as Municipal Petroleum Analysts. In late 2017, Kirste told city leaders he had found millions of dollars in unpaid oil fees without publicly naming the sources.

Seal Beach was in a financial crisis. Leaders were talking about raising taxes and borrowing money from a community pool fund to hire police officers.

At the June 11, 2018, council meeting, city staff recommended hiring Kirste.

Kirste pitched his "free contract," saying the city would not have to pay anything up front. His compensation would be 15% of whatever he collected for the city.

"It's entirely free, unless I find something," he said.

Then-Mayor Mike Varipapa was skeptical of the unusual contingency fee arrangement and concerned about Kirste's lack of experience relative to other consultants.

"This isn't small pocket change that we're talking about," Varipapa said. "This is big money that we're going forward with."

Some residents questioned why these unpaid oil fees were not revealed when Kirste was hired to audit the city's oil businesses in 2013 and 2014. He noted he did obtain \$200,000 from a delinquent oil producer to Seal Beach in 2014.

"I believe that everything that was asked of me during the contract was delivered," Kirste said during a July 23, 2018, council meeting.

At that meeting, council hired Kirste by a 3-2 vote. Moore cast the deciding vote after Kirste's contract



Stuart Palley | For The Times

THE LAWSUIT filed by the city of Seal Beach accuses California Resources Corporation of operating without a business license and owing the city millions in back taxes.

was reworked to exclude Crimson Pipeline, a client of Moore's employer.

Two months later, Kirste sent a letter to CRC arguing the oil company owed Seal Beach more than \$9.3 million in fees, back taxes and penalties. The amount was based on calculations citing various parts of the municipal code. That included a portion that says the city's tax collector may determine the amount of business tax owed by any business operating without a license.

CRC called the demand "bogus."

By September 2019, Kirste said CRC owed more than \$13.4 million which meant he stood to earn around \$2 million.

'THERE NEVER WAS A POT OF GOLD'

Seal Beach hired Kirste amid financial challenges, and its lawsuit comes during an arguably more severe economic crisis.

Voters approved a 1% sales tax hike in November 2018 that stabilized finances. With businesses now shuttered and people staying home, city coffers, which are deeply dependent on sales taxes and other declining sources, will likely take a hit.

"Every City in the U.S. is going to see revenue declines as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the City of Seal Beach is no exception," Finance Director Kelly Telford wrote in an email.

Telford said her office plans to present projections of the economic impact of coronavirus to the City Council on May 11.

OIL MAY FLOW INTO REVENUE

So, will Seal Beach see millions of dollars from CRC? Kalmick said we'll know more once CRC is served and it may ultimately be up to a judge to decide.

"There never was a pot of gold, in my opinion," Kalmick said.

He's the only current council member who was not in office when Kirste's contract was approved.

"From my perspective as the new person, it seemed like it was a bit overly optimistic to assume there was that kind of money there," Kalmick said.

He expressed understanding for his colleagues: "I wouldn't fault the council for getting wide-eyed."

He said he voted to sue CRC not necessarily because of a potentially huge pay day but because "we should not let someone who is legally bound to pay a business tax not pay."

"It's about asking about what's due us regardless the amount of money," Kalmick said.

KIRSTE 'HAS NO KNOWLEDGE OF CITY'S LEGAL STRATEGY'

While Kirste was instrumental in starting the legal fight against CRC, he has not been involved in negotiations for months.

According to Steele, Kirste is not authorized to speak to the press on behalf of the city.

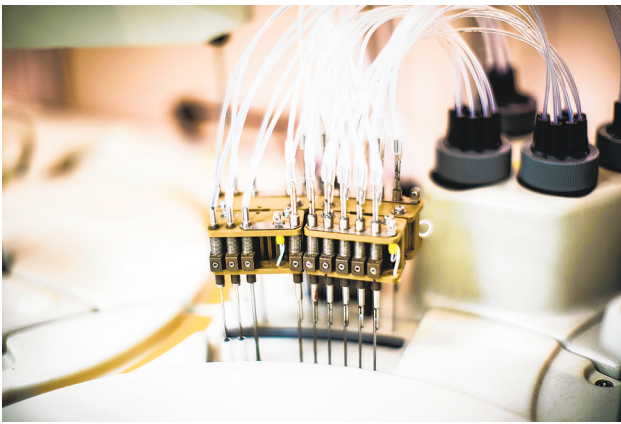
"He has no knowledge of the City's legal strategy, timing, theories or the remedies we will seek as we have not discussed any of that with him," Steele explained. In a follow-up email, Steele said Kirste will likely be a witness in the litigation as his "records and research are relevant to the case."

Kirste declined to comment, saying he was waiting to see the complaint first. But he did say that he had been authorized by the city to pursue a second source of unpaid oil revenue that he did not reveal.

Steele's response: "I am not aware of any other verified revenue opportunities that Mr. Kirste has brought forward."

JEANNETTE ANTONGIORGI ANDRUSS

is a contributor to TimesOC. Follow her on Twitter @NetteAndruss.



Courtesy of Antech

ANTECH, a veterinary reference laboratory headquartered in Fountain Valley, recently began a surveillance program to test pets for coronavirus.

F.V. veterinary lab's COVID-19 surveillance program detects virus in two New York cats

BY JESSICA PERALTA

Though Antech has worked daily for more than 30 years in the field of animal wellness, it's likely many pet owners have never heard of it.

Antech, which is headquartered in Fountain Valley but operates more than 70 laboratories, processes the bloodwork, urine or fecal samples of sick pets.

"We have over 90,000 samples on any given day that we have come through our reference laboratories," said Jennifer Klein, vice president of marketing at Antech. "We have the largest laboratory network in North America."

In early March, it began a surveillance program in pets to detect coronavirus, the virus that causes COVID-19, in samples submitted through its veterinarians.

Until recently, all samples had tested negative, but on April 22, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) announced the first confirmed cases of coronavirus infection in two pet cats in New York state — the first pets in the U.S. to test positive.

"The surveillance program is being conducted as part of our efforts to really understand the emergence of this virus," said veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Ogeer, vice president of medical affairs at Antech.

Ogeer said that since beginning the program in March, more than 2,000 samples have been submitted by veterinarians it serves and analyzed through its program. If a dog or cat goes to the vet and has symptoms like abnormal breathing, lethargy and diarrhea, the vet collects a sample for a respiratory test at Antech. The

lab then tests the sample using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis for a host of viruses and bacteria, including the coronavirus.

"We get quite a number of veterinarians submitting samples on a regular basis," Ogeer said.

The samples from the two cats living in separate areas of New York state arrived to Antech's Fountain Valley headquarters in April. When the samples tested positive, the lab followed protocol and notified the USDA.

"They worked very quickly ... and have been very good about communicating back to us," Ogeer said.

According to a USDA news release, both cats had mild respiratory symptoms and are expected to fully recover. In one of the cases, no one in the home had been confirmed ill with COVID-19, but the owner of the second cat had tested positive.

Another cat in the second cat's home had shown no signs of illness, according to the release.

Though these are the first confirmed cases of pets in the U.S. testing positive, there have been a small number of pets — both dogs and cats — reported as infected with the virus, according to the CDC's website. Only a few showed signs of illness.

The first case in the U.S. of any animal testing positive was a tiger with a respiratory illness at a New York City zoo.

Ogeer said cats may be more susceptible to infection.

"Cats have this ACE receptor that is very similar to what humans have that allows the virus to attach, but it's varying degrees of susceptibility," she said. "They have to be exposed to humans that have it or

See *Antech*, page R6

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Voters may have another chance to decide location of Irvine veterans cemetery

BY BEN BRAZIL

The site of a controversial veterans cemetery in Irvine could once again be considered by voters after the Orange County Registrar of Voters approved an initiative Tuesday night that was signed by thousands of residents.

The initiative would re-zone a 125-acre area near the Orange County Great Park, known as the ARDA site, for the long-awaited cemetery, blocking it from being built on any other Great Park land.

The petition was filed by Larry Agran, a former Irvine mayor and councilman who has for years been supporting the construction of the cemetery on the ARDA site.

The Irvine City Council, on the other hand, favors the construction of the cemetery on a piece of land in the Great Park that was once destined to be a golf course. That site would be developed in partnership with Great Park developer FivePoint Holdings.

Both sites were part of the now-defunct El Toro Marine Corps Air Station.

Irvine City Clerk Molly Perry said the initiative will be taken up at the next Irvine City Council meeting on May 12. The council will

consider certifying the petition, then will decide whether to adopt the initiative or place it on the ballot for the Nov. 3 election, which is more likely.

"Having qualified this for the ballot, it's the best chance to absolutely say yes to the veterans memorial park and cemetery on that site and at the same time to say no to the developer-inspired, developer-promoted office, commercial and industrial development," Agran said over the phone.

The group, Build the Great Park Veterans Cemetery committee, gathered more than 19,000 signatures for the petition. Only 12,888 signatures needed to be verified for the Registrar's office to approve it.

Irvine Mayor Christina Shea said she will add an opposing initiative to the ballot to allow Irvine voters to support the golf course site.

"We are going to move forward and certify the referendum and then my suggestion is to put it on the ballot, but also put an additional suggestion for the voters to look at the golf course site we have brought forward," Shea said. "The council voted to support

See *Cemetery*, page R5



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‘A TSUNAMI OF KINDNESS’

Vietnamese Americans launch nationwide giving campaign 45 years after Fall of Saigon.

BY ADA TSENG

In early March, a week before President Trump announced a travel ban from much of Europe, Ted Nguyen had just come back from a two-week vacation in Spain, Morocco and France.

What began as a whimsical holiday of sightseeing and tapas bars took a dark turn, as Nguyen saw the coronavirus pandemic swiftly take hold in those countries.

Back in Orange County and self-quarantining, he felt he had seen a glimpse of America's future. The numbers of infections and deaths were rising exponentially abroad, and by the end of the month, news spread that medical centers in Spain and Italy were overwhelmed, their doctors and nurses begging the government to provide more masks and gloves.

At the same time, he saw his longtime friends in the Little Saigon nail industry — including Johnny Ngo of Whale Spa salon furniture store in Huntington Beach, Tam Nguyen of Advance Beauty College of Garden Grove and Laguna Hills, and Christie Nguyen of Tustin's Studio 18 Nail Bar — struggling with their businesses, yet thinking about how they could rally the community to donate their masks to healthcare workers.

Ted Nguyen knew how to help elevate their efforts. He's the manager of public communications and media relations for the Orange County Transportation Authority.

So he organized a media campaign and helped those friends with large networks in the local Vietnamese American business community execute it.

In 10 days in early April, they collected 120,000 medical-grade masks and 300,000 gloves locally — a market value of approximately \$3 million.

Giving back is embedded in Vietnamese American culture, Ted Nguyen said.

“Before COVID-19, there were always multiple social events every weekend,” he said. “But these social events were always fundraisers to different causes ... It's an amazing culture of giving that's often untold because people are



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

RECESS ROOM family members and volunteers, including Kim Phuong Huynh, Huong Pham and co-owners Kim Huynh and Viet Pham, woke up in the early hours of April 30 to prep spring rolls and couscous as part of Nailing It For America's effort to feed the hungry on the 45th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon.

so humble when they give back.”

When the “Nailing It” volunteers saw the swelling of support, they wanted to do more.

On April 23, 20 local Vietnamese restaurants joined their efforts and delivered 20,000 meals to medical centers, grocery store workers, senior facilities, shelters and others in need.

One organization they partnered with was the OC Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA), which serves low-income communities of color in Orange County.

According to co-founder and Executive Director Mary Anne Foo, the organization has seen its volume of calls triple during the pandemic, whether folks are struggling with their mental health, asking for help applying for unemployment insurance or worried taking assistance would be considered public charge and jeopardize their immigration and citizenship statuses.

OCAPICA distributed the meals among clients, including homeless youth, that had appointments in their office, but also used it as

an opportunity for their case workers to check on their clients in person as they delivered the food.

“We reach out to community members who already feel isolated,” explained Foo. “Maybe they don't have access to the internet or English is their second language and they might feel linguistically isolated.”

She points to some elderly clients who are afraid to leave the house because they've heard about the elderly Asian man attacked in San Francisco and the Burmese parents and children stabbed in Texas.

Closer to home, a video of two Garden Grove students taunting Vietnamese American classmates by shouting “coronavirus” at them during a school cultural assembly went viral in March.

“It's made people feel helpless,” she said. “And this meal given to them, especially knowing that these restaurants are under so much pressure, facing challenges and maybe even going out of business, that they still thought of them ... People were very

touched.”

The restaurants were challenged to make 1,975 food items, in honor of the 45th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

“The 30th of April is a milestone date for us that will be forever etched into my heart,” Ted Nguyen said. “That was the date that Saigon fell, but also the date that we became born as Americans, because of the generosity of sponsoring families.”

Both Ted Nguyen and Tam Nguyen had fathers in the South Vietnamese navy who had to leave immediately on April 30 when Saigon fell, because they would have been targeted by the Viet Cong.

Then 5, Ted Nguyen, grasping the teddy bear that would inspire his American nickname “Ted,” and his family ended up in Camp Pendleton, coincidentally where Tam Nguyen's father also landed, after he was separated from his pregnant wife and 1-year-old son, Tam.

Tam Nguyen's family would be reunited a few months later in

Santa Cruz. Ted Nguyen's family ended up in deserts of Sierra Vista, Ariz., about 15 miles from the Mexican border. His father went door to door asking neighbors if he could paint their homes, his mother sewed clothing and that was how they built their new lives in America.

“Whenever I see someone with a T-shirt or hat that identifies them as a Vietnam War veteran, I always tell them I want to thank them for their service,” he said, choking up. “‘You're the reason I'm here. I don't even know half of what you've been through, but your sacrifices allowed me and my family to be here and to be successful.’”

“We told ourselves as a family that we'll never ever forget that, and we'll always try to give back to the community and to the country that embraced the refugees when we had nowhere to go.”

What started as “Nailing it for Health Care Workers,” their logo shaped like a nail file, has evolved into “Nailing it for America.”

The event was not only a chance for the local community to donate, but a call-out to other Vietnamese American communities across the nation to join them on April 30, for a third and exponentially larger wave of giving.

And all the communities with significant Vietnamese populations, from San Jose to New York to Houston to San Diego, responded.

Charlie Quy Ton, CEO of Regal Nail, the largest nail chain in the country, pledged to donate 1,975 face masks that have a protective eye shield.

Kimberly Huynh of Holly and Hudson Nail Lounge, with locations across Orange County and Los Angeles, are pledging to give out \$1,975 worth of manicures to frontline workers, amounting to almost \$40,000 in services.

Huy Nguyen of Images Luxury Nail Lounge, in Irvine and Newport Beach, will be donating 1,975 waxing and gel polish services to frontline workers, amounting to almost \$40,000 in services.

“One of our partners said it was like a tsunami of kindness,” he said, quoting Teresa Quyen Nguyen of Quentin Meats, who do-

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Middle Eastern restaurants hope the coronavirus doesn't take out Little Arabia businesses in Anaheim

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

A few minutes before closing, Nesrine Omari stands behind the order window inside Kareem's Restaurant in Anaheim's Little Arabia District. She's the sole person left inside to hand out the last few orders for takeout and delivery.

The solitary moment contrasts starkly with the Palestinian eatery's usual convivial atmosphere where Arab hospitality has had Omari conversing with families dining in since 1996.

But like most other Arab American businesses along Brookhurst Street, Little Arabia's main thoroughfare, Kareem's Restaurant is struggling to get by a few weeks after stay-at-home orders amid the coronavirus pandemic suddenly converted it into takeout only.

“Everything is so stressful,” Omari said, before handing over a bag of grilled chicken, falafels and hummus. “Do we stay open? Do we close down?”

For years, Little Arabia's businesses have continued to advocate for official recognition from the city as an ethnic enclave. Now, with many of them asking the same questions as Omari: will Little Arabia, itself, even be recognizable after the pandemic passes?

“So far, we've had a really good, positive reaction from the community,” said Kareem Hawari, Omari's son who's usually in the kitchen with her, by phone. “But we're probably down 50 to 60% in sales.”

Kareem's Restaurant comes into the pandemic having faced uncertainties in the past. When Mike Hawari, Omari's late husband and restaurant co-founder, fell ill with lung cancer in 2010, his wife shouldered the responsibilities of keeping the family business open while



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

FRESHLY MADE falafels at Kareem's Restaurant in Anaheim are still available for takeout amid restaurant shutdowns.

taking him to chemotherapy treatments. After Mike passed away in October 2012, Kareem's Restaurant shuttered for months. With the help of her children — Kareem, Nora and Marwa — Omari decided to keep the family legacy alive.

But now faced with a pandemic, the restaurant has had to cut half of its workforce. In the meantime, the family is applying for a federal loan meant to help small businesses pay some bills during the pandemic.

It's a shared dilemma for the restaurants, bakeries, hookah lounges, barber shops, salons and other businesses along Brookhurst Street that form the largest Middle Eastern ethnic enclave in the United States outside of the Detroit area.

“We are calling all businesses to hear from them and offer support,” said Rashad Al-Dabbagh, executive director of the Arab American Civic Council. “It's the same story for all the restaurants and cafes. They're all struggling.”

In one of Little Arabia's central plazas where flags of Middle Eastern nations are draped atop tile roofs, Alan Abdo speaks of similar struggles before open-

ing up Olive Tree Restaurant, a 15-year staple of the district, for lunchtime.

“We're not known to be a delivery restaurant,” said Abdo by phone. “We're more of a sit-down restaurant, in between fine and casual dining.”

Olive Tree's owner believes small, family-owned eateries like his own have borne the brunt of the pandemic where it concerns the restaurant industry. Abdo had to let go of several employees immediately following Orange County's Mar. 17 health order that mandated takeout and delivery options only.

The remaining staff had their hours cut after a rough first few days of sales. Now it's mostly Abdo and Abu Ahmad, his father whose recipes have defined Olive Tree's menu, taking orders and preparing food in between hour-long lulls.

Some days are better than others sales-wise, but Abdo can't ascribe any rhyme or reason to it. Taken together, it's not enough to pay the regular commercial rent rate, either way.

Even if Olive Tree survives the initial stay-at-

See **Businesses**, page R6

Cinco de Mayo usually brings in profits but family-owned Mexican restaurants struggle to remain open in pandemic

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Restaurant owner María Elena Avila said she usually sees packed seats and lines outside Avila's El Ranchito restaurant in Costa Mesa during Cinco de Mayo.

Customers perch close together on stools and rub elbows on bar counters to sip cocktails and beer. They eat her mother's recipes in a cocoon of chatter, clanking silverware and roving mariachi musicians.

The holiday, commemorating the Battle of Puebla in 1862, is an economic boon in the middle of the year for Mexican restaurants that partake in the festivities. This year it lands on the seventh week of the quarantine, and those who have made feeding people a way of life are hurting.

Avila is keeping El Ranchito open for takeout at a financial loss.

While customers stop by to support essential neighborhood businesses, big companies like Jose Cuervo are also pushing people to order from local independent restaurants with their #Cinco ToGo promotion. Through May 5, the tequila company will reimburse meals through Venmo for winners chosen at random.

Holiday promotions and possible government loans aside, the restaurant landscape is changing.

"Our family has been in the restaurant business for 54 years. We've had recessions, different downturns, 9/11 — but we've never seen anything like this," Avila said.

PIVOTING TO TAKEOUT MODEL

When Gov. Gavin Newsom announced stay-at-home orders amid the coronavirus outbreak,



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

MARIACHI PERFORMERS entertain guests at Avila's El Ranchito restaurant in Costa Mesa in 2016.

Avila pivoted to a takeout model and was forced to temporarily lay off some employees.

The first El Ranchito opened in a working-class neighborhood of southeast Los Angeles in 1966 and later spread across Orange County, each location with a family member at the helm.

"We made a commitment as a family to have all 13 businesses remain open during this time. We want to serve our community and we also want to take care of our employees so they can have a job that they could provide for the families — an opportunity for them to make tips," Avila said.

She said she's hoping to hire

staff back with the Paycheck Protection Program aimed to give small businesses financial relief.

Ryan Moore, owner of Mi Casa in Costa Mesa, said he laid off nearly all staff initially. When the restaurant opened for takeout, he rehired about 20 out of 45 employees to work four days a week with reduced hours.

"We've been able to maintain about 50% of our normal volume. I've got other friends in the industry and they're lucky to be making a third of what they were doing," Moore said.

Moore is a third-generation owner and thinks that Mi Casa is faring better than others because

the family-owned business has gained loyal regulars since 1972.

For El Mercado Modern Cuisine in Santa Ana, which opened in 2017, the takeout model didn't work, and general manager José Cerrudo had to temporarily close and lay off staff. Cerrudo and the restaurant staff are waiting for social distancing regulations to ease in order to reopen.

"There's not enough traffic to cover for the expenses to have the restaurant open for takeout. Anywhere from labor costs, goods, all the other bills — it just ends up that we will be losing a lot more rather than making money or breaking even," Cerrudo said.

WHICH RESTAURANTS WILL SURVIVE?

During the outbreak, the Avila family restaurant-chain have connected closely with neighboring businesses — checking in on each other, sharing face mask vendor contacts and giving each other tips on how to package food to go. But Avila can't help but wonder which restaurants will make it.

Avila and Moore anticipate their deep roots in their respective communities will help them recover.

"As long as we as an industry convey the message through our actions that we are performing duties in a safe manner and the customer is safe, then I think as people's confidence grows and they become less fearful of the disease, over time, the restaurant business will bounce back," Moore said.

In the meantime, to-go margaritas are helping both eateries stay afloat. It's a bestseller at El Ranchito along with the family platters. Avila said families have found it helpful to purchase and stockpile the restaurant's burritos in the freezer.

Mi Casa is also offering a variety of family meal packs. While supplies last, they are selling a \$30 margarita kit that includes a 24-ounce bottle of tequila.

Although thinking about finances makes Avila sad, she tries to remember her mother, the matriarch of the restaurant group who passed last year.

"In the difficult times she would say, *todo va salir bien*," Avila said. Everything's going to be OK.

vera.castaneda@latimes.com
@vera_fyd on Twitter

CEMETERY

Continued from page R2

that initiative. It is less money, in a better location and the Orange County veterans actually support it over the ARDA site. It is time our voters have the opportunity to look at both sites and compare them. Let the voters decide what they see is the most advan-

tageous in November."

The location of the planned veterans cemetery has been the subject of controversy in Irvine for many years.

Some residents want the cemetery to be at the original location, the ARDA site, chosen by officials in 2014. But in 2017, another site was proposed, with FivePoint offering a land swap deal that was eventually

voted down by Irvine residents in the 2018 primary elections.

In July, the council voted to build the cemetery on land that was slated to be a golf course in the Great Park. FivePoint said it would pay \$28 million towards the project.

Nick Berardino, president of the Veterans Alliance Orange County and Heroes Hall Foundation, said veter-

ans are in support of the golf course site, which is more affordable than the ARDA site.

"It's just dirty politics on Agran's part," said Berardino, who was a Marine Corps machine gunner in the Vietnam War. "He knows, and we will all know, that there is no way a cemetery gets built on that property."

The golf course site is es-

timated to cost around \$50 million, which could be accounted for with the funds from FivePoint and about \$25 million that the state earmarked for the cemetery. The site needs less cleanup than the ARDA site, which is estimated to cost about \$90 million.

However, Ray Roschmann, who helped gather signatures for the initiative, said proponents of the

ARDA site believe it's a "quicker way to the solution."

"The golf course site, we like to call a diversion, just like the land swap they tried to do two years ago," Roschmann said.

Council members have denied any stalling tactics with the cemetery.

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazilpilot

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Isaiah 41:10, The Message Bible

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County virtual concert to run throughout May

The “OC Parks Sound Check” virtual concert series kicked off on April 25 with a performance by singer-songwriter Matt Costa.

He started by performing a song called “Human Kinda Song” that he wrote based on comments he asked people to send him through Instagram.

As Orange County continues to social distance, gatherings at the county’s parks are discouraged, but OC Parks department will be hosting online concerts by local artists every Saturday at 4 p.m. through May 30.

The performance on May 2 was an acoustic set by Dream Brother, otherwise known as Kristofer Winrich. His stage name Dream Brother comes from his admiration for Jeff Buckley, who recorded the song “Dream Brother” in 1994.



Courtesy Photo

DREAM BROTHER performed in OC Park’s virtual concert “Sound Check” on May 2 as part of a weekly series that will take place every Saturday at 4 p.m. through May 30.

Tune in each week at the OC Parks Facebook page or their Instagram @ocparks.

OC Parks will announce the rest of its lineup through facebook.com/OrangeCountyParks on Monday.

— From staff reports

Orange County Museum of Art appoints director of development

The Orange County Museum of Art recently announced the appointment of a new director of development, Susan E. Totten, who was scheduled to start May 1.

The Newport Beach-based Totten was most recently the senior vice president at Arts Consulting Group, Inc., and she previously served in senior fundraising positions at UCLA, UCI Irvine Health Advancement, Pacific Symphony and more.

At Pacific Symphony, she developed a \$30-million capital campaign.

“We are thrilled that Sue is joining us in these next stages of our capital campaign. Her deep knowledge of the fundraising landscape in Orange County and elsewhere, as well as her institutional and organizational expertise, will be invaluable as we move forward,” OCMA Director and CEO Todd Smith said in a news release. “In addition to running the campaign, Sue



Photo by Juliana Paciulli

A RECENT exhibit at OCMAExpand - Santa Ana featured Carolina Caycedo’s works depicting local bodies of water.

will further develop the museum’s fundraising capacity once the new museum opens.”

Their temporary location OCMAExpand - Santa Ana at the South Coast Plaza Village has been hosting seasonal exhibits since 2019, though the current exhibit is postponed as the museum monitors the coronavirus pandemic.

OCMA plans to move to the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in 2021. The new 52,000-square-foot museum is designed by Pritzker Laureate Thom Mayne of Morphosis in Culver City and will include space for exhibition galleries, as well as education programs, performances and public gatherings.

— From staff reports

ANTECH

Continued from page R2

are showing signs.”

She stresses that these are rare instances, and though research is ongoing, there is no evidence that pets are transmitting the virus.

“There’s no evidence of this being spread in our companion animals in our homes from them to us or other pets in our household,” Ogeer said. “For these thousands and thousands of samples that have been tested in animals, that all of them have been negative, that is something for us to celebrate and rejoice about.”

Ogeer said Antech will continue its surveillance program as well as their day-to-day diagnostics work.

“The plethora of things, health-related, they can have, are still ongoing,” Klein said. “We’re supporting the veterinarians and professionals on staff that are there every day, making sure they can take care of our pets.”

JESSICA PERALTA is a contributor to TimesOC.



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

JENNY FARRELL, right, with OC Cutworks and mother Preechar Sullivan work on face mask patterns for UCI healthcare workers.

MASKS

Continued from page R1

them reusable.

“We are saying, why aren’t we reusing this material?” Sharma said. “We could have a self-perpetuating source of N95 masks. Where we could have these masks cleaned by sterilization machine and not have

to be throwing stuff away.”

The physicians recently submitted a paper with their findings to a scientific journal. It is currently under review.

To design the mask, the physicians received help from several of the engineering groups on the UCI campus, including the Michelle Khine lab, Elliot Hui lab, and the Ben Dolan

lab. UCI medical students have also helped cut wire for the masks.

They designed three mask prototypes, all of which are suitable under the standards of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. NIOSH assesses filtration efficiency and whether masks fit well enough. Healthcare workers regu-

larly get these “fit tests.”

To produce the masks, Sharma is partnering with Jenny Farrell, owner of OC Cutworks.

Farrell is currently making 2,000 masks for Sharma with a small team in her Santa Ana storefront. Farrell’s company will perform the cutting of the material and her mother’s business, which is located nearby,



DR. MELISSA CHANG shows masks made from recycled sterilization wraps that can be sterilized and reused.

will sew the masks.

Sharma said they will need about 10,000 total.

Farrell, a UCI alumnus, has been producing non-medical grade masks for businesses for weeks. She’s been hoping to help local healthcare workers when Sharma contacted her about a week ago. “It was perfect timing and a perfect situation,” Farrell said.

Farrell said her usual clients are no longer ordering from her, so producing the masks is helping her provide an income to her handful of employees. She’s glad to be helping healthcare workers on the front lines of the pandemic.

“Besides keeping my employees working, that was the draw, to be able to help that many people all at once,” Farrell said of her motivations. “Because it

seems easy to help people but sometimes you don’t know where to start.”

Farrell said producing these masks isn’t too difficult compared to the non-medical grade masks. She’s aiming to have the 2,000 masks done by this week.

Sharma said that while UCI Health isn’t currently short on masks, the hospital needs to be ready in case that time comes in the future.

“We are in the same situation as most of the country: if we don’t start thinking about these reusable, innovative options, we are all going to be in a crunch,” Sharma said. “If we don’t start thinking about other options, we are going to see shortages.”

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazilpilot

BUSINESSES

Continued from page R4

home period, Abdo fears diners might be hurting too much financially or may be too fearful to return in droves.

Early mitigation efforts in California appear to have flattened the curve of confirmed coronavirus cases.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation model shows that the highest daily death toll from COVID-19, the disease caused by coronavirus, has passed and is trending downwards.

For the many Muslim Americans who patronize Little Arabia, that peak arrived close to the start of holy month of Ramadan on April 23 — in other words, not soon enough to help ailing eateries.

“Because of Ramadan, I do well,” Abdo said. “We usually seat 220 people in one hour.”

In better times, Olive Tree hosted nightly iftar buffets when Muslims broke dawn-til-dusk fasts in religious observance of the Prophet Mohammed’s Koranic revelation. From the main dining area to the outside patio, families gathered to eat after a call to prayer. Even with Ramadan going well into May this year, Abdo doesn’t know if restrictions on restaurants like his will relax before the holy month ends.

“The scariest part about this whole thing is the unknowns,” he said. “How’s this going to affect my business? Am I going to survive? It’s nothing but stress.”

Knafeh Café, a bakery that specializes in the namesake pastry, is feeling the pandemic pinch in another way. Ramadan is a big season for the cheesy, shredded dough dessert but owner Asem Abusir has seen catering, across the board, take a steep hit.

“Everyone canceled all the reservations that we had,” he says. “We lost all of that. Catering has been the biggest impact on Knafeh Café.”

To compensate for the loss of walk-in customers and event catering, Knafeh Café is now offering free shipping everywhere in the country. Abusir is also selling a personal-sized tray more fit for a stay-at-home family than a big get together. “We’re trying to be creative,” he says.

And that sense of innovation will be needed to keep Little Arabia going against the odds. It doesn’t hurt to have a little hope, too.

“Little Arabia’s always been there to welcome everybody from around the world,” Hawari said. “We’re not going anywhere.”

GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN is a contributor to TimesOC. Follow him on Twitter @gsanroman2.

GIVING

Continued from page R4

nated 400 pounds of chicken to Recess Room last week to make Mediterranean-style couscous plated like the South Vietnamese heritage and freedom flag, a yellow background with three horizontal red stripes.

Sibling restaurateurs — Viet Pham of Fountain Valley’s Recess Room and Huang Pham of Huntington Beach’s Bodhi Tree Vegan Cafe, which is being rebranded to Good Vibes Cafe — along with a volunteer team of family, friends and executive chef Grant Harris, pulled three all-nighters to create 1,975 boxes of chicken and roasted vegetable couscous — turmeric and saffron-infused to make the yellow, with three stripes of red pepper couli (sauce) — and 1,975 spring rolls, which they called freedom rolls — turmeric-braised tofu and three bell pepper strips packed with the other ingredients in the rice wraps.

Recess Room has been doing Free Food Fridays every week since the county-wide health order and shutdown of non-essential businesses on March 17. Technically, these meals are for kids and seniors, but they haven’t turned a person in need away. They’ve donated 5,000 meals so far.

At 4 a.m. on April 30, they were back at it again, this time making 500 boxes of couscous and 500 freedom rolls to donate.

The Phams grew up in the restaurant industry — their mother Kim Huynh started the Westminster-



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

ON MARCH 31, Tam Nguyen, president of Advance Beauty College, right, and Johnny Ngo, president of Whale Spa Salon Furniture and Skyline Beauty Supply president, practice social distancing as they address the media about donating masks to healthcare workers.

based vegan restaurant Vien Huong in 1990.

“I don’t really think about all the things restaurants are going through now,” Viet Pham said of the difficulties, including their own mass furloughs. “For me, we’re really blessed to be in the position to help people.”

He thinks about his parents and grandparents, who, when they were ready to board a ship with the capacity to take 130 people out of Vietnam, found themselves at the harbor with about 1,000 refugees. The captain didn’t turn away a single person.

“My mom taught me that the world doesn’t care if you *think* about doing good, or *intend* to, or even *commit* to,” he says. “It only cares if you act upon doing good, and right now we need more action. So it’s give now, figure out how later.”

The market value of all donations the Nailed It team has collected in the

last month add up to about \$30 million, and these gifts are linked to Vietnamese American communities from almost every state in the country.

“I call Little Saigon, Not-So-Little Saigon,” Ted Nguyen said.

It not only stretches across Westminster, Garden Grove, Fountain Valley, Santa Ana, and now Huntington Beach, he said, but also as the largest Vietnamese diaspora, it serves as the epicenter of influence for Vietnamese American communities across America.

“And it’s important for us to do well, but it’s also important to share it, to tell our story,” he said. “We want to communicate that we are doing this because we are Americans. We have to get through this together, as a nation, protecting ourselves and looking out for the most vulnerable.”

adatseng@latimes.com
Twitter: @adatseng

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CONTACT US

Ada Tseng
Entertainment Editor
(714) 966-4635
ada.tseng@latimes.com

Raymond Arroyo
Advertising Director
(714) 966-4608
ray.arroyo@latimes.com

Online
timesoc.com
Social Media
[@timesocofficial](https://timesocofficial)

Address

10540 Talbert Ave.,
Suite 300 West,
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Business Office
(714) 966-4600

Newsroom
(714) 966-4699

Email
dailypilot@latimes.com
TCN Classifieds
800-234-4444

TCN Legal Phone
888-881-6181

TCN Legal Email

LAlegal@tribune.com

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