



Photos by Spencer Grant

A MURAL of Victoria Barrios, who was shot in a drive-by in 2019, is displayed in a Santa Ana parking lot known for showcasing public art.

'Who killed my daughter?' A Santa Ana mother seeks answers

A new mural is the latest part of a family's effort to learn who gunned down 18-year-old Victoria Barrios two years ago in a Santa Ana neighborhood.

BY BEN BRAZIL

"Who killed my daughter?"

That's the question the family of Victoria Barrios has been trying to find an answer to since the 18-year-old was gunned down two years ago in a Santa Ana neighborhood.

It's the question that Eva Barrios has put on billboards throughout the county as she seeks witnesses and information about her daughter's killer.

It's the question posed on the family's website, which has amassed leads for investigators, though no arrests have been made in the case.

Eva hasn't let her grief get the best of her. Her ongoing outreach efforts to try to find her daughter's killer are uncommon and tenacious.

Last weekend, days before the anniversary of her death, the family unveiled a mural of Victoria in the Blue Lot in Santa Ana, a parking lot known for showcasing public art. The goal of the mural is to encourage more witnesses to come forward and to send a message to those who took part in the murder.

"I want them to drive around and say, 'Oh, that's the girl we killed,'" Eva said. "They're not letting this go, because I'm not going to let it go. She's not going to be just a statistic."

In her early teenage years, Victoria waged a silent battle against depression and anxiety. For a long time, family didn't know she



EVA BARRIOS chokes up as she reads a tribute to her daughter and is comforted by Eva Guerrero, right, and Linda Salgado, left, with baby Daniella Martinez. At background right is Felipe Guerrero.

had been suffering.

She eventually got on medication, which balanced her out. But in the months before the shooting, she stopped taking her medication and fell back into a rebellious stage.

Eva and her daughter ended up having a big fight after Victoria got a speeding ticket. She took her daughter's car away, and Victoria ended up staying with friends the week of her murder. That was the last time Eva saw her daughter.

Victoria was with two of her friends when she was shot during a drive-by shooting just

after midnight on Aug. 30, 2019, near 500 E. Pine St. Police found her with a gunshot wound to the upper torso. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

Homicide detectives found a video of the shooting, which showed that the perpetrator was inside a four-door, red Chevrolet car, possibly a Tahoe. There were multiple suspects in the vehicle, and the police consider the murder to be gang-related. The shooter fired the gun several times, and a man was

See **Daughter**, page R4

Some eateries skipping lunch service

Lack of line cooks brought on by the coronavirus pandemic is behind reduced hours at Orange County restaurants.

BY SARAH MOSQUEDA

Mayfield was meant to be an all-day restaurant. The San Juan Capistrano eatery is Mediterranean by way of California and boasts big open windows and natural light in the dining room.

"We designed the space in a way that was meant to have flow throughout the day," said Mayfield owner George Barker. "Whether it is amazing coffee or a good day-drinking menu, daytime has always been a focus of ours."

But since opening in 2020, Mayfield hasn't been able to stay open all day consistently. Barker had just restarted lunch service after a temporary hiatus the week of Aug. 18. But on Aug. 30, he announced reduced hours again.

"Unfortunately we have come to the difficult decision to close our daytime operations for the time being," a post on Mayfield's Instagram account reads.

"Specifically it is the back of house that is struggling. Hiring cooks at the moment is impossible," Barker said.

Many other Orange County restaurants are facing similar challenges as they attempt to return to full capacity and regular service hours. Those challenges have many of them pressing pause on lunch service.

At Chaak Kitchen in Tustin, a small crew of two cooks arrives to prep for the entire restaurant on a Tuesday morning. Despite a relatively busy lunch business, Chef/Owner Gabbi Patrick decided to reduce hours at the Yucatan influenced restaurant she owns with her husband, Edward Patrick, in early August.

"Realistically, it was staffing," Gabbi said of her decision. "We could not hire staff and we wanted to support our kitchen and we wanted to make sure the guest received a great experience. We couldn't do it with five people in the kitchen working 13 hour days."

Restaurant owners are unsure of why it has become so difficult to find line cooks to work the line.

Imran "Ali" Mookhi, executive Chef at Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen, a halal restaurant in Fullerton, believes small businesses like his can't compete with the in-

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LABOR LEADER ADA BRICEÑO GUIDES O.C. DEMOCRATS' QUEST TO REVAMP COUNTY POLITICS

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Backed by a "Stop the Republican Recall" banner hanging from a kiosk at the Garden Grove offices of Unite Here Local 11, Ada Briceño rallied her base.

Five out of Orange County's 10 Democratic mayors stood behind her alongside other elected officials during the Aug. 25 news conference in a display of political energy keeps growing to stop this recall. Democrats are speaking with voters every single day and we won't stop until the recall is defeated.

"To see so many elected officials here shows that Orange County Democrats are speaking with one united strong voice," Briceño said. "It's clear that the energy keeps growing to stop this recall. Democrats are speaking with voters every single day and we won't stop until the recall is defeated."

As chair of the Democratic Party of Orange County, Briceño is hoping the momentum she hyped will turn O.C. into a seemingly unlikely outpost against

Newsom's ouster.

In 2003, county voters overwhelmingly backed the recall of Gov. Gray Davis, a Democrat, by 73.4%, with 63.5% choosing Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger as his replacement. But the times have changed as well as O.C.'s demographics and once reliably Republican politics along with it.

Briceño, a seasoned labor leader and Nicaraguan immigrant, is reflective of that in her second term of chair. She inherited a party that made a historic sweep of O.C. congressional seats in 2018. Since then, as chair, she deepened Democratic gains in local elections last year.

Still, between headline-grabbing anti-mask rallies, Republican supervisors tangling publicly with Newsom over pandemic policies and Capitol riot arrests of local residents, "Orange Curtain" clichés die hard.

"It implies that this is a red county, and that's far from the truth," Briceño said from her home in Stanton. "In every nook of O.C., our activists are working

"In every nook of O.C., our activists are working hard against the recall. Hundreds of people are knocking on doors, phone banking, text banking and putting yard signs up."

— Ada Briceño
Democratic Party of O.C. chair

hard against the recall. Hundreds of people are knocking on doors, phone banking, text banking and putting yard signs up."

A PRIVILEGED PAST
Briceño's upbringing in Nicaragua

See **Briceño**, page R5



ADA BRICEÑO, chair of the Democratic Party of Orange County, is originally from Nicaragua.

Don Leach



Courtesy of Lyndsey Lefebvre

BRICEÑO SPEAKS at a news conference against the recall of Gov. Newsom.

As Mary's Kitchen shutdown draws near, Orange officials talk about backing eviction

BY BEN BRAZIL

As the closure of Mary's Kitchen draws near, the city of Orange seems intent on shutting down the long-standing homeless nonprofit.

After remaining silent for weeks, Orange officials voiced their support for the shutdown of Mary's Kitchen during a homeless "navigation day" that the city set up in front of the nonprofit.

Officials said the event was meant to help connect the nonprofit's homeless clients with other resources ahead of its closure. Officials said the city will hold a few more events before the nonprofit closes. Members of the press received invitations to attend the navigation day.

Though the nonprofit has gathered support from the community and politicians, city officials contend that Mary's Kitchen can no longer operate at its current location due to public-safety issues and a belief that the facility doesn't play a role in the county's continuum of care approach to solving homelessness, identified as a "comprehensive regional" strategy.

Mary's Kitchen has been operating in Orange since the mid-1980s and has been at its current location, 517 W. Struck Ave., since 1994.

A nonprofit driven by donations and volunteers, about 200 people have come to rely on the various services that Mary's Kitchen offers, which includes three meals, six days a week, to anyone who seeks them out. Showers and laundry facilities are available, and the nonprofit receives mail for hundreds of people.

However, the city sent Mary's Kitchen a letter in June terminating its lease three years early, giving the nonprofit until Sept. 18 to move out.

An online petition to save Mary's Kitchen has garnered more than 7,000 sig-



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

THE CITY of Orange held a "navigation day" in front of Mary's Kitchen to try to connect the homeless with other resources.

natures and state Sen. Dave Min and Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva have come to the defense of the nonprofit. But city officials have not been persuaded.

Orange Mayor Mark Murphy said in an interview at the navigation day that the city has attempted several times to get Mary's Kitchen to pivot its services to be more of a part of the continuum of care approach, "rather than a feeding location." He said the kitchen enables homelessness.

"We found this location that worked for a number of years, but like lots of things, times change, demands change, perspectives change," Murphy said. "What we really want to see for folks that need the help, is to get into what's called the continuum of care, a comprehensive umbrella of services so that they can change the trajectory of their lives."

Murphy continued: "Folks come here, they get a meal or two, or even three

... but then they're still left to their own devices for shelter, for other services along the way. So it's really enabling rather than providing a continuum of care."

Murphy also pointed to an increase in crime in the area as a reason for his stance on Mary's Kitchen.

"My biggest worry at night is that somebody is harmed worse than what has already happened between now and the time they leave," Murphy said.

Councilwoman Arianna Barrios echoed Murphy's comments on Mary's Kitchen regarding the continuum of care.

"I want to be clear that it's not that we don't think there's a need for the services they provide," Barrios said. "It's not that we don't think they're amazing, I mean they are quintessential Orange charity — see a need, fill a need and roll up your sleeves and get it done."

"But what we've seen

the street, the police department and the industrial area," she said.

Weitzman pointed out that Mary's Kitchen works with a professional security company. Security vehicles are present and a guard keeps track of whoever enters the nonprofit's grounds, she said.

"That might be at the core of the issue is that Mary's Kitchen truly believes they've done everything the city has asked regardless of the cost upon Mary's Kitchen, and the city believes they haven't," Weitzman said. "None of us have been able to figure out what it is that's missing with any specificity that would allow us to meet it."

Mary's Kitchen complied with requests from the city in the past to install security cameras and hire the security guard. Gloria Suess, who leads the nonprofit, said that it has a navigator to help connect homeless people to services.

Weitzman also took umbrage with city officials claiming that Mary's Kitchen doesn't have a role to play in the continuum of care.

"The city doesn't have any role in the continuum of care," Weitzman said. "It would be great if the city would get participants in the continuum of care to come and enroll people in housing, the way that the other cities do."

She also said that the city hasn't provided resources to adequately care for many homeless adults who don't already fit into the criteria of homeless service providers in the city. She said the city houses the Be Well OC mental health facility, but people can't just walk in — they have to qualify and have a mental health crisis. That facility also houses a family shelter.

"It's great that Orange decided to house those, but those are not facilities for

See **Kitchen**, page R6



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

STARLA ACOSTA, 65, has lunch at Mary's Kitchen.

over the last several years is just an inability to meet the new reality of how we know is the best way to deal with people who are unhoused and people who are in mental health crises. It's really about this continuum of care, getting people into services and finding the way to help them navigate that."

Brooke Weitzman, an at-

torney representing Mary's Kitchen against the city, said that the city and police seem to be unfairly blaming Mary's Kitchen for crimes that are being committed on the street where the nonprofit is located, rather than solely the calls for service within the nonprofit's walls.

"They seem to be defining Mary's Kitchen area as



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Photos by Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

VOLUNTEERS PLANT cabbages at Second Harvest's new 45-acre farm in Irvine.

As the pandemic worsens food insecurity, new farm will help feed Orange County

BY BEN BRAZIL

Second Harvest Food Bank broke ground this week on a 45-acre farm in Irvine in an effort to combat a spiraling food crisis in Orange County.

Due to the economic consequences of the pandemic, the food bank is now serving almost twice as many people as before. But Second Harvest — one of the county's two major food banks — isn't just hoping to increase its food stores, it's also aiming to provide nutritional food to the underserved populations in the county.

During a news conference on Tuesday morning, Second Harvest board Chairman Dave Coffaro said that when he first started working at Second Harvest three decades ago, they weren't concerned with getting people nutritional food. Rather, they were just trying to get food to people who needed it.

The food bank started focusing on alleviating nutritional insecurity in the county last year, providing consistent access to fresh



U.S. REP. Katie Porter (D-Irvine) speaks during a news conference at Second Harvest's new farm in Irvine.

protein, produce and dairy, as opposed to relying on donated foods.

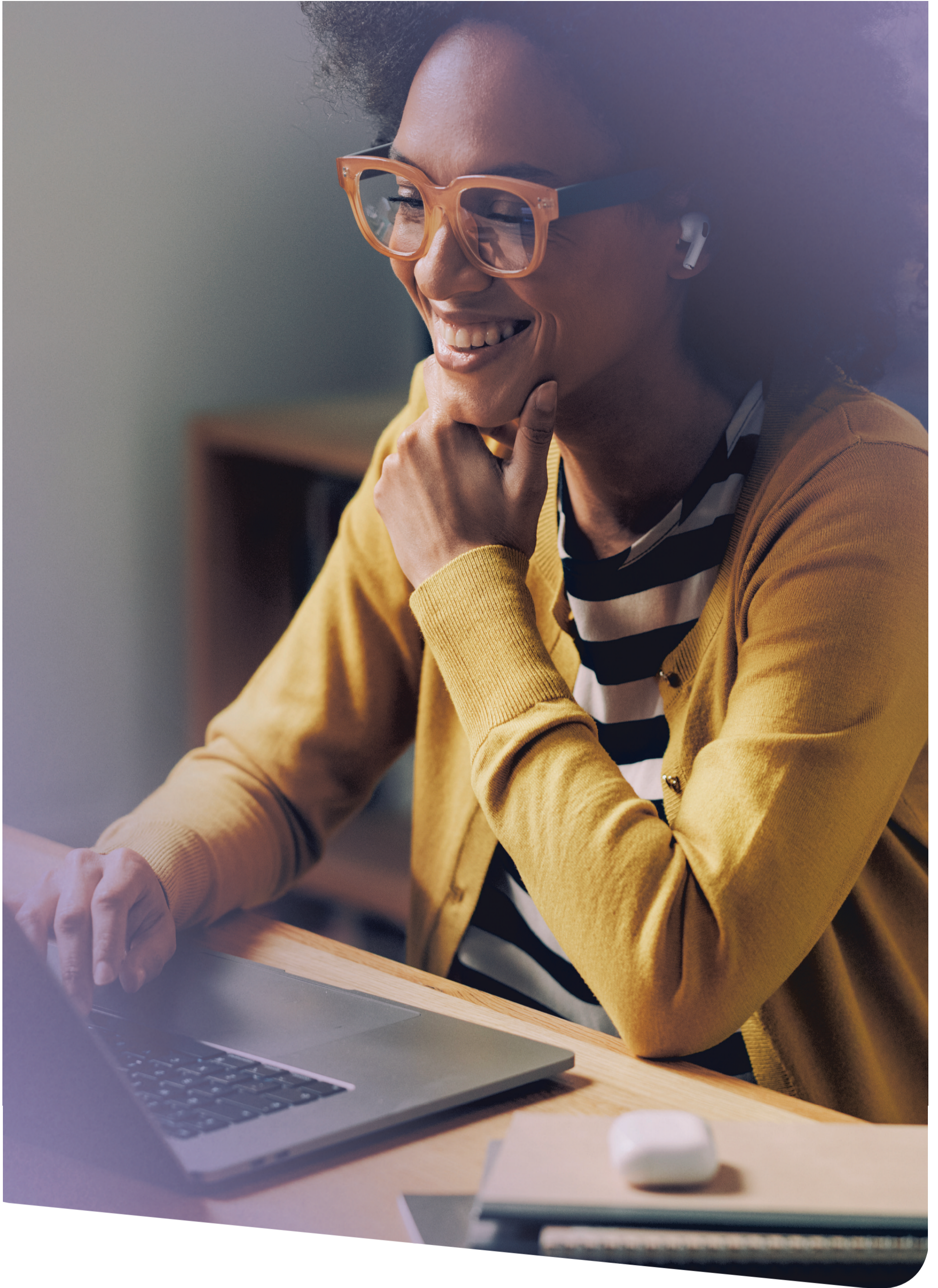
Claudia Keller, Second Harvest chief mission officer, said the food bank's goal is to have produce account for at least 50% of its distribution. She said the yield will be about 140,000 pounds of produce a month from the farm, though it has the capacity for 600,000 pounds of food a month.

"Our commitment is to

meet food insecurity, but really going forward to tackle nutritional insecurity," Keller said. "We want to make sure that the people that need the most help are getting the good food that all of us can get at a supermarket. We want to make sure that they're getting it with dignity and on a consistent basis."

This is Second Harvest's first substantial farm,

See **Farm**, page R4



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DAUGHTER

Continued from page R1

also shot in the area.

Santa Ana police Det. Matt McLeod, who is the lead on the Barrios case, said he couldn't discuss specifics about it because it's an active investigation.

McLeod said the main challenge has been overcoming people's apprehension in providing information because many believe they can only do so in person. McLeod also said that in this case, like other investigations, potential witnesses or people who may have been involved in the crime may fear the repercussions of reporting information to the police.

"A lot of people are of the misunderstanding that in order to provide information for these types of cases, that you have to automatically go to court and stand up in front of the world and make a declared statement," McLeod said. "Well, that's far from the case. The main challenge is overcoming that misinformation ... Just because you're providing information does not mean that you're the chief and principal witness."

McLeod said the police have been getting information "on a daily basis."

When asked why the killer hasn't been located despite getting regular information, McLeod responded: "When you deal

with crimes of this extent, our duty as investigators, as police, is to make sure that ... every issue, every piece of evidence, is vetted, whether that be information coming by word of mouth, physical information or physical evidence," McLeod said. "With that, it takes time because we are going, of course, to beyond a reasonable doubt, — that's the standard that we hold ourselves to.

"... We're dealing with such an egregious crime here, that we want to make absolutely sure, not just based upon hunches or information which could be at the end of the day ... proven inaccurate."

When asked whether the police have any suspects, McLeod said the department is actively investigating leads on a few different persons of interest. He said that although much time has passed since the crime was committed, it won't inhibit the investigation.

"From my experience having been assigned to the homicide detail here for an excess of 15 years, I've noticed actually that as time progresses, in certain instances, you will have an influx of information, due to the fact that people feel more comfortable providing that information," McLeod said.

McLeod pointed out that the department has received information from the public, in large part, due to the public outreach

efforts of the Barrios family.

"It's generated response from the community, from even inside as well as outside Santa Ana," McLeod said.

In the wake of her daughter's death, Eva tried to think of ways to keep Victoria's name out in the public after the initial media attention had died down. She was driving down the street when she saw an empty billboard. She contacted the billboard company, and the first billboard was put up posing the question to the public, "Who Killed My Daughter?" with contact info for the Santa Ana Police Department on it.

Eva then kept searching and connecting with billboard companies to get her daughter's face up around the county.

For Eva, there's anger at those who perpetrated the crime and frustration that the killer hasn't been located. But there's also the love and support the community has shown her and the family.

"My mind and body can't comprehend it because I'm dying inside," Eva said. "But I just have this great support and I have the community reaching out."

Still, Eva is near certain that her daughter's killer will be found. She is reassured by McLeod, who she calls "her detective."

"He always tells me



BERTHA ESPINOZA looks at portraits of Victoria Barrios at a mural unveiling on Aug. 28.

Spencer Grant

'when, not if,' she said. "I have to believe in that."

Victoria was a loved member of the community, kindhearted with an infectious laugh.

"She felt like she could conquer the world," Eva said.

Felipe Guerrero, Victoria's grandfather, said she was outgoing and lit up a room with her smile. She had a restless heart, never standing still, but also had an old soul, always caring for those in her life.

That carried over into her hopes for the future. Victoria hoped to be a police dispatcher or to enter into some other field that helped people.

Those dreams were kindled while watching crime shows with her granddad.

"She was amazed at how cool the dispatchers were — they wouldn't panic," Guerrero said, pointing out that she also was drawn to how the dispatchers could calm people down over the phone.

Guerrero said they are continuing to try and keep Victoria's image and name out in the community so she doesn't become a statistic. In fact, she's become a symbol for the victims of the city's long history of gang violence.

Earlier this year, Santa Ana Councilman Johnathan Hernandez got involved with Victoria's family after realizing that Guerrero was her grandfather. Hernandez had known Guerrero for years due to their shared community work.

Hernandez grew up in a gang-ridden part of Santa Ana and his father was a well-known gang leader. For him, Victoria's death touches him personally.

Hernandez has helped at-risk youth and gang members turn their lives around throughout his life through programs like his group Roses in the Concrete.

With Victoria dying senselessly in a likely gang-related incident, Hernandez and the family decided to erect a mural of Victoria, drawing attention to the victims of gang violence in the city.

"She's up there to represent the ones that should be here but are not," Guerrero said of the mural.

Hernandez got in touch with his arts and culture commissioner, Fernando Olivares, to do the mural. Olivares is a well-known local artist with works publicly displayed in Santa Ana. When Hernandez in-

troduced the artist to the Barrios family, he was immediately touched by Victoria's story.

"It's pretty tough, especially because I grew up in this neighborhood," Olivares said. "Things happened to innocent people all the time."

Olivares finished the mural in a week, the quickest he's ever completed a public piece.

Using a common technique of his, Olivares hid little messages about Victoria throughout the mural. She was regularly called "Queen Victoria" by loved ones, so Olivares included a hidden crown at the bottom of the mural. He also included her date of birth in the sunbeams above her face.

"I asked them to give me a lot of phrases, words, numbers," Olivares said. "I like to implement those things in the mural."

One side of the mural contains the quote: "A moment of rage can result in a thousand years of pain." Another side quotes Tupac Shakur: "Long live the rose that grew in concrete when no one else even cared."

The Tupac reference is a favorite of Hernandez. While he said he marvels at the tenacity of a rose that grows from concrete — like the children who are determined enough to be successful despite growing up in poverty and violence — he believes it's unsustainable.

"My intention is to bring justice to the Victoria Barrios family," Hernandez said of the mural. "The only way we bring justice is we have to make people uncomfortable. And the reason why is because we pretend like this is normal. And for the first time we're telling people, we see your pain and we understand that something here is very broken, and we are letting you know we're committed to fixing it. That's what that mural represents."

"It represents the acknowledgment that we can't keep growing roses in concrete. We can't just expect kids to make it by a hair. If you make it in this city, you're not coming out unscathed, you're coming out damaged. You're coming out missing a couple petals, you're going to come out tilting a little to the left."

Hernandez said Santa Ana's response to gangs has generally been hyper-policing and gang injunctions. But he says he's working to fix the problem

at a community level. In addition to Hernandez, Mayor Vicente Sarmiento, and council members Jessie Lopez and Phil Baccerra showed up to the mural unveiling.

"Clearly, those reactions were not conducive to ending gangs," Hernandez said. "The only way you're going to end gangs is you have to have former gang members and people that have lived that life, work on the ground as interventionists. You have to create a response to generational gang-banging. You have to prevent kids from ever getting to the point where they consider destroying themselves. You have to have mental health. You have to have equitable housing. You have to have sports programs. You have to have music programs. You have to have cultural celebrations."

Hernandez said he recently created the Gang Reduction Youth Development Department, which will contract with different organizations that will work on the ground, including the Santa Ana-based Neutral Ground, which is made up of "justice-impacted individuals." Hernandez was able to secure about \$2 million worth of funding to devote toward the program.

"There's so much that goes into this, we are just now getting started," Hernandez said.

Hernandez said that gang culture is protecting Victoria's killer.

"It's because of gang culture that you're not able to come forward," Hernandez said. "... Gang culture is protecting this guy. It's not snitching, this guy killed an 18-year-old little girl. What are you protecting?"

On Saturday morning in a quiet heat, Bertha Tillman's "Oh My Angel" played over a loudspeaker in a Santa Ana parking lot as Eva stared up at a mural of her late daughter.

That infectious smile of Victoria's. Her kind eyes.

As the tears came, loved ones crowded around Eva. Usually when a mural is unveiled, it's met with applause. But all were silent as the mural of Victoria Barrios was revealed.

Friends, family, and community members gazed deeply at the mural.

The music played. Tillman sang: "Oh, my angel, come back to me."

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FARM

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though it does have a little farm at its facility that is less than 1 acre. Prior to the 45-acre farm, Second Harvest's bank was filled with food that it either purchased or received from donations.

The farm is located at the University of California South Coast Research and Extension Center in Irvine. Second Harvest is partnering with the UC system for the first time.

Once the food is harvested, it will go to the food bank's facility, which is about half a mile from the farm. Then the food will get distributed through Second Harvest's pantry network, which serves families, seniors, homeless people and others who have been financially impacted by the pandemic throughout the county.

The crops are estimated to be ready for harvest by Nov. 18, right in time for Thanksgiving. The farm will include zucchini, squash, summer corn and other crops.

Several political leaders spoke at the news conference, including county Supervisor Don Wagner, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan and Rep. Katie Porter (D-Irvine). While they ad-



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

VOLUNTEERS PLANT cabbage seedlings on 45 acres at the Harvest Solutions Farm in Irvine.

dressed a small crowd, volunteers were out in the field planting about 26,000 cabbages.

"Food insecurity has gotten worse during the pandemic," Porter said. "But it was a problem before, and it's sadly going to be a problem after. Today we're taking an important step to addressing not just the amount of food but the type and the quality of food, to investing in nutrition and investing in people in our community."

Second Harvest is responsible for recruiting most of the volunteers for the farm. The food bank also partnered with Solutions for Urban Agriculture and the University Extension Center for volunteers.

In addition to addressing nutritional needs, the farm allows Second Harvest to take control of its supply chain, fortifying it against the inflated food prices and supply chain issues caused by the pandemic.

Since the food bank previously purchased food from the Central Valley, Second Harvest had to work around disruptions in the supply chain.

"It is a new era for us in food banking here in the county," Keller said. "We are taking some control of our own supply chain. We are shortening the time from farm-to-table for our most vulnerable citizens."

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BRICEÑO

Continued from page R1

gua served as a far cry from her future life as co-president of Unite Here Local 11, a union representing 32,000 hotel and food service workers in California and Arizona.

Adopted by a father who worked as a middle-class banker, Briceño had elegant birthday parties featured in local newspapers and even visited Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., on vacation.

"I was chauffeured to a private school," she added. "But one day, I came back home and I couldn't leave the house anymore."

Sandinista rebels battled government troops for Nicaragua's future outside her home. After the dictatorship fell and the U.S.-backed Contra war began, Briceño, 6 years old at the time, boarded a plane to Miami in 1980.

Arriving as immigrants, the comfy life the family once knew ended.

Her father worked as a jeweler until being offered a better-paying job across the country as a longshoreman in San Pedro. As the family traveled west, a drunk driver in Texas slammed into her mother's car.

After the accident, members of the family had to spend time recuperating in a hospital, and Briceño's father lost out on being a longshoreman. With the family still struggling financially, Briceño started working in her early teens vending ice cream at Ports O'Call Village in San Pedro with a friend, where she says they faced sexual harassment.

Once her friend's dad found out, he took the girls and confronted the owner with the reason why they quit.

"That was one of the first times that I saw someone stand up for my rights," Briceño said.

LOVE OF LABOR

Unsure of her place in the world, Briceño got hired as a front desk clerk at an Anaheim hotel across the street from Disneyland.

She bonded with the



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

ADA BRICEÑO, chair of the Democratic Party of Orange County. The labor leader, originally from Nicaragua, is guiding Democrats in an effort to defeat the gubernatorial recall as well as transform county politics heading into the 2022 elections.

Spanish-speaking immigrants that worked as room attendants but could do little to better their conditions as she saw them.

That opportunity arose at the Sheraton Hotel in San Pedro where Briceño worked next. She made \$2 more per hour and could finally afford glasses. She credited Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 681, the union that represented her, for those upgrades.

"I found my passion there through my collective bargaining agreement," Briceño said. "I started talking to room attendants. They started coming to me and I started defending their rights. That's when it clicked for me."

Seeing a future leader emerging from the rank-and-file, the union offered an 18-year-old Briceño an organizing job. She took it and became Here Local 681's first Latina president within eight years.

In 2004, the union merged to become Unite Here Local 11. Organizing campaigns led Briceño into battle against the Disney-

land Resort and other hoteliers around O.C.

"Ada is seen in the labor movement as a strategic thinker," said Barbara Lewis, Southern California hospital division director for the National Union of Healthcare Workers. "She goes beyond the boundaries of what others believe may not be possible. She's changed the lives of hotel and hospitality workers in Southern California."

Even though Briceño shied away from Democratic Party politics for years, as she believed there wasn't a place for someone like her, union campaigns always crossed paths with elected officials.

"Everything that I cared about, it always landed in a politician's hand," she said. "When I became president of the union, after much tribulation, moving our members into politics was very front-and-center."

Over the past decade, Briceño and her union fought for district elections in Anaheim and a minimum-wage law in the city's resort area.

When Fran Sdao stepped

down as chair of the Democratic Party in 2018, Briceño called trusted friends about her intentions to run. Unopposed, she became the first immigrant and second Latina to chair the party in 2019 with a critical general election on the horizon for O.C. and the nation.

A BLUE BASTION?

In a county once so steadfastly Republican, President Ronald Reagan chose to kick off his 1984 reelection bid at Miles Square Park in Fountain Valley. But former President Donald Trump lost the county in 2016 and 2020, a first for a Republican candidate since 1936. It wasn't all wash down ticket for Democrats in either election.

In 2016, Republicans maintained a grip on local seats and the Democrats' so-called "Blue Wave" receded last year with close losses suffered by incumbents Harley Rouda and Gil Cisneros in the 48th and 39th congressional districts, respectively.

At the same time, Briceño points to 20 seats flipped in the party's favor

that year in local city council and school board races, including in traditionally conservative cities like Huntington Beach, Fountain Valley and San Clemente.

Councils with Democrat majorities — like Buena Park, Irvine and Santa Ana — have passed temporary pandemic laws like "hero pay" for grocery workers that once seemed unthinkable in O.C.

"Orange County, until recently, was considered a homogenous bastion for extreme conservative values and right-wing politicians," said Vicente Sarmiento, Santa Ana's mayor. "Ada has helped diversify the county's congressional, state, and local legislative delegations where Democrats with progressive public policies are emerging and prevailing."

Increasing the party's share of registered voters in the county — now standing at a 65,000 edge over Republicans — has been a key objective during her tenure. Briceño hopes the margin will prove pivotal in the re-

"Orange County, until recently, was considered a homogenous bastion for extreme conservative values and right-wing politicians. Ada has helped diversify the county's congressional, state, and local legislative delegations where Democrats with progressive public policies are emerging and prevailing."

— Vicente Sarmiento
Santa Ana mayor

call, even as Latinos statewide, a vital voting bloc, have polled majority in favor of it.

"We can always do a better job in reaching out to Latinos," Briceño said. "But I also know that we are in such better hands with Gavin Newsom than we'll ever be with any of the other candidates."

Whatever the recall's outcome, the focus will shift towards the 2022 midterm elections right away. It's a county-changing agenda stuffed with winning back lost congressional races as well as making more inroads in local races, including high-profile contests for supervisor seats and O.C. district attorney.

"I understand more about the party and what's at stake than I did when I first decided to run," Briceño said. "I'm even more driven this time around."

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STATEWIDE RECALL ELECTION UNDERWAY.

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The Statewide Gubernatorial Recall Election is underway, now through September 14.

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OR

- **In-person** at any of 64 Vote Centers throughout Orange County. Vote Centers are open Sept. 4 - 14

TWO QUESTIONS ON THE BALLOT:

1. Recall (remove) Governor Newsom?
Vote Yes or No.
2. If Governor Newsom is removed, who should replace him?
You can vote on this question no matter how you vote on the first one.



ORANGE COUNTY REGISTRAR OF VOTERS

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For info on accessible voting, visit [OCVOTE.GOV/RAVBM](https://ocvote.gov/RAVBM)

LUNCH

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centives large restaurant groups are offering.

"I see the ads and posts by all these major fast food chains, offering \$25 an hour or signing bonuses," Mookhi said. "Those are major chains that can afford that, but being a small business, it's hard to compare to them."

Last month Mookhi ended lunch service in an effort to protect his current team from burnout.

"We knew we had to retain our staff that is actually showing up and support them and appreciate them," Mookhi said. "In order to do that, we had to reduce our hours and close for lunch."

He said the loss of lunch has led to about a 17% dip in revenue.

"If I had the staff, I would still open for lunch," Mookhi said, "but I have no other option."

Barker said burn out might be another reason cooks are not coming back to work.

"I think there are a lot of cooks that have left the industry and have decided to get jobs elsewhere," Barker said. "It is a hard job and it was understaffed as it was."

Mookhi has a similar view.

"The restaurant industry is not an easy industry to be in," Mookhi said. "There are people that changed their careers during the pandemic. They don't want to be part of the restaurant industry anymore."

The Blind Pig, a modern gastropub in Yorba Linda, opened its doors in October 2019.

Owner Tony Monaco said the eatery offered lunch pre-pandemic.

"We opened back up but we have not gone back to lunch and honestly, it is partially due to not being able to find labor to do it right now."

Monaco, who has a second Blind Pig restaurant in Rancho Santa Margarita, said the Blind Pig, Yorba Linda was poised to reopen for lunch when he was able to hire college students who were back home dur-



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

LEAD CHEF Trevor Moak chops up pork lardon for an arugula salad at Tustin's Chaak Kitchen.



A MASKED employee stands in the kitchen at the Blind Pig Kitchen and Bar.

Courtesy of the Blind Pig Kitchen and Bar

ing the pandemic.

"Right when we were feeling comfortably staffed up, all those college students started going back to college," Monaco said. "So now we are back in that hiring phase."

Almost all restaurant owners place part of the blame on extended unemployment benefits and the \$300 bonus.

"I think the main factor is the \$300 a week on top of what their normal employment pay was," Edward said. "I think for a lot of these people, being able to receive that didn't give them an incentive to go out and look for work."

According to the State of California's Employment

Development Department website, federal unemployment benefit programs under the CARES Act end on Sept. 4. Individuals will no longer be paid benefits for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, Pandemic Additional Compensation or Mixed Earner Unemployment Compensation.

"I think once the extended unemployment ends, then we will see a few more people," Monaco said.

Most restaurants are using hiring platforms like ZipRecruiter and Indeed to find staff, without much luck.

"If we do put up an ad-

vert," Barker said, "we get 30 people applying to be a server, and zero cooks apply."

Mookhi estimates Khan Saab has spent more than \$4,000 on hiring ads.

Gabbi said Chaak has used Craigslist and Indeed without success. She maintains restaurant hiring happens more intentionally.

"When people are looking for a job, they know where they want to work ... they will go to that restaurant," Gabbi said.

Despite the lean crews, most restaurants report an uptick in business.

"I don't really know any restaurants that aren't busy at the moment," Barker said. "There has been such



Courtesy of Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen

GUESTS IN the dining room at Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen.

a boom in people wanting to go out, so maybe the restaurants that were not as busy before are now needing not two cooks, but three or four."

Edward says lunch service at Chaak was increasing when they decided to pause it. "It was busy and getting busier. So it was disappointing to stop but I think we made the right decision," he said.

Despite the challenges, Orange County restaurant owners remain optimistic.

Chaak is still offering Brunch on Sundays. "Our hope is to bring back Friday and Saturday lunch and that is where we are going to leave it," Edward said.

The owners of Khan Saab hope to be back to regular business hours as soon as they are able to staff up.

"The plans are to be back open at full operation," Mookhi said. "Lunch and dinner and brunch on the weekends. It is just a matter of how soon we find staff who are actually going to show up to work."

The Blind Pig is currently open for lunch on Sundays. "We are doing our entire dinner menu all day and we are also offering four or five brunch specials that we change every few weeks," Monaco said. "We are ready to do Saturday lunch, but now it is just a matter of finding a couple more people for the kitchen. We are not trying to overload our chefs for dinner. We are still really new, so we want to put our best foot forward."

Gabbi believes closing for lunch will allow her crew time during those first days of the week to work on new menu items and dedicate time to more labor-intensive dishes.

"Our smoking is such a big part of our cuisine and trying to keep up with the demand is difficult," she said. "This actually keeps us from grinding and lets us produce good, quality food."

Barker said Mayfield will also take this time to make improvements, like adding new dishes and changing up the wine list.

"We are trying to be a bit more realistic and try to focus on the team we do have and doing right by our staff first," Barker said, "and also making sure that the quality of the product that we give to the customer is what we intend."

Mookhi said he appreciates the people that do come out to eat and their patience with the staff.

"We are trying to get back to get back to normal so we can do a proper service," he said.

Monaco said the restaurant industry is still holding itself to a high standard.

"When people come in, they are spending their money for a great experience and we are still dedicated to doing that," Monaco said. "And we think dinner service only at the moment is the best way to show that."

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KITCHEN

Continued from page R2

adults who are without a home, who don't have kids, who need basic needs met," Weitzman said. "So anything the city is willing to do to start providing outreach and start providing a vehicle to get into the continuum of care and to partner with Mary's or do it on its own, would be an amazing step forward for a city that currently has nothing but Mary's Kitchen."

Several service providers participated in the city's event on Wednesday morning, including CalOptima, Buena Park and Placentia navigation centers, the Orange County Health Care Agency, HomeAid and the police department's homeless outreach team. The city blocked off the street in front of Mary's Kitchen, and service providers set up tents. Mary's Kitchen is located at the end of a cul-de-sac surrounded by industrial buildings and the police department.

Not many homeless people attended the event that morning. Most stayed within the walls of Mary's Kitchen, though Suess announced that there were services outside. Starla Acosta, who has been coming to Mary's Kitchen for about five years, said it's because of "lack of trust" with the city.

"People always promise them things," Suess said.

Weitzman said that Orange has never before provided services in front of Mary's Kitchen like the navigation event. The event blocked off the end of the cul-de-sac where the nonprofit is located, preventing homeless people from parking their cars, she said.

"It would be maybe better if the city could provide services in a way that didn't block the participants from getting in, since there is limited parking and a lot of folks who come here have disabilities," Weitzman said.

Weitzman suggested that homeless people at Mary's Kitchen may have been less inclined to visit the navigation event due to the police presence.

"This maybe wasn't the



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

STATE SEN. Dave Min (D-Irvine), left, speaks with client and volunteer Ray Hernandez during a tour of Mary's Kitchen.

best structure for the services they decided to bring," Weitzman said.

Weitzman said Mary's Kitchen may take legal action if the city doesn't rescind its lease termination.

"My position on the legal issues hasn't changed, that they would be violating state and federal laws if they proceeded, and that we'll take any actions that we need to hold them accountable to comply with those laws," Weitzman said.

Weitzman stated her legal position on the premature lease termination in a July 9 letter to the city, asking Orange to rescind its demand letter because it doesn't have a substantive reason for ending the lease agreement.

"The notice fails to meet both substantive and procedural standards for early termination of agreement," Weitzman wrote of the city's letter. "The only reference to the lease in the notice states that the city may terminate the agreement however, it fails to detail any reason supported by the terms of the agreement."

"Despite acknowledgment of the critical support Mary's has over the years, the letter draws baseless conclusions that are simply not supported by facts, effectively blaming Mary's Kitchen for the city's failure to address the housing crisis, healthcare needs of its most impoverished residents, and any and all other issues in the public space outside of Mary's Kitchen property."

"Surely no term in the lease puts the burden on Mary's Kitchen to redress

the city's failures to meet the needs of low-income and unhoused individuals."

Weitzman's letter also calls for the city to determine the environmental impact of closing Mary's Kitchen to keep in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

The letter says that water and soil can be contaminated from the loss of Mary's Kitchen's hygiene facilities, and other public areas could be impacted as homeless people are forced to relocate.

"The immediate closure of a service provider leaving an estimated 150-200 people per day without this safe place to sit, receive meals to eat and clothes to wear, access mail, access hygiene facilities, use laundry facilities and more will inevitably have an impact on the environment," the letter says.

Weitzman also argues that the lease termination violates the city's housing element, which requires the city to consider homeless people, low-income people, seniors and disabled people — all of whom frequent Mary's Kitchen. Weitzman notes in the letter that Mary's Kitchen is the only homeless services provider in the city listed in its housing element.

The letter notes that the city must "make adequate provision in its housing element for the existing and projected needs of all economic segments of its community, including its homeless population."

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