



Safe parking program in O.C. urged

Homeless advocates believe it's crucial as the pandemic economy continues to force many onto the streets.

BY BEN BRAZIL

For about a year during the coronavirus pandemic, dozens of homeless people living out of their vehicles parked on Valencia Drive in Fullerton.

The street served as a kind of imperfect haven for them, where they didn't need to constantly move their vehicles every couple of days to avoid parking citations or expose themselves to the dangers of parking in an unknown area. Then the city decided weeks ago to start enforcing parking regulations that it had temporarily halted due to the pandemic.

Since then, the homeless have been cleared from the street and have scattered throughout the county, said Father Dennis Kriz of St. Philip Benizi Church.

Kriz and other religious leaders had been working to connect the homeless who lived on Valencia with supportive services and housing options. The group of homeless advocates are known as the Tri-Parish Homelessness Collaborative, which is made up of St. Philip Benizi, St. Mary's and St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic churches in Fullerton.

The collaborative served as the major voice advocating for the homeless who lived on Valencia. The group had also been pushing the city to bring back its former safe parking program, which provided a parking lot for homeless people to park their vehicles in. Fullerton ran Orange County's first safe parking program, but it shut down in January after running out of funding.

For homeless people who live in their cars, finding a safe place to park is a major obstacle. With many cities having overnight parking prohibitions, the homeless are forced to park in unsafe areas that put them at risk.

The city ended up partnering with the religious leaders to try

See **Parking**, page R2

BOOKS BY MAIL

Santa Ana arts center aims to bring the library closer to home

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Marytza Rubio's home is stocked with books. About 300 titles travel back and forth between her bookshelves and the post office. An estimated 750 are stored inside weather-proof bins in the garage. The inventory is a part of Makara Center for the Arts' book collection, which has continued to circulate since the brick-and-mortar space shut down last year.

Rubio, a writer who was born and raised in Santa Ana, said she always loved books and had an affinity for specialized collections like the fashion library at Otis College of Art and Design, her former workplace. After completing an MFA program based in South America, she wanted to bring the bookstores, libraries and kiosks she came across in cities like

Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Santiago to her hometown.

"I didn't want to teach. I'm not really into academia or any similar formal environments," Rubio said. "I wanted to recreate some of the energy in those places I visited, but specifically that kind of library that I was able to explore when I was working at Otis."

She describes Makara as a lending library specializing in global arts and culture with a focus on perspectives that have been historically excluded.

The volunteer-run nonprofit was established in 2016. Rubio held pop-up book clubs and sold books to fundraise. A year later, she opened a commercial space on 811 N. Main St. The book inventory, free to Santa Ana residents, began to grow. Pro-



Photos Courtesy Makara Center for the Arts

THE MOST requested books through Makara By Mail.

Photo illustration by Greg Diaz

See **Mail**, page R4

Have dim sum, will travel: a look at offerings in Orange County

BY EDWIN GOEI

If you are new to dim sum, here's a primer: It is a feast of dumplings and bite-sized snacks designed to be eaten with hot tea. There are two options to have it: You can go to a traditional dim sum restaurant for the whole experience, or you can get it as takeout, which is cheaper and more accessible.

The focus of this article is takeout dim sum, but this isn't another pandemic food story. Takeout dim sum existed well before COVID-19 and will continue to exist well after.

During the lockdown last year, I enjoyed lots of takeout dim sum, but I would have even if there was no pandemic. It has always been the shortest path to dim sum gratification. There's no need

to endure the hour-long restaurant waits, the tipping and the splitting up of the bill at the end.

I would go as far as to argue that among the food experiences we were deprived of because of COVID-19, dim sum should not have been one of them. Korean BBQ may be inextricably linked to the brick-and-mortars in which it's served but not dim sum. Even Sam Woo and Seafood Cove, which are known for their traditional dim sum services, have always offered the option of ordering to go.

But then there are the dim sum shops that are exclusively for takeout. Their existence is proof of dim sum's eminent portability. Despite dim sum's Cantonese origin, Little Saigon has the high-

See **Dim Sum**, page R5



A DIM SUM assortment at Gai Phat Food Co. in Westminster.

Edwin Goei



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ROIC

Amazon eyes San Clemente for its newest distribution center

The e-commerce giant hasn't acknowledged the proposal for the warehouse.

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF

Amazon.com, Inc. is eyeing a 20-acre site in San Clemente for a new distribution center, a major regional development that would fill the city's already busy business park.

The new proposal is shrouded in secrecy, with City Hall adhering to what they describe as a confidentiality agreement with the private real estate company Greenlaw Partners LLC. But Greenlaw is a go-to real estate company for Amazon, and it is targeting the vacated San Clemente site for a 105,000-square-foot warehouse that would host what developers describe in city documents as an "e-commerce delivery station."

A city official also confirmed he was working on the project when a resident emailed him opposing "the Amazon distribution center."

Amazon won't acknowledge the proposal and instead issued a standard statement about not publicly discussing its future road map.

The development comes at a booming time for the online shopping giant, and



Jenny Jarvie | Los Angeles Times

AN AMAZON Fulfillment Center in Birmingham, Ala. Amazon is reportedly looking to develop a 20-acre site in San Clemente's business park for a new distribution center.

it follows other key expansions in Southern California such as a delivery station in Mission Viejo, the purchase of the former Orange County Register headquarters in Santa Ana and the purchase of a 31-acre site in Irvine, where the company already has a huge distribution center.

The proposal to City Hall initially only required approval from the Planning Commission, but San Clemente Senior Planner Stephanie Roxas told TimesOC on Tuesday that Greenlaw now plans to seek a development agreement with the City Council. Such agreements re-

quire more scrutiny and can involve negotiations about project amenities and developer contributions.

"One thing we've been hearing from our City Council members is they really want to understand what the community benefits would be as part of this development proposal. Usually, that's very subjective," Roxas said.

Roxas said city staff "expressed concern" about the confidentiality agreement, as did City Council members.

"We didn't really see it as being in the applicant's own interest to keep every-

thing confidential," Roxas said. "But ultimately, it's their decision."

Roxas said the city hopes to host a public "study session" with Greenlaw in July that will include a presentation by the company's traffic consultant "to be a little more transparent about what's in the application, because there is a lot of misinformation happening there."

The road to approval in the seaside town of 65,000 could be bumpy. San Clemente residents have a history of opposing development, and some already

See **Amazon**, page R4

Former O.C. chiropractor convicted in fraud case

A jury finds Susan H. Poon guilty in the first federal criminal trial in the county in 15 months.

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF

In the first federal criminal trial in Orange County in 15 months, a jury on Tuesday convicted a Dana Point resident and ex-chiropractor of healthcare fraud, part of a broad investigation that ensnared medical providers throughout Southern California.

Susan H. Poon, 56, was among 34 people charged in 2019 in what authorities described as a multistate investigation into \$257 million in fraudulent Medicare and Medicaid billing.

Prosecutors pinned \$2.2 million of that on Poon by identifying dozens of patients with hundreds of procedures that were simply made up.

Not only were the procedures never performed, in many instances, the patients had never seen Poon and didn't know she was using their identities

to get money from insurance companies.

Many of the falsified patient documents contained the phrase "grin and bear it," which prosecutors told jurors was clear evidence of an organized scheme by Poon.

"There's a common denominator, and that's the defendant is just making it up. She's writing it on all these forms," said Assistant U.S. Atty. Daniel Ahn, who prosecuted the case with Assistant U.S. Atty. Daniel Lim.

Poon's chiropractic license was revoked in July 2019. At the time of her arrest, she operated Head 2 Toe Wellness in Rancho Santa Margarita, where prosecutors said she defrauded Anthem and Etna insurance companies hundreds of times between January 2015 and April 2018.

Many of the "ghost patients" prosecutors described were family members of Costco Wholesale Corp. and United Parcel Service Inc. employees who met Poon at health fairs.

Poon obtained informa-

See **Fraud**, page R4

PARKING

Continued from page R1

and connect the homeless with services before bringing back the parking regulations. But Kriz said only six people were helped before the city reinstituted its parking enforcement. He said that four were connected with Fullerton's homeless navigation shelter and the collaborative was able to pay for two other people's RV to be fixed so they could relocate to live with family in Oregon.

"So, six people have been helped and the rest have been scattered," Kriz said. "So the problem hasn't really gone away."

The city has continually said it would not bring back its safe parking program but would be supportive of a more widespread program. The collaborative has since focused its efforts on pressing officials for a countywide program. What happened on Valencia highlights the need, Kriz said.

"Every day that these folks are not at some designated parking lot, they are scattered throughout the county, parking in places that they probably shouldn't be," Kriz said. "The faster that the city or the county responds to this, the sooner they will have less RVs parked throughout the county."

Kriz said the collaborative will be meeting with the city and county to propose their idea for a countywide safe parking program. Kriz didn't want to divulge specifics of the program prior to the meeting.

Christa Johnson, interim deputy city manager of Fullerton, said in an email that the "city is working with the faith-based community, county and state officials on safe parking programs" and is hosting meetings every two weeks to continue the discussions regarding a regional safe parking program.

Kriz did say that the collaborative will be presenting the city and county with potential sites for a program. David Gillanders, executive director of Pathways of Hope — which worked with Fullerton on its safe parking program, said finding a site is the major obstacle to a countywide safe parking program.

He said that somebody needs to step forward with a parking lot that can be dedicated for the program. This could include a city, county, college or business-person.

"The current thing was that there's no place to put this program, but we're saying there are places," Kriz said. "Without getting too much into the details of what places, but we have definite ideas."



Ben Brazil

SEVERAL RVs are parked on Valencia Drive in Fullerton.

Jason Austin, Orange County's director of the Office of Care Coordination, said in an email that the county would only consider a safe parking program if there was support and interest from a city to operate the program. He did not mention Fullerton.

"The county aims to work collaboratively with its 34 cities in operating and creating programs that effectively address homelessness incorporating evidenced-based practices," Austin said. "To operate a safe parking program according to common practice, there has to be an expectation for participants to provide ownership of vehicle documentation, current registration, insurance coverage and valid driver's licenses with a focus on linking participants to shelter, housing or supportive service programs. The supportive service programs can include physical and behavioral health, housing, employment — needed services to assist in the process of becoming housed."

The county and activists appear to agree on the general goal of any potential safe parking program.

Austin said a safe parking program shouldn't just offer a place to park for the night, but it should also provide an opportunity for governments and service providers to engage with homeless people so they can eventually be connected with housing and move out of their vehicles.

Gillanders and Kriz said a countywide safe parking program that connects people with permanent supportive housing is needed.

Austin pointed out that many people who live out of their RVs tend not to

consider themselves homeless. He said this complicates the discussion surrounding safe parking programs because they are not looking to be connected with housing.

Like Austin, Gillanders drew a distinction between safe parking programs and people who live out of their RVs, stating that many people who live in their RVs consider it a home and are just looking for a safe place to park rather than looking to be connected with housing.

Gillanders said there are about 50 safe parking programs throughout the state, and most of them connect people with services with the intent of getting them into permanent housing.

"I think a safe parking program, first and foremost, does have to be an idea that we are finding housing for these people that they can afford and that they can stay in, so they don't have to stay in a vehicle full time," Gillanders said. "Whether you're in an RV or a car, if that's a program you want to participate in, we should make that available. If you're in an RV and you're looking to stay in an RV, I think that's a different kind of program that's not quite the same thing. It's got a different intent and a different purpose when it is structured around allowing people to stay in their vehicle in perpetuity for as long as they want."

Gillanders and members of the Tri-Parish Collaborative had their qualms with the Fullerton safe parking program and hope any countywide program will improve on its deficiencies.

Gillanders said the major problem with the Fullerton program was that it was too

"I've never seen so many people be so vicious, like with venom, toward a group of people, as they were to the people on Valencia. ... Because it can happen to anybody. Yeah, I never dreamed this would happen to me. And yet it did, and it wasn't because I was drinking or on drugs or anything. It's just, I was financially set back."

— Shely Youngbauer

exclusionary. He wasn't in favor of the program only allowing people who were connected to Fullerton and who didn't have criminal backgrounds.

"If you have an active warrant, I think that's one thing," Gillanders said. "If you have a criminal offense from 15 years ago, I think that's an entirely different thing. So, I would like to see some reengineering of that to have some ability to work with people despite what's happened in their past."

Kriz echoed those sentiments.

"There are a lot of homeless folks who would have a fairly long list of rather trivial citations and arrest warrants that would impede them from getting into programs," Kriz said.

Kriz pointed to Shely Youngbauer, who wasn't allowed into Fullerton's safe parking program due to a felony from about 15 years ago. With the help of the church, Youngbauer was able to relocate to Oregon to be with family.

"She was not allowed to participate in the program even though it was long ago and she had certainly done her time," Kriz said.

Youngbauer said in an interview that the safe parking program would be helpful because it could provide an avenue for people to get into housing without having to stay in a homeless shelter.

Youngbauer said many people who live in their RVs are resistant to go to homeless shelters because it requires you to give up your vehicle, and COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred in the shelters.

Orange County shelters have also been criticized by advocates and have faced an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit that alleges sexual harassment and poor conditions.

Youngbauer had once co-owned a Round Table pizza and was a part of the Chamber of Commerce. But financial ruin struck a few years ago and she was forced to live out of her RV with her son.

After staying on Valencia, the pair were able to travel to Oregon to be with Youngbauer's brother after receiving help from the churches.

"I've never seen so many people be so vicious, like with venom, toward a group of people, as they were to the people on Valencia," Youngbauer said. "It's like, 'Hey, why do I

scare you? Is it because you realize that it could happen to you?' Because it can happen to anybody. Yeah, I never dreamed this would happen to me. And yet it did, and it wasn't because I was drinking or on drugs or anything. It's just, I was financially set back."

The Fullerton program also required vehicle searches of the participants.

Kriz questioned the legality of this and pointed to the fact that for a homeless person living out of their car, they were essentially subjecting themselves to have all their belongings searched on a regular basis.

"We will certainly be saying that we want a program that will be used," Kriz said. "If the rules are too strict and arguably unconstitutional — if you're requiring a nightly search of vehicles — that's going to make it really hard for people to participate."

Gillanders was also critical of the required vehicle searches.

"I think the way to think about it is, I'm not really sure what we're expecting to find that's going to change our motivation to help someone in moving out of their car into permanent housing," Gillanders said.

"If we found substances, how does that change our priority of trying to get somebody into housing? There's plenty of people who are housed, and they use substances. If you find a weapon, that might be a little bit of a different thing but I don't necessarily know what inspires us to do such invasive searches right off the bat."

Yet the need for a safe parking program is becoming more urgent as the number of homeless people living out of vehicles has increased due to the pandemic economy. Gillanders said that number will only grow.

Nonprofit-driven safe parking programs exist in Los Angeles and San Diego.

"The housing prices here are just as exorbitant," he said. "COVID is going to probably continue to create this slippery slope of people who fall through the cracks ... we need to be prepared for an even greater influx of people who need this kind of resource."

People living out of their vehicles have to contend with a variety of parking regulations throughout Orange County, some of which require a vehicle to

be moved after 72 hours and other oversized vehicle laws that make it challenging for people to find safe places to park.

Mark Hamlet, who lived on Valencia, said he is now once again being chased out of spots regularly by police. Hamlet has been living out of his RV for decades and said he is conscientious when deciding where to park his vehicle, avoiding neighborhoods and businesses with heavy foot traffic.

"There weren't any oversized vehicle ordinances back when I started doing this," Hamlet said. "They're harassment and they're discriminatory."

Hamlet said he would consider a safe parking program if it didn't require any vehicle searches.

"If I had to be subjected to any search, then I can tell you, that's no place I will go," Hamlet said. "I'm not on parole or probation, and I retain all of my 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Amendment rights."

Gillanders said the RV and parking ordinances that many cities have, effectively criminalizes homeless people who live out of their vehicles.

"Cities just have to decide the cost-benefit of just criminalizing people that do live in their vehicles versus trying to create an opportunity for them to stay somewhere," Gillanders said.

When asked what the county currently does to help homeless people who are living out of their vehicles, Austin said that the county provides a broad range of services for those experiencing homelessness, including those who are living out of their vehicles.

"The county operates homeless street outreach contracts that engage people living on the streets and connects them to emergency shelter and/or housing programs," Austin said.

"The county also operates emergency shelters that individuals can access that provide safe beds to sleep, access to meals, showers and onsite supportive services. Our ultimate goal is to engage individuals experiencing homelessness and support their transition out of sleeping in situations that are unsuitable for human habitation and into a housing opportunity."

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Photos Courtesy Greg Dymont

ABOVE: The sunflower field at the Fullerton Arboretum is part of a fundraising project. This is late May when plants are blooming and some custom stakes have been placed. **BELOW:** The Calodendrum Capense tree at the Fullerton Arboretum is shown.

Fullerton Arboretum hosts online nature workshops

The Fullerton Arboretum is offering free online workshops in June. Jie Tan will host “Explore Living Colors: The Ecology in Book Arts” on Thursday and Saturday. In the workshop, participants will be able to create bookmarks, cards, collages, books and book-binding using leaves, flowers, paper and thread. In another workshop on Saturday, led by Steve Kaye, participants can learn tips and practical techniques to capture hummingbirds on camera. Debbie Vengco, associate director of marketing and communications for Extension and International Programs at Cal State Fullerton, said via email that the workshops are a result of staff thinking of ways to engage their audience while closed. The 26-acre arboretum has remained closed to the public since last year due to the coronavirus pandemic. Most of the staff was furloughed at the begin-



ning of the pandemic and later a team of horticulturists were brought back full time to take care of the plant collections. Since its closure, the area that was once a community garden became a sunflower field tied to a fundraising project, and the arboretum’s annual vegetable sale Veg-

giepalooza took place online in the spring. Proceeds from the sale went toward helping the arboretum keep its full-time staff, care for the plants on site and conservation efforts. The arboretum is set to reopen in the beginning of July, according to Vengco. — From staff reports

Solo show about the loss of an 11-year-old girl’s mother comes to video on demand for a limited time

Susan Lieu’s solo show “140LBS: How Beauty Killed My Mother” is hitting screens at home for free through Monday. The autobiographical 65-minute performance recounts how Lieu’s mother, Jennifer Ha, went in for plastic surgery and died mid-procedure from loss of oxygen to her brain. Lieu was 11 years old. The show, in which she plays 15 characters, deals with grief, Vietnamese feminine beauty and medical accountability. In 2019, Lieu used the profits from nine sold-out shows in Seattle and San Francisco to launch a tour across major U.S. cities with Vietnamese populations. Prior to a performance in Westminster, she told TimesOC that meeting audience members after the show felt like a combination of a wedding and a funeral. “I feel more alive than I’ve ever felt. I’ve worked harder than I’ve ever worked, but at least I know that the work I’m doing is net positive,” Lieu said.



Jenny Crooks

SUSAN LIEU playing herself in “140 LBS: How Beauty Killed My Mother.” Lieu plays 15 characters in the show. The virtual screening, funded by the Orange County Health Care Agency, is hosted by the Laguna Playhouse as a part of its new outreach program, Our Stories, focused on using theater to strengthen health, well-being and community connection. “One of the things that we’re trying to do is reach out to 16- to 25-year-olds. The story involves Lieu as a young adult, going back and trying to discover what happens surrounding the death of her mother,” Dylan Russell, the theater’s director of education and outreach, said. “We really wanted to bring forward something where we could show a production that exemplified [dealing with grief]. Susan also does a lot of work around performance and writing as a healing process.” — From staff reports

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'LIKE IF YOU WON THE LOTTERY ON 9/11': How comedian Robin Tran's life changed in the last year

BY VERA CASTANEDA

A month before the pandemic started, Robin Tran was sick of doing stand-up comedy so she started learning how to make memes for fun.

She continued posting a mix of stand-up clips and original videos on TikTok that resulted in a new following of mostly LGBTQ 20-somethings during a time when comedy events were canceled indefinitely.

"I've had more success in one year in quarantine than my other eight years of stand-up combined," Tran said.

The 35-year-old, who grew up in Garden Grove, might be recognized from performances in Orange County venues — early 2012 open mic sets about being a 27-year-old virgin or a 2016 duo set "Unconventional Lesbians" performed with her girlfriend, Cate Gary.

Others might recognize Tran from appearances on Comedy Central's "Roast Battle" or her 2018 one-hour special debut "Don't Look at Me" on Hulu as part of a six-episode showcase of Asian comics called "Comedy InvAsian."

"I've had to come out a lot, and I was the first employee in my company's history to come out as transgender," Tran said in her one-hour special. "Don't ever be the first employee in your company to ever do anything. It was the worst experience of my life."

The joke is now available along with the full comedy album on all audio streaming platforms. It covers bipolar disorder, coming out as transgender to her Vietnamese mother, Christmas in a white household and pro wrestling to name a few topics.

Tran, who has since left her



Courtesy Robin Tran

ROBIN TRAN performing onstage at the Comedy Palace.

9-to-5 job, spends most days scrolling through Twitter, reading news, writing jokes and making TikTok videos. She's also starting to perform stand-up sets again, prepping for shows in San Diego next month and Austin in 2022.

In this condensed and edited interview, Tran talks about depression, behind-the-scenes moments of "Don't Look at Me," TikTok and getting back on stage.

Q What has the past year been like for you?

A I've been talking about how 2020 is the best year of my life, but I wouldn't be able to say it during 2020 because everyone was suffering so much. I had to hide it from people. The other day on stage I said it's like if you won the lottery on 9/11.

I was severely depressed for over 20 years and I have bipolar II. I started medication in 2017. I had psychiatrists that just didn't care

about me at all. I was on the wrong medications for a couple years, got off of them because it wasn't working. In the month where I was on no medication, it felt like I could feel things again, but my mood swings were wild.

So I got a new psychiatrist that actually cared about me and I got some good health insurance. My depression completely lifted.

I tell people that finding the right medication is the best thing that's ever happened to me — better than doing stand-up, coming out as transgender or falling in love.

Q It's wild that sometimes the difference between life and death is quality healthcare and healthcare workers, but a lot of people don't have access to it.

A When I started seeing my current psychiatrist, I kept thanking her and she said to me, "That makes me so sad that you're thanking me over something that every doctor should be doing for you." She completely demystified bipolar II for me. People either make it this insurmountable thing that they have that they'll never overcome or they do the opposite where they go, "I'm depressed and it's because I'm special or I'm a genius." But she said that having bipolar or having a mental illness is the same as if you had a cold or asthma. You wouldn't say, "I'm so weak. I need this inhaler."

Q Did you have conversations about whether suffering in general serves your comedy and not having it might take away from a performance?

A That's one of the most common misconceptions, and I used to think that too. It's this old myth of the tortured artist, the sad

clown. It's a very male mentality. When I was super depressed, I had some really funny sets about depression. But I didn't really talk about anything else because my brain was so focused on my own misery. I'm a very silly person and I finally brought the silliness and absurdity onstage that I was missing for so long. I think you can tell how much fun I'm having, even if I'm talking about something serious.

Q What was the process of making your first one-hour special "Don't Look at Me"?

A Most comedians would find venues to practice. But I was so depressed, I didn't do any of that. I would pace around the apartment and say the hour to myself from beginning to end out loud. Then I would just lay in bed for the entire day crying. On the day of the taping, there was a dress rehearsal where I performed the entire hour for a cameraman and no audience. I bombed. I forgot my jokes. I messed up my opener. I messed up my closer. Then two hours later, I had to perform this thing for a packed audience. My girlfriend was opening for me and while she was performing, I thought about making a run for it. But right before I went on stage, I just remembered the worst that can happen is bombing again so just go and have fun. Then I ended up having the best set of my life.

I had a clock on my life. I thought I'm probably going to kill myself, but I want to do something really good before that happens. That's how I saw the special.

Q You've become more active on TikTok — not just posting your stand-up clips but also

original videos.

A I ran out of stand-up clips. I was really panicking because I didn't know what to post and had 100,000 followers. My girlfriend said, "Make your own content. People want to see your face." I was like, "No one wants to see my stupid face. There needs to be a microphone and an audience." I just started doing it because I had no choice.

Some old school comedians say that it's not real comedy. You try to make a funny 15-second video! I guarantee it's as hard or maybe even harder than doing a 20-minute set. You have to figure out a way to be funny quickly, which means editing. A lot of comedians will have a four-hour podcast that they don't edit out calling it a creative choice. But for me, that's being lazy. Some of the most creative people in the world are on TikTok right now. I'm really excited about it. And it also gets rid of the gatekeepers a little bit.

Q You're also starting to go out and perform again. What's that like after not being onstage for a year?

A It felt like an awkward first date. We're enjoying each other's company, but I didn't really know how to do comedy and they didn't know how to be an audience. It'll take a while to get used to, but I think it'll be back to normal again soon. I love stand-up comedy, but I don't need to do it all the time. I'm OK with doing one really good set and then taking a two-week break to go back to the internet stuff.

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MAIL

Continued from page R1

gramming like book clubs, kid-friendly Surreal Story-Time, lectures on Santa Ana history and Tarot and Tea kept the center busy for the next couple of years.

In early 2020, Rubio and the center's board members started having conversations about how to make Makara sustainable.

"It's demanding to have a space that's volunteer run," Rubio said. "We have jobs. We have family and other commitments ... Rents are rising in Santa Ana, and we're not connected to Orange County wealth. How will we be able to bring in enough money to sustain Makara?"

Before they could answer those questions, the coronavirus pandemic took over. They decided not to renew the lease on the commercial space. When they moved out in May 2020, they gave away as much of their 1,500 book inventory as possible.

Little did they know by October 2020, the center would have to rebuild some of its collection to launch Makara by Mail, a mail-order library service.

Readers can sign up for individual or family Makara library cards, select books online to be borrowed for up to 28 days (with no late fee charges) and return via mail with a prepaid post-age. The service is free to Santa Ana residents and open to nonresidents

across the United States through a one-time fee for a paid membership, with all funds going toward the center's services. The on-line book catalog was reorganized (in English and Spanish) with funds from the CARES Arts Relief Grant and the Literary Arts Emergency Fund.

"You become part of a community because our collection is so small," Rubio said. "It only works if we all play our part. If a book goes out and it doesn't come back, that's OK. We're not going to bar someone from using our library again because that defeats the purpose."

About 250 patrons are still active through the mail program. Rubio sends out 10 to 15 books a month. The majority of readers are located in Santa Ana, but she has mailed out books as far as New York.

Olivia Remijio, 51, initially found Makara on Instagram. The Newport Beach resident, who grew up and works in Santa Ana, became a frequent patron of the brick-and-mortar and eventually the mail service.

"I didn't recognize any of the [book] titles, which was exciting to me," Remijio said. "I noticed that a lot of the books were also in Spanish and other languages."

Remijio later added, "If I can get anything in the mail to brighten my day, especially during 2020. I was on it."

Her first Makara by Mail

order was "Cemetery Boys" by Aiden Thomas.

Adriana Alexander, 41, was first introduced to Rubio while she held pop-up book clubs. The Santa Ana resident, who is acting as a family caregiver while working on her own writing and mural projects, remembers going to an event featuring artist Leonora Carrington and a presentation on Mesa Blanca, a type of spiritism based in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

"Marytza's warm personality and her point of view are definitely part of what draw people in," Alexander said. "But once you get there, it's really about all the many interesting things you can learn that maybe you didn't even know existed before ... Makara is really good at being the cultural resource you didn't really know you were missing."

Authors Darcie Little Badger, Kazuo Ishiguro, Marlon James, Samanta Schweblin and Akwaeke Emezi have been on Alexander's 2020 reading lists.

Rubio curates titles based on Makara readers' interests, books that are influencing cultural conversations at large and selections from Reparations Club and Haymarket Books.

She's found reader interest correlates to current events. Rubio said there's a current spike in requests for books on Palestine and the Middle East. After the Atlanta spa shootings, there was a higher interest in



Greg Camphire

MARYTZA RUBIO at Makara Library headquarters.

Charles Yu's "Interior Chinatown" and other books that dealt with the Asian American experience. Any time there's a police shooting, she said there's an interest in books on abolishing policing and imprisonment.

Since 2017, the top 10 most checked out books have been "My Favorite Thing Is Monsters" by Emil Ferris, "Get in Trouble: Stories" by Kelly Link, "An African American and Latin History of the

United States" by Paul Ortiz, "The Hate U Give" by Angie Thomas, "Mama The Alien/Mama la Extraterrestre" by René Colato Laínez, "The Ultimate Guide to Tarot: A Beginner's Guide to the Cards, Spreads, and Revealing the Mystery of the Tarot" by Liz Dean, "The Strange Library" by Haruki Murakami, "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" by Erika L. Sánchez, "The Book of Emma Reyes: A Memoir" by Emma Reyes,

and "Abuela's Weave" by Omar S. Castaneda.

As the state is slated to reopen Tuesday, Rubio is thinking about what the future for Makara looks like.

"I'm very happy to see that there are more types of projects like this," Rubio said. "There's Noname Book Club ... there's the Feminist Library on Wheels. When I see these projects taking an anti-capitalist approach, genuinely rooted in knowledge and collective empowerment, I am so encouraged by that and I want to see more of it ... [Makara] is working on sharing the knowledge that we've accumulated in starting this project and making it available to anyone who's interested in doing their own project whether it's a library, theater company or a way to share music."

Most recently, the center supplied the books that stocked free little libraries set up across Santa Ana through the Boca de Oro festival.

"I never thought you could just start your own library," Remijio said. "That's what I have appreciated about 2020 — that people have been putting books outside of their houses, literally encouraged to create their own libraries."

For more information or to check out books, visit makarabymail.com.

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FRAUD

Continued from page R2

tion about children and spouses, then submitted fraudulent billings for procedures that never took place. Jurors heard from several people whom Poon claimed to have served, but they testified they'd never been to her office.

Poon's lawyer, H. Dean Steward, defended her as a caring professional with a fast-paced practice. She made billing errors, Steward said, but errors are not crimes.

Steward also said her lifestyle doesn't reflect the extravagance often seen with financial crimes. Prosecutors like to show photos of a "Newport Beach penthouse and Ferrari and all those things," Steward said, but "what we have here is Dr. Poon driving a Mini Cooper. The car before that that she drove was a Prius."

"We didn't hear about Gucci purses. We didn't hear about Rolex watches," Steward said.

Jurors deliberated about eight hours over two days before convicting Poon of

all nine felony healthcare fraud charges. She's currently not in jail but faces a statutory maximum of 67 years in prison when she's sentenced Aug. 30, though she likely will receive much less time under federal sentencing laws.

According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, for the 81% of healthcare fraud convicts who were sentenced to prison in 2019, the average sentence was 34 months.

After he read the verdict on Wednesday, U.S. District Judge David Carter asked jurors to inform his courtroom on Monday about their health status, in an apparent nod to a months-long dispute among his colleagues about the safety of pandemic-era jury trials.

The judge is close with U.S. District Judge Cormac Carney, who dismissed five criminal cases because of the trial ban, and shares Carney's concern about the constitutionality of indefinitely disallowing trials.

Carney has been at odds with U.S. District Judge Josephine Staton, who questioned the safety of Orange County Superior Court jury

trials during the pandemic because she said court officials weren't contacting jurors post-trial to see if they'd been infected with the coronavirus. Carney repeatedly pointed to the Superior Court trials when arguing against the Central District's trial ban and said in February that Staton "misunderstands the purpose and practicability of contact tracing."

Like Staton and Carney, Carter appeared to misuse the phrase "contact tracing" when he spoke with jurors last week because he wasn't referring to tracing the contacts of the jurors but simply requesting they contact the court on Monday to report their health status.

Regardless, Carter clearly was trying to acknowledge Staton's safety concerns while adhering to his and Carney's steadfast support for in-person jury trials.

"There's a lot of cases coming up in the future, and if something happens we want to get it right health wise," Carter said.

MEGHANN M. CUNIFF is a contributor to Times OC.

AMAZON

Continued from page R2

are rallying against the plan.

"The response we've seen has been overwhelmingly negative," said Arrow Santos, a marketing assistant for the real estate company Kidder Mathews. Santos first reported the proposal last month on a blog for an individual Kidder Mathews broker. In addition to general opposition, he said he's fielded calls from people "asking why we'd bring attention to it."

"Which to me kind of speaks to what the true intentions are," Santos said. "I think if the big business players thought this would be beneficial to local residents, they would not be going to the lengths of secrecy that we've seen. It's hard to really imagine another reason than avoiding the court of public opinion."

No one with Greenlaw returned phone calls seeking comment for this article, and CEO Wilbur Smith did not respond to emails.

Founded in 2003 and headquartered in Irvine, Greenlaw has been steadily swooping up properties for Amazon over the last few years, with news outlets reporting recent projects in Palmdale, Simi Valley and Bakersfield. Meanwhile, Smith donated \$10 million to USC last year, and the school renamed its real estate development department after him. His success pairs well with his client's: Amazon reported a 44% increase in net sales in the pandemic-era first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020, or \$108.5 billion over \$75.5 billion.

"They're growing like gangbusters, and the reality is, by and large, the public values the service Amazon provides," said Daniel Flaming, director of Economic Roundtable, a Los Angeles-based research nonprofit. But meeting that demand "in a way that's compatible with the quality of life in communities is kind of a work in progress," Flaming said.

The Planning Commission's design subcommittee reviewed the proposal

May 12. Commissioner Zhen Wu said the proposal is a "huge economic development" and job builder that would fill "an under-utilized space" in the business park. Developers expect to have 11 trucks ferry goods to and from the center, "primarily between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.," Roxas told the subcommittee.

The company initially had what Roxas described as a "very ambitious" goal of breaking ground within six months, but she said the pursuit of the development agreement likely will extend that timeline.

Santos said the space Amazon wants to develop "could provide between 50 and 100 industrial spaces for small, locally owned businesses owned by people who have chosen to raise their families in San Clemente."

"What a lot of people don't realize is this really is San Clemente's last vacant land for all time," Santos said. "Once this is constructed, this is it for the future of San Clemente."

MEGHANN M. CUNIFF is a contributor to Times OC.

DIM SUM

Continued from page R1

est concentration of these shops in Orange County. What follows is an analysis of three old-school spots where you can pick up dim sum, go home, brew a pot of tea and finish your meal in the amount of time it takes to wait for a seat at a traditional dim sum restaurant.

TASTY BBQ & DIM SUM
13861 Brookhurst St.,
Garden Grove
(714) 539-3222

Located inside Sieu Thi Thuan Phat Supermarket, Tasty BBQ & Dim Sum is one of the few dim sum to-go purveyors that's open past 5 p.m. In fact, if there's still stock available, you can conceivably walk up to their U-shaped stall after sunset and get dim sum before the 8 p.m. closing time.

Though dim sum for dinner might be a tempting prospect, resist the urge — what you pick might have sat out all afternoon.

Arrive in the morning when the metal baskets are stacked as tall as your head and still billowing steam. You certainly want to eat the delicate rice noodle sheets called *cheong fan* as soon as they're made. Wait too long and they turn into glue sticks.

Also order the *siu mai*, open-faced pork dumplings, before lunchtime to taste them at their most optimal.

Tasty BBQ sells the smooth and mousse-like



DIM SUM OFFERINGS at Tasty BBQ & Dim Sum in Garden Grove.



Photos by Edwin Goei

TASTY BBQ & DIM SUM is inside Sieu Thi Thuan Phat Supermarket in Garden Grove.

variety — the kind without any errant pieces of chewy pork or shrimp in the mixture.

Skip the steamed BBQ pork buns, however — they aren't as satisfying as those sold by Little Saigon's banh bao specialists Yummy Banh Bao and TP Banh Bao 2.

But say you did want to come and try your luck at a dim sum dinner. The fried glutinous rice footballs called *ham sui gok* are excellent any time of day.

Out of the three dim sum spots featured in this article, Tasty BBQ's specimens are the best of the lot, with a crunchy outer shell that cracks open like a geode. Inside the cavernous interior, discover a spoonful of loose seasoned ground pork.

Compared to their competitors, Tasty BBQ's braised spare ribs are the most silky and unctuous, even if you have to reheat them a little in the microwave.

For sweeter items, Tasty BBQ bakes the flakiest *daan taat*, the classic egg custard tarts that are required to complete any dim sum meal, but it also offers an egg custard bun covered in a cracked sugary dome reminiscent of Mexican concha.

GIAI PHAT Food Co. occupies its own storefront in Westminster. It serves a variety of dim sum that can be ordered by the piece.



GIAI PHAT FOOD CO.
9550 Bolsa Ave. Ste 123,
Westminster
(714) 775-7437

Gai Phat Food Co. occupies its own storefront — it's the only shop on this list that's not inside a supermarket. But the point here is the same: to get your dim sum quickly and go home.

But Gai Phat is unique in that it offers the option of getting some items by the piece. For instance, four baked BBQ pork buns come to an order (one more than its competitors); but the *char siu* filling inside is so dry, it's best to only commit to one.

The *daan taat* also comes four to a box, and you want every one since they're small enough here to be

consumed in a single bite. And though the *ham sui gok* is nearly as big as a fist, you'll regret not doing a full order. They're almost as crunchy as Tasty BBQ's but contain more filling.

Skip the purple-striped taro pastry, which is packed with a near flavorless hunk of mashed taro that hardly qualifies as dessert.

Also, if you opt for the steamed beef tripe, be aware that it's in dire need of more of its gingery gravy to offset its rubbery chew. But if you're an aficionado of coarsely chopped filling in your *siu mai*, you're in luck: Gai Phat stuffs its *siu mai* with whole shrimp and big chunks of pork.

But what ultimately distinguishes Gai Phat from



THE DIM SUM CO. in Westminster offers takeout dim sum with online ordering and a QR code to download its menu while you're standing in line.



DIM SUM Co.'s poke bun, a canary-hued steamed bun with salted duck egg custard inside and cartoon googly eyes outside.

the other vendors mentioned here is the house-made sate sauce. The eatery gives you thimbles of it in lieu of chili oil, and it elevates anything it touches. Even if you don't intend to take home any dim sum, it's worth visiting the shop to buy a full jar of this ambrosial chili paste to slather on everything you eat — be it dumplings or McNuggets.

THE DIM SUM CO.
8900 Westminster Blvd.,
Westminster
(714) 895-8455
thedimsumco.com

The Dim Sum Co. is the most technologically savvy purveyor on this list. It has an enviable social media presence that the other two shops don't have. It offers online ordering and even a QR code to download the menu while you're standing in line.

And there's always a line, which forms as soon as the shop opens despite its slightly higher prices.

Key to its popularity is the signature poke bun, a canary-hued steamed bun that has salted duck egg custard on the inside and cartoon googly eyes on the outside. It's a delicacy spe-

cifically designed for viral marketing.

These days, in response to COVID-19, the Dim Sum Co. repositioned the order counter so that you pick up and pay without coming inside the store, but the service is as efficient as it has always been.

The fried taro balls are greaseless and crisp, shedding their shredded-wheat-like fur in crumbles — perhaps the shop's best item aside from the poke buns. And though you only get three egg custard tarts per order here, they're bigger than Gai Phat's and possess a sturdier crust more resistant to soggy.

Like Gai Phat's, the Dim Sum Co.'s *siu mai* are of the chunky variety, but they're softer in texture and therefore slightly better.

Skip the *ham sui gok*. Even fresh, they're deflated, flaccid and greasy. And the spare ribs are leaner and therefore less decadent than Tasty BBQ's version. And when it comes to dim sum, why bother with anything that is less than decadent?

EDWIN GOEI is a contributor to TimesOC.

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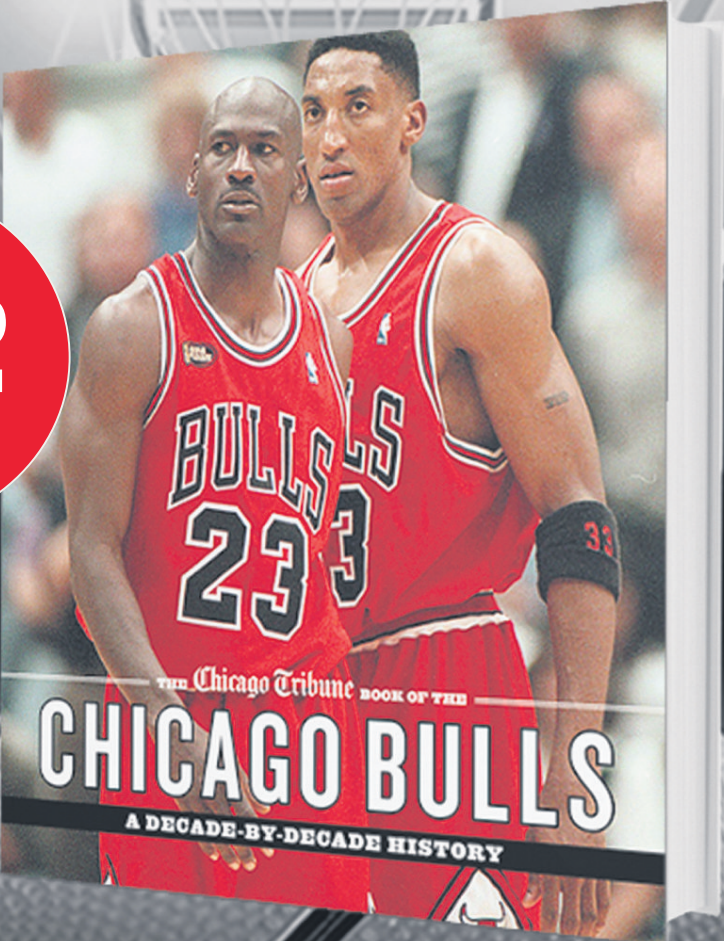
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