

'Let's just keep moving forward': O.C. dining in the time of COVID-19

To coincide with the Best of TimesOC Readers' Choice supplement, we asked contributors to take a look at some of the struggles and successes of O.C.'s dining scene this challenging year.

BY ALIESE MUHONEN

Sixty-one degrees? Rain? Whatever. The elements didn't stop a queue of socially distanced customers from trailing out of Eggbred's door and around the parking lot on a chilly Saturday morning. The reward for their wait: inventive breakfast sandwiches crafted by owner Albert Shim, who opened the La Habra restaurant on Oct. 10.

"[The decision to open] was kind of in full faith," Shim said. "I was just like, 'Screw it, I can't hold off any longer. I just gotta do it.'"

Shim, 35, is one of the few bold souls who started a business in the food and beverage sector in 2020 — the industry's most devastating year in recent memory.

According to a survey conducted by the National Restaurant Assn., the food service industry is projected to lose \$240 billion by the end of the year. Within California, an estimated one in three restaurants will be casualties of the coronavirus pandemic, closing permanently or shuttering multiple locations.

Starting a new restaurant is challenging under normal circumstances, especially with Orange County's steep rent and depth of competition. But the addition of a pandemic has narrowed the odds of success even further.

Shim originally planned to open Eggbred in April but postponed when lockdown restrictions went into effect.

"I was so scared about the pandemic and



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

See **Dining**, page R4 **OWNER GEORGE BARKER** opens windows at the Mayfield restaurant in San Juan Capistrano.

How an O.C. food critic navigates eating out during the pandemic

BY EDWIN GOEI

Before the pandemic, I regarded drive-throughs and takeout as afterthoughts, last resorts, the parts of eating out that, as a restaurant critic, I couldn't really write about. But during the COVID-19 crisis, they were all there was. And though it's a sad but necessary substitute for the full restaurant experience during scary times, there was, at least, the

act of driving to get the takeout — a welcome distraction from the monotony of staying home.

Of course, there was the food itself.

But as it turned out, drive-throughs and takeout didn't just provide these tastes of normalcy. They were valuable lifelines for me to patronize the eateries in need of my

See **Critic**, page R5



Edwin Goei

THERE'S 20% off Tokyo Central's bento and sushi boxes after 7 p.m.



Photo by Kyle Fierro

FABLE & SPIRIT in Newport Beach has been included in Michelin Guide's 25 Inspector Discoveries in California.

Michelin Guide nod lifts the spirits of Newport Beach pub

BY LORI BASHEDA

A Newport Beach restaurant has been crowned one of the Michelin Guide's 25 Inspector Discoveries in California.

Fable & Spirit, a relative newcomer (opened in the summer of 2019), is a sophisticated neighborhood pub, both classy and comfy, in Lido Marina's growing culinary scene.

Darren Coyle, who co-owns the restaurant with his wife Jean, said they were blown away when they heard the

news.

"I wanted to jump up and down," he says. "Michelin anything is the ultimate recognition that a restaurant can get."

The list, posted online Oct. 27, was unveiled with an introduction: "This year's annual Star Revelation in California may have been postponed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and devastating wildfire season, but in its place ... a collection of 25 inspector discoveries; a snapshot of new

See **Pub**, page R2

GOP pushes against 'blue wave'

It may be purpling across Southern California as more ballots are cast for Republicans in 2020.

BY STEPHANIE LAI

Two years ago marked a monumental shift for California politics: Four districts in the then-Republican bastion of Orange County flipped blue, ushering in four Democrats to the House of Representatives.

But 2020 is shaping up as a reversal of that blue wave, although how big a retrenchment it will be remains an open question. With few ballots left to count, Republicans have taken back at least one seat in Orange County and padded their vote lead in other swing districts across Southern California.

In a major win for the GOP, California 48th District Congressman Harley Rouda, a Democrat, con-

"In the past we've seen Republicans doing well on election night and Democrats making ground from mail-in ballots. But the numbers being released after Election Day are favoring Republicans."

— **Michael Moodian**
Chapman University
research analyst

ceded to his Republican opponent, Michelle Steel on Tuesday, in one of several hard-fought races in areas that until recently were considered conservative strongholds. Steel remained ahead of Rouda by 2%, or 8,000 votes, as of Thursday.

O.C. Registrar of Voters Neal Kelley said all in-person votes and 99% of mail-in ballots have been counted, leaving about 28,000 ballots to be processed. Kelley said he anticipates the final tally to be complete in about two weeks.

Steel's win takes back one of several seats that the California GOP lost in the 2018 midterm elections, when Democrats made big gains in O.C. and other red-leaning areas. The historic clean sweep gave Democrats control of all seven O.C. seats during the 116th Congress.

The 2018 results delivered a blow to Republicans in California's moneyed coast, home to sprawling suburbs and the birthplace of Richard Nixon, the region described by Ronald Reagan as "a place where good Republicans go to die."

The post-election day success for these Republican candidates is

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Virtual events set for Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week

BY BEN BRAZIL

United to End Homelessness will host community discussions with industry experts to educate the public as part of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week from Nov. 15 to 22.

The discussions will include a series of talks on veteran homelessness and what service providers and property owners are doing to help people stay housed during the coronavirus pandemic, among other topics.

United to End Homelessness is also launching a social media campaign called "Essential," which focuses on how essential a permanent home is to solving homelessness.

The organization is providing a social media kit for people to take part in the campaign and help spread awareness.

"During COVID, the word 'essential' and essential workers is something that really came to the forefront of our collective thinking," said Becks Heyhoe, executive director of United to End Homelessness.

"Unfortunately, one of the areas that we feel didn't quite get highlighted was the role of the frontline workers who are working to address homelessness in our community as essential workers.

"We'll be taking this week to look at things that are essential when it comes to addressing homelessness, and also using this week as an opportunity to celebrate and thank those who work in the homelessness industry here in Orange County."

United to End Homelessness and partnering agencies have for the last three years taken part in the national event.

Orange County United Way created United to End Homelessness in 2018 as a partnership between the county's leaders in business, philanthropy, government, faith-based and nonprofit groups. The organization claims it is dedicated to ending homelessness in the county by 2024.

United to End Homelessness provides regular classes on homelessness for the public, among many other educational offerings.

The group's Welcome Home OC program partners with property owners to incentivize them to house the homeless. The group has housed about 125 households through the program.

Heyhoe, like many in the industry, said the county needs more permanent supportive housing to achieve the goal of ending homelessness. She sup-



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

JOHN WAGNER, who has been homeless for more than a decade, holds a City Net care package given to him in Costa Mesa.

ports the county's plan to build 2,700 more units of permanent supportive housing in the next several years.

For more information on the

events, visit unitedtoendhomelessness.org/events/.

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazilpilot

Activist group claims O.C. company supplied part in drones used by Azerbaijan to target Armenian civilians

BY BEN BRAZIL

The Orange County chapter of a prominent Armenian activist group claims a Fullerton company produced antennas used in drones that are killing Armenian civilians.

The Armenian National Committee of America in Orange County contends that battlefield photos released by the Armenian government show that Comant Industries has supplied antennas that are being used in Turkish Bayraktar drones.

The group says that those drones have been used by Azerbaijan in a controversial conflict over an ethnic Armenian enclave called Nagorno-Karabakh, which is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Armenians refer to the enclave as Artsakh.

The conflict, which has led to the displacement and death of many civilians, has spurred action by Armenians in the U.S., as thousands have taken to the streets in protest in Southern California.

“As an Armenian diaspora community we have done whatever we can from abroad to stop the aggression and the war crimes and the indiscriminate killing of civilians,” said Sanan Shirinian, who has been working with the Armenian National Committee of America and is a leading member of the Armenian community in Orange County.

“And we’ve just become aware that a U.S.-based company actually here right in our backyard in Fullerton is applying the antenna use in drones which are killing

innocent civilians.

“We feel that it’s our due diligence to make our voices heard and make sure that this company stopped doing business and selling their antennas to war criminals.”

The Armenian activist group held a protest in front of Comant’s building last week and sent a letter to the company calling for them to “cease the sale” of antenna parts to Turkey and “take a strong moral stance on this issue.”

The letter detailed how members of the Armenian community in Orange County have family and friends in the areas targeted by the drones.

“Our community is directly impacted as we worry about the safety and security of our loved ones,” the letter reads.

Comant did not respond to numerous voicemails.

However, Comant general manager Josh Jones sent a response letter to the group, which provided TimesOC with that letter.

“Thank you for your letter which raises a number of questions about the apparent use of a Comant antenna in the ongoing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia,” the letter reads.

“This specific antenna you refer to is a VOR/GS navigation antenna designed for commercial and military purposes and was sold in 2017. I wanted to reassure you that Comant Industries has a long-established and rigorous business ethic and compliance system in place. We only sell and ship products in strict compliance with export regulations, in-

cluding U.S. and U.K. regulations.

“Finally, like you, we hope the violence you described in your letter can be brought to an end as quickly as possible.”

Greg Mikhanjian, spokesperson for the Armenian National Committee Orange County chapter, said the response was “inadequate.” He said the group will continue to put pressure on the company.

“They need to reveal any and all sales of its products, tech or services to Turkish weapons manufacturers and announce publicly that it’s instructing all its wholesalers, retailers, any other partners, that they have to cease any and all transactions or transfers, with the Turkish or Azerbaijani military or related entities,” Mikhanjian said. “They haven’t done that...and it was not a commitment to that promise to stop sales.”

The local chapter discovered the photographic evidence of the antenna from a series of battlefield photos that were released by the Armenian government, Mikhanjian said. The photos also implicate a series of other U.S. companies that are supplying parts for the drones.

The group posted the photos to its Instagram account and began contacting each company with demands to cease supplying Turkey with the technology.

Mikhanjian said that some of the companies have complied. He said another protest against Comant is likely but has not yet been scheduled.

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazil

PUB

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and inspiring culinary talent across California.”

It goes on to note Fable & Spirit’s “elegant design ... and yet, it never rests solely on its good looks.”

Specifically, the list gives a shout-out to the warm Guinness brown bread with honey butter and sea salt, “an absolute delight, especially paired with plump P.E.I. [Prince Edward Island] mussels bathed in a thyme butter so heady that you’ll want to slurp up every drop.”

Also noted: “The Cracked Pepper Bucatini — studded with clams and pancetta — is a glorious tangle of goodness.”

The Fable & Spirit culinary team is led by chef David Shofner, who is also executive chef of the Coyle clan’s popular Dublin 4 Gastropub and Wineworks for Everyone, both in Mission Viejo.

Fable & Spirit’s made-from-scratch menu is progressive, yet approachable, focusing on fresh ingredients. The Fable in Fable & Spirit is a play on farm-to-table, as well as a wink to Irish fairy tales.

Dishes range from classic fish and chips made with Icelandic cod flown in fresh on ice to Wood-Fired Octopus with sofrito, chorizo Bilbao, smoked potatoes and Padron peppers. The restaurant, by the way, is a



Photo by Kyle Fierro

AN EMPLOYEE at Fable & Spirit in Newport Beach mixes drinks.

family affair. The Coyle’s daughter, Ali, a level 3 sommelier, is director of wines. Their son, Drew, is director of spirits.

“It’s lovely to have them all involved,” said Darren Coyle.

Darren and Jean grew up in County Mayo and later lived in Dublin 4 before moving to Philadelphia in the early ’80s and then migrating to Orange County. Their vision for Fable & Spirit, Darren says, was to create a restaurant that was “refined, yet whimsical ... capturing the grandeur of Ireland’s country homes. We want to share the spirit and magic of our rich Irish heritage.”

Guests enter through a gold Georgian door, just like those seen on the streets of Dublin. On the

walls hang paintings of Irish goddesses and hares, revered shape shifters in Irish mythology.

The bar is topped with sleek black Nero Marquina Spanish marble. The upholstery is a mix of leather, teal velvet and elegant prints. Guests can also ask to be seated in the Snug, a cozy private booth — a fixture in old Irish pubs.

While the menus are globally inspired, some of the dishes and cocktails are nods to Ireland. A delicate Rabbit Fricassee is on the menu, as is a Dublin Irish Coffee made with Irish whiskey, espresso, dark brown sugar and hand-whipped cream.

My favorite is the Ritual, a sexy bourbon cocktail with chai and allspice which arrives with a bit of smoking sage clipped to the rim of the glass.

Guests can also choose from more than 180 boutique wines by the bottle from the wine cellar, and 40 wines by the glass. Coyle said they have stayed strong during the pandemic, adding 30 seats outside and another 35 under the neighboring Lido Theatre’s vintage neon marquee for three-course Chef Dinners on Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

“The clientele has been extraordinary,” Coyle says. “I can call many of them friends.”

LORI BASHEDA is a contributor to TimesOC.

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CONTACT US

Erik Haugli
Deputy Editor
erik.haugli@latimes.com

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

Online
timesoc.com
Social Media
@timesocofficial

Address

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

Business Office

(714) 966-4600
Newsroom
(714) 966-4699

Email

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

TCN Legal Phone

888-881-6181

TCN Legal Email

LAlegal@tribune.com

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DINING

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stuff, [but] I feel like we bypassed the majority of that, and I just feel super blessed and fortunate.”

And though he said he's exhausted and “borderline delirious” from working 40 days in a row, Shim's not complaining.

“I'm super grateful for everything,” he said. “I just want to make sure we're structured and can serve the customers well. It's so hard to do right now.”

If the lines outside of Eggbred are any indication, his faith has paid off.

Thirty-seven miles southeast in downtown San Juan Capistrano, George Barker, the 29-year-old owner of Mayfield, prepared for the dinner shift with his staff. Reservations for the restaurant's modern Mediterranean fare have sold out multiple weekends since it launched full service dining at the end of August.

Tonight's challenge is the rain, hindering seating on the outdoor patio.

Barker chuckled.

“It's cold outside, and basically sitting inside will feel like you sat outside,” he said.

Named after Barker's hometown in the U.K., Mayfield is his dream four years in the making. After moving from London to Orange County in 2017, Barker opened a food truck, vetted potential restaurant locations and secured Mayfield's current space on Camino Capistrano.

Construction began the week before lockdown in March. Barker couldn't go to the site for seven weeks and had to communicate with the construction crew and his chef through video calls.

“At the very start, it was hard,” he said. “We were trying to plan, like, building a kitchen, stocking the kitchen, hiring, writing menus. And we didn't even get the recipe tests for like 12 weeks because we couldn't see each other. So that was challenging.”

Though opening in the midst of a pandemic wasn't



EGGBRED OWNER Albert Shim is shown Tuesday at his La Harbra restaurant, which he opened in October.



Courtesy of Mmm Gelato
COCONUT drinks and gelato at Mmm Gelato in Garden Grove.

an ideal scenario, Barker is grateful that he could open Mayfield later in the year.

“We've worked with it,” he said, “And I think part of being a restaurant is every night, you have to deal with situations and figure things out and work things out. And [the pandemic] is just another one of those.”

The next day in downtown Santa Ana, Brit Costello, 35, and Jason “J-Bird” Venable, 36, sat in the taproom of Cerveza Cito Brewery and reflected on the chaotic five weeks since the brewery's Oct. 1 opening.

On separate weekends, there were the Santiago

and Blue Ridge fires (resulting in poor air quality), Halloween, the presidential election and now a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Costello, the tasting room manager, smiled wryly.

“It feels like we've been open longer than we have,” she said. “It really does.”

Venable laughed. The owner of the brewery and one of the three co-founders of the Santa Ana hair products company Suavecito Pomade, Venable was in the middle of purchasing the brewery space when lockdown went into effect.

“It's just one of the things where [we said] ‘Let's just keep going forward,’ and I don't think we had any idea it was going to get this crazy,” he said.

“I think we've actually been luckier than most, that people are totally willing and haven't really caused many issues when it comes to, like, abiding by the rules.”

Of all the businesses in the food and beverage sector, craft breweries have

had some of the largest losses in sales and the most confusing restrictions. Under the current tier system, customers cannot buy beers at a brewery without also buying an accompanying meal.

For breweries without dedicated kitchens like Cerveza Cito, that means playing musical chairs with food trucks and forming partnerships to guarantee there's a different one on-site every day. The food also needs to pair well with the brewery's Latin-inspired beers, whose ingredients — prickly pear fruit, Ibarra Mexican chocolate and ghost pepper spice, among others — reflect the city's and Venable's heritage.

While the brewery has had consistent sales, Venable and Costello stressed the importance of being flexible and having an action plan to survive.

“You have to be totally willing to throw anything out the door if something changes at the drop of a hat, because it does,” Costello said. “I think we all

learned that this year: how fast things can change.”

That afternoon in Garden Grove, Phoebe Pham carried a folding table and chairs outside and arranged them in front of the dessert shop she co-owns, Mmm Gelato and More.

Though the customers stayed inside the shop — it's 64 degrees and windy — Pham was comfortable sitting outside.

“This actually feels good,” she said. “I went to school at Boston University.”

Pham's business has endured every closure and restriction since the beginning of the pandemic. She and her business partners tried to open Mmm Gelato in March but closed when lockdown began.

Featuring mainly gelato, coffee and matcha drinks with a Southeast Asian twist, the business couldn't sell many of its offerings through delivery services due to their risk of melting.

Mmm Gelato reopened for takeout after lockdown ended and slowly expanded its hours to a regular schedule by August.

“We have to push back our grand opening day,” Pham said. “In fact, we haven't had a grand-opening day yet. So it's like we have the longest soft opening ever.”

In addition to the rigor of helping run her first business, Pham is expecting her second child, due at the end of the year. She credited having a growth mindset with getting her and the shop's staff through the difficult days.

“[The pandemic] slowed down our plan. But on a positive side, we have more time,” she said. “When we first opened, we made mistakes. But we learned through it. Me and the other partners, we think of this as something to try, just to have fun. So that's why we opened the store; we try to bring that positivity to other people.”

“A lot of things happened this year. But at the end, we still have to be positive to get through everything together.”

ALIESE MUHONEN is a contributor to TimesOC.

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CRITIC

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support, restaurants where I was a regular customer before the lockdown.

I still, however, did manage to explore and try a few new places, especially when I found they offered deals and discounts.

And I ate well. Some meals I took in front of the TV while bingeing Netflix, but most I ate in the car while the food was still hot. My glove compartment now rivals my silverware drawer in its collection of forks, spoons and chopsticks.

Even now, as some restaurants have shifted outdoors with tents and started socially distanced indoor dining, I still find myself choosing to do takeout. Mostly it's to save myself from asking that uncomfortable question of "Is this a good idea?" when sitting among groups of people. But partly it's because doing takeout is cheaper, which, in turn, allows me to eat out more often and patronize more places.

Here are the best takeout meals I had and will continue to have until we find ourselves on the other side of this pandemic.

BANH MI CHE CALI FOR DRIVE-THROUGH VIETNAMESE FOOD

For years I was aware that Banh Mi Che Cali Restaurant — located next door to the smaller Banh Mi Che Cali housed in an old Taco Bell on Brookhurst — has a drive-through window. What I didn't know until the lockdown is that it had everything I could ever expect from a full Vietnamese restaurant menu.

Yes, you can order pho from this drive-through.

Coupled with this is that the prices are one of the cheapest in Little Saigon. Almost nothing is over \$8. The combination rice plate — with a grilled pork chop, Vietnamese egg cake, shredded pork skin, a side salad, pickles and an ambrosial fish sauce to dribble on everything — is enough to feed two.

There's also fried rice,



THE ENTIRE MENU of Banh Mi Che Cali, including their pho, can be ordered from their drive-through window.

Photo by Edwin Goei

shaken beef, noodle salads, as well as the crusty baguette sandwiches of which this chain is renowned. But most impressive of all is the house special pho, which has more features than a fully loaded Tesla.

15553 Brookhurst St., Westminster, CA 92683

BIG PARM FOR \$1 PIZZA SLICES

For the remarkable price of \$1, you can get a satisfying triangle of molten cheese, sauce and pepperoni that beats the Costco food court pizza not only on taste but on cost, which is really saying something.

Andrew Gruel of Slapfish, who's behind this food court stall inside Mess Hall at Flight in Tustin, seems to have instituted this price drop to cater to the lunchtime crowd of cubedwellers from this sparsely populated office park. The low prices are also fodder for guests of Flight's popular drive-in movie nights.

Since I started eating them, the \$1 slices have since shrunk to a twelfth of a large pizza rather than an eighth, but it's still a good deal for a pie of this quality.

1705 Flight Way #2, Tustin, CA 92782

CAFE HIRO FOR THE MENCHI KATSU LUNCH SPECIAL

Weekdays at lunchtime is the ideal time to go for takeout at Café Hiro. This

popular Japanese/Italian hybrid specializes in washoku, Western food as seen through a Japanese lens. But weekdays are the only time you can order the menchi katsu lunch special.

It's a ball of seasoned ground beef that's been breaded and deep-fried. Imagine a juicy hamburger patty crossbred with an onion ring, eaten with a zippy tonkatsu sauce and a bracing hot mustard.

Along with proving that a meatloaf is better when it's crunchy on the outside, the dish also shows that you can't have too much starch on one plate. It comes with not one but three kinds: a warm scalloped potato, some sort of pasta and steamed rice. Also included: a salad, shredded cabbage and a free dessert that you don't get if you dine in.

10509 Valley View St., Cypress, CA 90630

GRILL CITY FOR FILIPINO BREAKFASTS

Grill City's silog is a meal I've enjoyed before the pandemic, during the shutdown and will continue to enjoy for as long as there is a Grill City. It's the Filipino answer to the American bacon and egg breakfast, a portmanteau of two words: sinangag (fried rice) and itlog (fried egg), served with a protein of your choice. The best protein is tocino, a

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Fran
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Don't get me wrong, I know my way around a kitchen. But sitting down to a wonderfully prepared meal is hard to beat. I love the sense of community at Walnut Village. It's like a small town with things to do right outside my door. The Book Nook and the water aerobics classes are my favorites. And having a choice of dining venues in the Village each day? Yeah, that's the icing on the cake.



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cured pork product cut from the fattiest parts of the pig with a ruddy color of Chinese char siu and a taste somewhere between beef jerky and barbecued baby back rib.

And if you take advantage of their buy three silogs for \$12.99 special, you've effectively secured six meals, because each Styrofoam box contains enough food to feed you twice over.

2180 Barranca Pkwy., Irvine, CA 92606

MISOYA ROCKIN' SUSHI FOR HOEDOEBA

If poke, chirashi and bibimbap entered a teleportation machine and got merged molecularly, you'd get Misoya's hoedoe-bap.

Think of a poke bowl but spicier, sweeter and more garlicky. Picture chirashi but with crunchy vegetables. Imagine the Korean sesame-oil scented aroma of a bibimbap but with chilled pieces of raw fish instead of beef. Hoedoe-bap is all these things together, and at this Korean-owned sushi joint, it seems to be on permanent special for \$7.99, which, I don't have to tell you, is cheaper than most chirashis, pokes and bibimbaps.

8893 W Garden Grove Blvd., Garden Grove, CA 92844

SABROSADA FOR CARNE ASADA NACHOS

The first bite from Sabrosada's carne asada half nachos is always the best. You feel the sturdy corn crunch of the freshly fried tortilla chips reverberate through your skull.

Your tongue is warmed by the refried beans. Then you taste the beefiness of the pencil-eraser morsels of seasoned carne asada.

Next there's the color bursts: the bright green goo of the guacamole, the yellow shredded cheese, the snowy sour cream, the tricolored pico de gallo. Even if you were blindfolded, the kaleidoscope of flavors unfurls in your



Edwin Goei

SABROSADA'S carne asada nachos in Fountain Valley.

mouth. It's synesthesia at its most delicious.

When so many things right now don't make sense, this drive-through Styrofoam box of nachos does. Lining up is an easygoing experience. The queue moves at a steady clip. The employees are courteous and professional, working hard to ensure the food is prepared fast and tastes as good as you had it last time. But you do want just the "half order" of nachos. The only difference I can tell between the half and full seems to be the price.

17225 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, CA 92708

TOKYO CENTRAL FOR DISCOUNTED BENTO BOXES AFTER 7 P.M.

Seven p.m. is the golden hour at Tokyo Central. It's when this Japanese supermarket marks down all remaining inventory of their bentos and sushi boxes with a 20% discount. Consider yourself lucky if you see a few boxes of delicately cooked salmon steaks atop fried rice with an immaculately curated array of side dishes.

But if you're here for discounted karaage, or actual nigiri and sashimi, forget it. They never make it past the lunch rush. It speaks to the

quality of the food that customers snap them up even before the clearance sale starts.

2975 Harbor Blvd., Costa Mesa, CA 92626

ZANKOU CHICKEN FOR KABOB COMBOS

I'd eat Zankou's kabob combo plate every day if I could. In its Styrofoam box is everything you need in a Middle Eastern meal.

There's karmic balance in its components. Every texture, taste and temperature complement each other so that not one thing dominates.

And on the shish taouk, the marinade doesn't overwhelm the essence of the chicken — it elevates it.

Eat it as you smooch the roasted tomato into the fluffy rice, releasing a torrent of juice that almost turns it into an entirely new dish.

Together with the cucumber salad that plays against the silken hummus and condiments that include Zankou's famous toum, radish pickles and sliced onions, everything on this plate exists in perfect harmony — even as the world remains in chaos.

2424 W Ball Road, Anaheim, CA 92804

EDWIN GOEI is a contributor to TimesOC.

GOP

Continued from page R1

a shift from the norm, according to Chapman University research analyst and co-director of the annual O.C. survey Michael Moodian.

"In the past we've seen Republicans doing well on election night and Democrats making ground from mail-in ballots," Moodian said. "But the numbers being released after Election Day are favoring Republicans, which says to me that more Democrats voted early."

The switch also could mean that more Republicans registered on Election Day to vote in person.

Steel, 65, will become one of the first two Korean American women to serve in the U.S. Congress, along with incoming Democratic representative Marilyn Strickland of Washington, who is of African American and Korean descent.

While voter registration has flipped in favor of Democrats across the county, Steel's district remains one of two that maintain a Republican voter registration advantage.

"This victory has been hard-fought and hard-won, and I could not be more humbled to have your support nor more honored to serve our community in Congress," Steel, a member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, wrote in a tweet. "Now, let's get to work."

The race between Rouda and Steel campaigns was as hard-fought as it was narrowly won. From social media posts to television ads, Steel's campaign portrayed Rouda as a politician who would raise taxes. Rouda's campaign countered by branding Steel as "the most corrupt politician in O.C."

Rouda was endorsed by Joe Biden, whom O.C. backed over President Trump.

Four years ago, the 58-year-old lawyer ousted 15-term Republican Dana Rohrabacher, who became increasingly unpopular during his final term.

In a sign of how aggressively both parties plan to



Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

TRUMP SUPPORTERS shout to passing motorists in front of GOP headquarters on Election Day in Newport Beach.

continue fighting for control over the district, Rouda already has announced his intention to run again in the upcoming midterm election, when voters can "compare my opponent's two years in Congress with my accomplishments on Nov. 8, 2022."

Democratic Party of Orange County chair Ada Briceño reiterated the sentiment in a statement.

"Congressman Harley Rouda is an outstanding leader who put Orange County residents first. This election was extremely close, so make no mistake: We're taking this seat back in 2022," she said.

In another tight race in Orange County, challenger Young Kim, a former state assemblywoman, is trying to oust incumbent Gil Cisneros in their rematch for the 39th District. Kim, who won the district's March primary by more than 2,000 votes, currently has a lead of around 4,000 votes, or 1.2% of ballots.

The Korean immigrant started her career running a women's apparel business and later organized community outreach projects for Rep. Ed Royce (R-Fullerton), while serving occasional stints as a host on Korean-language radio.

Seen as an underdog competitor to Cisneros, a lottery winner-turned philanthropist and politician, Kim faced a disadvantage in a district where 37% of registered voters are Democrats.

Republicans made up 32.5% and independents made up 28.7% of the regis-

tered voters in October.

On election night, both Cisneros and Rouda took early leads, but since then their Republican opponents have steadily gained ground.

In yet another hotly contested campaign, in northern Los Angeles County, incumbent Rep. Mike Garcia, a Republican, was projected as the winner over Assemblywoman Christy Smith in the race for the 25th Congressional District, according to a report from NBC News on Friday.

In 2018, that seat flipped from red to blue when Democratic newcomer Katie Hill unseated Republican incumbent Steve Knight.

But Hill resigned less than a year into her term after admitting an inappropriate relationship with a campaign staffer.

The vote count seesawed between Garcia and Smith, who held the lead Monday.

Moodian said that Garcia's win in the special election to replace Hill had given a misleading understanding of the political alignment of the district, which includes Santa Clarita and stretches east to the Antelope Valley and contains more registered Democrats than Republicans.

"Special elections draw in more registered Republicans," Moodian said, "it also comes off the heels of the Katie Hill controversy, so that all bodes well for Mike Garcia."

STEPHANIE LAI is an intern for the Los Angeles Times.

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