

# Daily Pilot

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020 /// Now including Coastline Pilot and Huntington Beach Independent /// dailypilot.com



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**A LARGE VESSEL** makes a turn at the Balboa Bridge as residents watch from a pier during the official unofficial "Let Freedom Ring" Newport Harbor Christmas Parade on Thursday in Newport Beach. The parade will continue through Saturday and will follow the same route as the traditional parade.

## Newport boat owners throw boat parade to replace canceled event

BY LILLY NGUYEN, DON LEACH

Boat owners may not have gotten to rock around the Christmas tree, but they did rock around Newport Harbor on Thursday night — the first night of the official unofficial boat parade.

The "Let Freedom Ring" parade was organized by boat owners in Newport Beach after the Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce canceled theirs in response to the coronavirus pandemic, stating that there was no way for the organizers to ensure people attending were wearing masks or face coverings and abiding by social distancing man-

dates while watching the parade.

"We are confident in our decision to cancel the official Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade," Steven Rosansky, president and chief executive officer of the Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce said in an email.

"As anticipated, coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths are at record highs and this is not the time to be encouraging people to gather in contravention of common sense and all the guidance provided by the state and county health department recommendations," Rosansky said.

The parade typically generates an estimated \$7 million to \$10 million in revenue,

according to studies done by the Newport Beach and Co. Rosansky said a typical year usually sees 80 to 90 boats registered, though other unregistered boats often tag along at the end.

Rosansky said individual days of the parade have been canceled before due to bad weather, but that the last time the entire parade was canceled was likely during World War II. This year would have been the 112th.

City staff said that the city's harbor patrol and boats from the Orange County Sheriff's Department will be present for public safety

See **Parade**, page A2

## O.C. COVID-19 cases continue climbing as health officials' warnings on gatherings turn to pleas

BY SARA CARDINE

As Orange County coronavirus cases continue to climb dangerously past hospitals' treatment thresholds, county health officials' warnings about not gathering with others this holiday season are taking a desperate tone.

Orange County Health Care Agency Director and Public Health Officer Dr. Clayton Chau, speaking Tuesday before the Orange County Board of Supervisors, painted a harrowing picture of the county's health outlook given recent virus trends.

"The number of infections in our surrounding county has been rising every day. Every day we break the record for the number of people who've been infected," he said. "Our hospitals are now bombarded. The emergency rooms have no capacity to triage people as quickly as they

can. I'm pleading with the community, please, please do not gather."

The agency on Friday recorded 2,594 new cases of coronavirus and three deaths, bringing Orange County's cumulative case count to 116,377 and pushing the fatality rate to 1,734.

Area hospitals reported they were treating 1,557 individuals for COVID-19, reflecting a 17.2 rise in the three-day average for hospitalizations, including 358 being cared for in intensive care units.

The current rates are more than double those recorded by the Orange County Health Care Agency figures reported at the start of the month when, on Dec. 1, hospitals reported 648 COVID-19 hospitalizations with 158 ICU patients.

Chau pleaded with residents to take the upward trends seriously.



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**PEOPLE ENJOY** the outdoors along Ocean Boulevard in Newport Beach.

"The reason we have an increase in cases is because people are gathering and not following public health guidance — period," he said. "I have never been so afraid of Christmas and New

Year's in my life like I am now — I can't imagine what it would be like after the holiday if people are not listening and people are not

See **COVID-19**, page A2

## NMUSD distance learning return debated

Some remain adamant about the need to keep kids in class after decision to reclose schools for secondary students.

BY SARA CARDINE

As Newport-Mesa Unified School District middle and high school teachers used a non-student day Friday to decompress from a chaotic first semester, on the final work day before winter break district officials sent out a quick communique to the school community.

The message informed district families all secondary students would return to distance learning on the Jan. 4 start of spring semester. A two-month dalliance with in-person learning — which saw kids return to campuses under a hybrid schedule — would be paused, at least through Jan. 22.

"[A] significant increase of COVID-19 cases throughout the state, Orange County and our local community has impacted our district and workforce, severely limiting our ability to find appropriate substitute employees who provide critical services," Supt. Russell Lee-Sung explained.

"Now, more than ever, we encourage everyone to do their part to slow the spread of COVID-19 by adhering to the protocols."

The ongoing pandemic has created a widening chasm in Newport-Mesa Unified between those who strongly believe kids should return to classes for the educational, social and emotional benefits of in-person learning and those who worry the county's record-shattering infection rates can, and will, defeat the district's best defenses.

During a special meeting Thursday to determine whether to reclose secondary campuses in January, board President Karen Yelsey refuted suspicions the district was trying to sneak one past unsuspecting parents.

"What we're going to be discussing today we just heard about Tuesday night," she said, adding Lee-Sung had the power to make a unilateral decision but that board members wanted to be included. "We wanted to hear the data and be a part of making that decision — that's why we're here tonight."

A reported 278 members of the public submitted comments at the meeting, weighing in on whether secondary students could, or should, safely attend in-person classes. Though opinions were split down the middle, board members ultimately voted 6-1 to approve the transition to online learning.

See **NMUSD**, page A2



Wally Skalij | Los Angeles Times

**VANESSA BRYANT** speaks at the celebration of life of husband Kobe Bryant and daughter Gianna in February.

## Vanessa Bryant accuses her mother of extortion in ugly legal war over family money

BY RICHARD WINTON

Newport Beach resident Vanessa Bryant on Thursday accused her mother of seeking to "extort a financial windfall" from her in the wake of her husband Kobe Bryant's death by filing a lawsuit claiming she is owed years of back pay for working as an unpaid assistant.

The family feud ratcheted up after Sofia Urbieta Laine sued her 38-year-old daughter for financial support alleging she worked for years as an unpaid "longtime personal assistant and nanny" to the couple and that the Lakers legend had "promised to take care" of his mother-in-law for the rest of her days before his death in a helicopter crash Jan. 26.

"Unfortunately, Kobe Bryant's promise did not see the light of day as he is now deceased and

Vanessa Bryant took each and every step she could to void and cancel all of Kobe's promises," the 48-page lawsuit alleges, saying Vanessa Bryant never intended to honor her late husband's wishes.

That was the final straw for Bryant, who also lost her 13-year daughter Gianna in the Calabasas helicopter crash that killed nine people and remains the subject of a National Transportation Safety Board investigation.

In a statement, she wrote that her 68-year-old mother was trying to "extort a financial windfall from our family." Bryant said she and her husband of nearly 20 years had supported her mother financially, allowing her to live in one of their properties near their Newport Coast home free of charge.

See **Bryant**, page A4



# PARADE

Continued from page A1

throughout the unofficial parade's run.

No incidents occurred on Thursday night.

Crowds were small, largely distanced as they watched the parade go on. Newport Beach Mayor Pro Tem Kevin Muldoon said he attended the parade and was out on the water with boaters.

Muldoon previously tried to save the Christmas Boat Parade and submitted a request to discuss it to City Manager Grace Leung the night the parade was canceled in November. City council members voted 5-1 at the Dec. 8 council meeting to discuss the possibility of city staff aiding unofficial parade organizers.

"It went smoothly," Muldoon said on Friday. "We had a lot of experienced boaters out on the water and we had our own harbor department assisting and directing the parade."

People walked along Marine Avenue and some watched from the Balboa Bridge. Boats were met with cheers and shouts of "Merry Christmas" and oohs and aahs from passersby.

Some watched from Marina Park and restaurants.

"It wouldn't feel like Christmas and the holiday season without the boat parade," Muldoon said. "Having a citizen-led boat parade was a fitting homage to the boat parade's organizers of 100 years ago."

The parade, organized by We the People, will continue through Saturday, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. It will follow the same route as the traditional parade and starts at Lido Isle.

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**Berj Palanjan**

October 12, 1954 - December 3, 2020

Berj Palanjan, devoted family man and larger-than-life figure in the Orange County community, passed away on Thursday December 3, 2020.

Born to his Armenian parents Leon and Rose Palanjan in Aleppo, Syria, Berj came to the United States with his parents and younger sister, Sossi, in 1966. After a brief stint in Boston, they moved to San Diego to be near family. Berj attended high school in San Diego before moving to Costa Mesa to live with his beloved uncle, Jerry Palanjan.

Berj admired his Uncle Jerry and went to work for him at Grand Prix Performance in Costa Mesa, hardly ever missing a day in over 40 years. While helping Jerry run the business, Berj grew into somewhat of a local celebrity with his personality, trustworthiness and automotive expertise.

Grand Prix customers remember that Berj was always quick with a joke (maybe not always appropriate) or a compliment to make them smile. While on the surface Berj was a fun-loving tough guy, he also had a huge heart and was extremely helpful to those in need. His charisma combined with his generosity contributed to his status as a local legend, known and appreciated by so many in this community that meant the world to him.

During his marriage to Carolyn, they were blessed with three sons, Chase, Jake and Dane. Berj was a dedicated father who cherished his time with his boys. He was extremely proud of all of their accomplishments and wasn't shy to brag about them to anyone who would listen...from his eldest son Chase's Military Service to Jake graduating from Cal State University, Long Beach and Dane graduating from the University of Southern California.

Berj loved the outdoors and enjoyed camping, fishing and dirt biking with his boys and dogs. He earned a pilot's license and enjoyed flying in his spare free time. Berj was also an avid cook and gardener (staghorn ferns were his specialty).

Berj passed away after suffering through a six-year illness from complications of a stroke. Those who knew Berj know he did not go without a fight...he was swearing, smiling, laughing and loving until the very end. He will be missed by everyone who knew him and will always be remembered as a wonderful father, son, brother, nephew, uncle, cousin, colleague and friend.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that anyone wishing to commemorate Berj please make a donation to either the Armenian Ararat Home of Los Angeles (<https://ararathome.org/donations/giving-opportunities>) or The Boys and Girls Club of Central Orange Coast (<https://boysandgirlsclub.com/donate/>) and please continue to support small businesses in our community.

The family would like to thank the Flagship Healthcare staff as well as the many doctors, healthcare workers, family members and friends who helped Berj in recent years.

Unfortunately, there will not be a funeral service at this time. Naturally, Kettle One Vodka and ice are devastated by the loss of Berj and they've requested a celebration of his amazing life whenever is appropriate.

# NMUSD

Continued from page A1

Among the commenters was Kevin Fairfax, whose daughters attend Ensign Intermediate School and Mariners Elementary in Newport Beach. He spoke on behalf of keeping kids in classes but said Friday he hadn't known about the districtwide impact of infections and quarantine-related absences.

"I didn't get anything that would back it up that would let me go, 'All right. Half your schools have no custodians, then that's a no-brainer.' We didn't get that," Fairfax said. "Or you're canceling classes left and right because you can't find substitutes. I'm willing to listen and get data and say, 'OK. You made your point.'"

While middle and high school students will be returning to laptop learning at home in the new year, Newport-Mesa elementary schools will continue in-person instruction under a modified half-day in-person schedule. That means Fairfax will have one child doing distance learning, while the other jets back and forth to campus daily.

Several members of the public, including elementary school employees, tuned into Thursday's virtual meeting to urge district leaders to return all schools to distance learning as a precaution against a post-holiday coronavirus surge.



**STUDENTS** and parents protest outside the Newport-Mesa Unified district office on Oct. 23.

Scott Smeltzer  
Staff  
Photographer

"If you perceive a danger to secondary school employees and students from COVID, and you are recommending distance learning in January for them, I feel that elementary should be given the same protection," said Julie Smith, a third-grade teacher College Park Elementary School. "I hope you do the right thing to protect all of your employees and students."

Lee-Sung explained in Friday's message elementary students benefited more from in-person learning where, on smaller campuses, student cohorts could be more easily controlled. Reclosing high schools, he continued, would reduce the number of contacts and allow for

critical staff to be redistributed to still-open elementary schools.

Although board members approved Thursday's recommendation, some emphasized their desire to bring secondary students back to brick-and-mortar schools on Jan. 25.

"I do want to reaffirm that if we do this... that we are firmly coming back on the 25th," she said. "I think we need to make that commitment that our secondary students will be back on the 25th."

Trustee Charlene Metoyer urged students, staff and families to be safe over winter break.

"Please do everything you can over break to not break safety rules," she said. "If you want [schools] to be open, everybody in Newport Beach and Costa Mesa has to do their part."

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# COVID-19

Continued from page A1

complying."

The county's seven-day average of new cases stands at 42.7 per 100,000 residents, while the average health equity quartile positivity rate is at 18.8%.

Some 20,989 tests were issued countywide Friday, bringing the cumulative number of tests issued to 1,810,442 and accounting for a seven-day average testing positivity rate of 13.2%.

Here are the latest cumulative coronavirus case counts and COVID-19 deaths for select cities in Orange County:

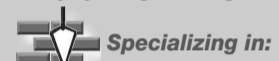
- Santa Ana: 23,119 cases; 349 deaths
- Anaheim: 19,757 cases; 372 deaths
- Huntington Beach: 4,714 cases; 94 deaths
- Costa Mesa: 3,797 cases; 49 deaths
- Irvine: 4,257 cases; 19 deaths
- Newport Beach: 1,822 cases; 28 deaths
- Fountain Valley: 1,450 cases; 24 deaths
- Laguna Beach: 413 cases; fewer than five deaths
- Here are the case counts by age group, followed by deaths:
  - 0 to 17: 10,572 cases; one death
  - 18 to 24: 16,691 cases; four deaths
  - 25 to 34: 24,423 cases; 24 deaths
  - 35 to 44: 18,384 cases; 42 deaths
  - 45 to 54: 18,816 cases; 127 deaths
  - 55 to 64: 14,134 cases; 238 deaths
  - 65 to 74: 7,140 cases; 338 deaths
  - 75 to 84: 3,617 cases; 380 deaths
  - 85 and older: 2,535 cases; 580 deaths

Updated figures are posted daily at [ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc](https://ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc). For information on getting tested, visit [ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing](https://ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing).

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**Pleasant Holidays.**

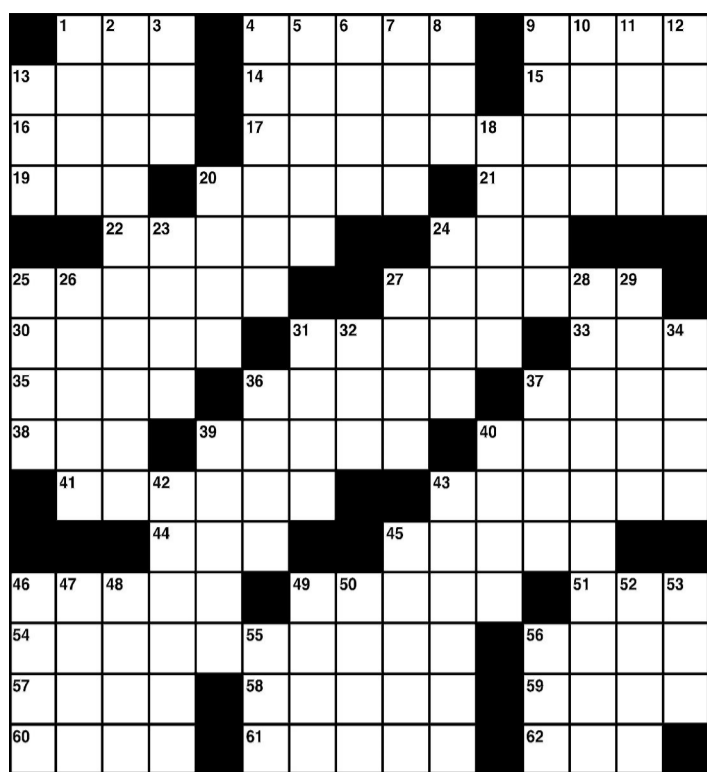


**THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE**

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

- ACROSS**  
 1 Two or three  
 4 Jackson 5 hairdos  
 9 Flu deterrent  
 13 Uber competition  
 14 Loose outer garment  
 15 \_-nots; those in need  
 16 Element whose symbol is Fe  
 17 Prepared farmland for planting  
 19 \_ person; for each  
 20 Tricks  
 21 Unwraps  
 22 Hairstylist's item  
 24 Run up a tab  
 25 Fly a plane  
 27 Company  
 30 Moat  
 31 June birthstone  
 33 Simple reply  
 35 "Rome wasn't built in \_"  
 36 Boasts  
 37 Banjo ridge  
 38 Fellows  
 39 Entrances  
 40 Andes animal  
 41 "Do unto \_ as you would have"  
 43 Wee  
 44 Vaudevillian  
 45 Fulton or Martin  
 46 Jack who ate no fat  
 49 "Blue \_"; Irving Berlin song  
 51 Under the weather  
 54 Investigates again  
 56 \_ tea  
 57 "A \_ Grows in Brooklyn"; 1945 film  
 58 Martini garnish  
 59 Set \_; leave shore  
 60 Diving seabirds  
 61 C-sharp and B-flat  
 62 TV series about an alien

- DOWN**  
 1 Cost of a ride  
 2 Like an



**SUDOKU**

By The Mephram Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit [sudoku.org.uk](http://sudoku.org.uk).

		5		1				
	3				9	5		
1				4				8
4	7					3		1
9								6
2		3						4
		2			6			8
			6	2				3
		9		7		6		

**For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A4.**

- outrageous price  
 3 Take first prize  
 4 Blame  
 5 Straight beater  
 6 Auditioning actor's goal  
 7 Stable dinner  
 8 Word with lift or boots  
 9 Molds
- 10 Detest  
 11 Kiln  
 12 Cruz & Lange  
 13 Money left on a caf table  
 18 "Wheel of Fortune" player's purchase  
 20 Late Ginsburg  
 23 Risqu

- 24 " \_ is not to reason why"  
 25 Sandler or Brody  
 26 Part of VCR  
 27 Chokes  
 28 Despot; heavy-handed  
 29 \_ like; appears to be  
 31 Experts  
 32 In one \_ and out the other  
 34 Linger  
 36 Drill a hole  
 37 Run off quickly  
 39 Sorority letter  
 40 Marvin & Majors  
 42 Con games  
 43 Graduate assignments  
 45 Holey utensil  
 46 Mile. in Mlaga  
 47 Neighbor of Colombia  
 48 Stink to high heaven  
 49 Storage structure  
 50 Make a sweater  
 52 Explorer Eriksson  
 53 Bad cholesterol  
 55 Labor Day, for one; abbr.  
 56 "Love \_ Many-Splendored Thing"

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**BRYANT**

Continued from page A1

"She was a grandmother

who was supported by me and her son-in-law at my request," Bryant said. "She now wants to back charge me \$96 per hour for sup-

posedly working 12 hours a day for 18 years for watching her grandchildren. In reality, she only occasionally babysat my older

girls when they were toddlers."

Bryant said that she was a stay-at-mom to her daughters Natalia, 17; Biana, 4; Capri, 18 months, and Gianna.

She wrote that the children for the most part in the last decade were at school or in sports and that her mother's claims "are obviously false."

Vanessa Bryant said her mother had never been involved in any of their her and Kobe Bryant's busi-

nesses or finances.

Bryant said their relationship soured after she tried to make peace with her mother.

"Earlier this year, I was looking for a new home for her and, a week later, she went on television and gave an interview disparaging our family and making false accusations while living rent-free in a gated apartment complex in Newport Coast," she said.

In that interview with Univision, Sofia Laine al-

leged she was forced out of her home by her daughter and was made to return a luxury car. "She told me, 'I need to you to get out of the house.'" Laine said on "El Gordo y la Flaca."

Bryant said the interview was "beyond hurtful."

"Even after that betrayal, I was willing to provide my mother with monthly support for the rest of her life, and that wasn't good enough. She, instead, contacted me through intermediaries — contrary to what she claims, my phone number hasn't changed — and demanded \$5 million, a house and a Mercedes SUV."

Vanessa Bryant inherited control of an estate valued at as much as \$600 million after Kobe Bryant's death, according to financial experts. She said she won't give into the "false and absurd claims" and demands.

"She has no regard for how this is affecting my children and me," Bryant said.

She added that her mother wants to live off her for the rest of her life while still collecting alimony from a 2004 divorce.

"My husband and I have never discouraged or kept her from providing for herself," Bryant said.

"My husband never promised my mother anything, and he would be so disappointed in her behavior and lack of empathy," she said in her statement.

**RICHARD WINTON** is a staff writer with the Los Angeles Times.

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**Legal Notices**

**Legal Notices**



**CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH  
 NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that on **Tuesday, January 12, 2021**, at 5:00 p.m. or soon thereafter as the matter shall be heard, a public hearing will be conducted in the Council Chambers at 100 Civic Center Drive, Newport Beach. The City Council of the City of Newport Beach will consider approval of the following application:

**Residential dock reconfiguration located at 944 Via Lido Nord**

The project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential to have a significant effect on the environment. The replacement residential dock system is in the same location and is substantially the same size, purpose and capacity as the dock system it replaces. The overwater coverage of the new dock system decreased from 943 square feet to 696 square feet.

All interested parties may appear and present testimony in regard to this proposal. If you challenge this project in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you raised at the public hearing or in written correspondence delivered to the City at, or prior to, the public hearing. Administrative procedures for appeals are provided in the Newport Beach Municipal Code Chapter 17.65. The application may be continued to a specific future meeting date, and if such an action occurs, additional public notice of the continuance will not be provided.

**SPECIAL NOTICE REGARDING COVID-19**

Given the Declaration of a State Emergency and Proclamation of Local Emergency related to COVID-19, we recommend that you submit your questions and comments in writing for City Council consideration by sending them to the City Clerk's Office at [cityclerk@newportbeachca.gov](mailto:cityclerk@newportbeachca.gov). To give the City Council adequate time to review your questions and comments, please submit your written comments by **Monday, January 11, 2021, at 5:00 p.m.** In addition, members of the public will have the ability to participate in this meeting telephonically. Please review the City Council Agenda for further instructions. The Agenda, staff report and corresponding documents will be posted to the City's website at [www.newportbeachca.gov/citycouncil](http://www.newportbeachca.gov/citycouncil), by end of business day on **Friday, January 8, 2021**. While the City does not expect there to be any changes to the above process for participating in this meeting, if there is a change, the City will post the information as soon as possible to the City's website. The City of Newport Beach thanks you in advance for continuing to take precautions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. If you are unable to participate in the meeting via the process set forth in the agenda, please contact the City Clerk's Office at 949-644-3005 or [cityclerk@newportbeachca.gov](mailto:cityclerk@newportbeachca.gov) and our staff will attempt to accommodate you.

For questions regarding this public hearing item please contact Chris Miller, Administrative Manager, at [cmiller@newportbeachca.gov](mailto:cmiller@newportbeachca.gov).

Project File No.: 1901-2020



Leilani I. Brown, MMC, City Clerk, City of Newport Beach

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## Daily Pilot

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