

## Forum weighs civilian panel to monitor police

Santa Ana City Council fields questions and hears from experts as it considers creating an oversight commission.

BY BEN BRAZIL

As the Santa Ana City Council considers creating a police oversight commission, the city held a virtual forum on Wednesday night to hear from a panel of experts and field questions from the public.

The city is trying to determine what specific model and what kind of authority its police commission should have. It's been encouraging residents to fill out a survey on its website to gauge public opinion on police oversight.

City staff will compile the findings of the survey and results of the forum into a report and present it to the City Council next month.

The panelists at the virtual event included John Alden, the executive director of the Oakland Community Police Review Agency, Tiffany Bailey of the American Civil Liberties Union, George Lippman, a former member of the Berkeley Police Review Commission, Eileen Teichert, chair of the Riverside Community Police Review Commission and Michael Gennaco, an independent auditor for the Anaheim Police Review Board.

"I think the way that oversight fits in with law enforcement today is it is an essential feedback loop for any city to figure out whether or not their police officers really are policing in a way that's consistent with community expectations," Alden said. "Civilian oversight ... gives the community a very direct way to have input over individual complaints about police misconduct, about patterns of police behavior ... and even through changing police department policies, which could be written behind closed doors without any public input. And these three powers I think can really dramatically alter the way that police behave."

Bailey said that forming a police oversight commission is the first step in fostering a transparent and accountable police department. However, it will only work if the commission's model is strong.

"Meaning that it has independent investigation authority, subpoena power and all these other tools that make civilian oversight particularly effective," she said.

In another survey that the city

See **Police**, page R4



**CUSTOMERS ORDER** at Alebrijes Grill, a food truck in Santa Ana.

Photo by Edwin Goei

# 8 MEALS FOR \$8 (OR LESS)

BY EDWIN GOEI

**I**nflation is rising to a 13-year high. Gas prices are inching closer to the \$5 mark. There is nothing but bad news out there for our finances.

With that in mind, here's a list of this food critic's favorite places to get great, satisfying meals for \$8 or less in Orange County. Use it as a refuge from those forbidding headlines to eat well but within your budget without resorting to McDonald's Dollar Menu. But do it quickly! The prices reported are current as of this writing, but who knows what they will be in the next month.

See **Meals**, page R5

## New equity map aims to resolve community disparities

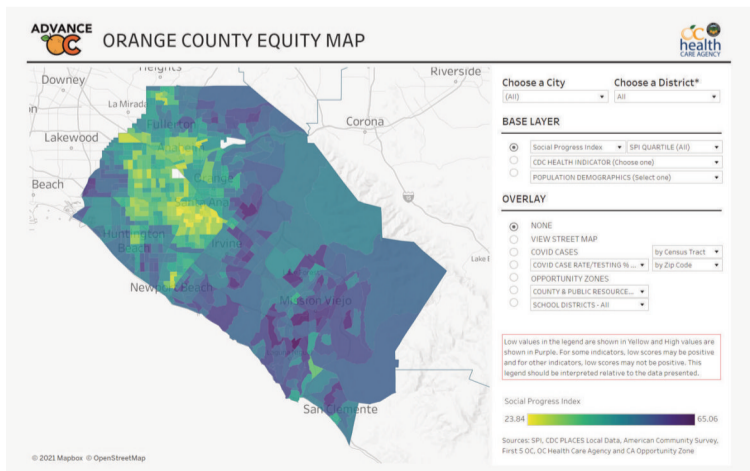
BY BEN BRAZIL

In an effort to fix social and health inequities revealed and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, a local nonprofit has partnered with Orange County to develop a map equity tool that shows which cities and neighborhoods are the most in need.

The Orange County Equity Map could allow the county, cities and nonprofits to better allocate resources to communities that suffer from issues like poor education, hunger, substandard environmental conditions and lack of affordable housing.

The map tool, which was released last month, was developed by Advance OC, a nonprofit that was started in 2019 with the goal of working toward ending social and health disparities in the county.

"The goal of doing an equity map is really to factor in those historical inequities that exist in



Courtesy of Advance OC

**THE ORANGE COUNTY** Equity Map reveals social and health disparities among the county's populations.

structural elements in our community — where folks have disproportionately lacked resources in the past and how that has manifested into different lived experi-

ences by our community members," said Katie Kalvoda, president and board chair of Advance OC.

"So we wanted to be able to

create a tool that could visualize that for folks and then help be a resource."

The equity mapping tool tracks various information, including health disparities and social and environmental inequities.

The map has data on access to nutrition and supermarkets, the percentage of the population that uses dental care, water quality, safety and crime, opportunity and residential segregation, among many others.

Advance OC pairs the mapping tool with indexes on social progress and COVID-19 vulnerability.

Santa Ana, Stanton, Garden Grove, Anaheim, Westminster, Buena Park, La Habra, Costa Mesa, Fullerton and Orange score the lowest on the social progress index, which takes into consideration issues like basic human needs, housing, personal safety, health and wellness, inclusiveness and personal freedom and choice.

The data could possibly be

used to help advance housing affordability and help alleviate homelessness, as well as close education gaps for children.

For instance, the map reveals the neighborhoods with the least broadband availability. This digital divide has become all the more important as distance learning became the norm last year, requiring students to have access to the internet to virtually attend school.

In response to this data, school districts can better understand the factors that play a role in student achievement gaps in a community.

"We want to be able to help everyone who's trying to advance Orange County," Kalvoda said. "Our value statement is basically that we believe that no one should be held back by their ZIP Code, they should all have an opportunity to live and thrive and

See **Map**, page R2

# UCI opens free speech and fair elections center

2 professors were influenced by a number of crises, including the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Following the U.S. Capitol riot and moves across the country to undermine trust in elections, a pair of UC Irvine professors has started an academic center that will focus on the two most important tenets of democratic societies — fair elections and free speech.

The aptly named Fair Elections and Free Speech Center will host public events, publish reports and provide legal support to the university's law clinics, while also focusing on international threats to democratic elections and speech issues.

"With the attack on voting rights in the United States, and the attacks on democratic institutions worldwide, I think the center's going to be extremely well-placed to do the kind of research and public education that articulates what needs to be done to protect democracy in the U.S. and worldwide," UC Irvine law professor David Kaye said this week during a phone interview.

Kaye is co-directing the



A MASKED PROTESTER carries a red flag reading "Trump Nation" in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

center along with UC Irvine law professor Rick Hasen, one of the country's leading election law scholars.

Kaye cited a number of crises that influenced their decision to found the center, including the Jan. 6

Capitol insurrection.

He also noted that there have been efforts in several states to make it more difficult for people to vote.

The Justice Department filed a lawsuit in late June challenging a Georgia law

for discriminating against Black voters.

The new law — which allegedly restricts the distribution of absentee ballots — was signed into law by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp after President

Trump spent months railing against the outcome of the presidential election he lost. His followers have continued to claim the election was fraudulent, a belief that fueled the storming of the Capitol

building.

"I think that the 2020 election demonstrated that disinformation about free and fair elections is a major problem," Hasen said. "Political operatives can manipulate the current information environment on social media for cynical political ends ... This is a moment where we need to think carefully about how to balance our interest in free speech and robust election contests with dangerous disinformation about election integrity."

During and following the 2020 presidential election, some Republican politicians and conservative media members have spread misleading information on social media to cause distrust in the election process, particularly taking aim at mail-in ballots.

In response, social media companies have been pressured to more adequately regulate false content posted on their sites.

However, there may be a tricky balance between maintaining 1st Amendment rights and policing misinformation on social media.

"You can't have a vibrant democracy unless people can engage in free and relatively uninhibited debate,"

See **UCI**, page R5

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## MAP

Continued from page R1

reach their human potential, regardless of where they live."

The Orange County Health Care Agency has already used the map to determine where it should perform vaccine outreach.

Karin Kalk, director of project management and quality improvement at the agency, said in an interview that the county deployed mobile vaccination units to the neighborhoods and census tracts that were most in need of the vaccine.

Kalk said the county will use the map to help guide its allocation of a \$22.8-million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is meant to be used for COVID-19-related health disparities.

The county will also be forming a coalition guided by the map to help solve high-priority COVID-19-related needs in the community.

"We were able to find the neighborhoods that had the greatest risk for COVID, we knew we needed to do extra work to make sure vaccines were reaching those communities," Kalk said.

Kalvoda said the map also empowers residents with the information they need to better advocate for change in their neighborhoods. The public can use the data on the website to validate their advocacy, she said.

"A lot of folks for years and years have been trying to advocate for their communities, and sometimes people are very dismissive," Kalvoda said.

"For example, when they come to a city council meeting and talk about poor water quality or lack of broadband access for their kids, or whatever the case may be, people sometimes are dismissive. They can bring the data to their city council members and city managers and say, 'See, this is what I've been talking about all these years.'"

Hieu Nguyen, the county's director for the Office of Population Health and Equity, said residents can type their addresses into the map tool and see the equity issues associated with their neighborhoods.

Nguyen said he can imagine community members taking this information to their local governments to ask informed questions and advocate for change.

"That imagery has stuck with me as to why we want this data to exist and be utilized by the community," Nguyen said.

The data in the map and index comes from various national, state and local sources provided by different Orange County agencies and nonprofits, the CDC, the U.S. Census and others.

Kalvoda said the nonprofit created the idea for the map, then worked with



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

**KATIE KALVODA** of Advance OC discusses the Orange County Equity Map during a news conference last month.

the nonprofit Social Progress Imperative to help gather and analyze the data in the map.

The Social Progress Imperative produces a well-known list of equity data called the Social Progress Index that's been used by the state of California, the United Nations and foreign countries. Advance OC will continue to update the map as new data becomes available.

Though the equity map was released in mid-July, Kalvoda said a lot of people have already been reaching out to Advance OC to partner on projects relating to homelessness, education inequity and food insecurity. She said she couldn't reveal what groups or people the nonprofit has been in contact with.

Advance OC was able to complete the map with the help of \$387,000 from the county, which was approved by the county Board of Supervisors about a year ago at the urging of Supervisors Andrew Do and Doug Chaffee.

Do said over the phone that the county will now be able to better target resources it allocates to communities in need.

"The goal is for us in the system, whether it be the government or agencies, to be able to speak a common language," Do said. "So when we look at the indicators as to the well-being of our communities, we speak the same language, we look at the same set of data, from which we measure performance. People define equity differently, and they look at different things, and so it is really hard for policy decision-makers to agree on possible causes and results of policy issues that they are trying to address."

Echoing Do's sentiments, David Gillanders, executive director of Pathways of Hope, said the map can help nonprofits like his determine which areas in the county to focus services.

Pathways of Hope provides more than 200,000 meals and thousands of pounds of food each year to northern Orange County residents who face food insecurity. The nonprofit also provides housing and support services to the homeless, including leading the first safe parking program in the county.

But while the map pro-

vides valuable information, it won't mean much if action isn't taken, officials and advocates say.

"Information without action doesn't mean enough," Gillanders said. "When I look at something like the equity map and I think, gosh this is a great amount of information, but if we don't take action to address these things from leadership, from local government and the nonprofits to really dive deep and utilize this information and work to solve problems, then just having information is not enough."

Tracy La, executive director of VietRISE, also believes that "action is what is going to create equity, not just a data pool." VietRISE is a social justice nonprofit that advocates for working-class Vietnamese and immigrant communities in Orange County.

La took issue with the map tool and stated that it isn't an equity tool by itself because an equity tool needs more context than just data. It has to tell the story behind the data, she said.

"I think naming it an equity tool is misleading," La said. "It doesn't have an equity framework — like partnerships with nonprofits or activist groups working on advancing equity and justice — and it doesn't explicitly share how it's advancing equity because providing data alone without a call to action can't do that. The data also comes from other tools that activities and nonprofits already use. The tool could be helpful, but it is limited."

"Our Board of Supervisors should be committing to achieving systemic change and passing policies that make life easier on a structural level for working-class and marginalized communities if they really want to advance equity. Historically they have not been receptive about policies that will increase housing affordability, end homelessness and evictions, address over-policing, etc. Anything on equity needs to also clearly have a race and immigration lens — how undocumented immigrants face these issues differently — which this tool doesn't have."

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# Pacific Symphony bringing free concert series to parks in O.C.

Pacific Symphony will perform three outdoor concerts later this month in Irvine, Mission Viejo and Orange as part of its annual "Symphony in the Cities" series.

Thousands are expected to attend the summer series, which is held in local parks throughout Orange County.

The music will be a mix of classics, and popular and patriotic music. There will also be a sing-along.

Children will be able to learn how to conduct from conductor Carl St.Clair and could help lead the orchestra during the concert.

The program includes Gioachino Rossini's "Finale from Overture to *William Tell*," Georges Bizet's "Farandole from *L'Arlesienne* Suite No. 2," Max Bruch's "Concerto No. 1 in G Minor for Violin & Orchestra III. Allegro energico," Arturo Marquez's "Danzón No. 2," Ennio Morricone's "Gabriel's Oboe from *The Mis-*

*sion*," Alberto Ginastera's "Danza Finale from *Estancia*, Op.8a," John Philip Sousa's "Hands Across the Sea March" "The Stars and Stripes Forever," Aaron Copland's "Selections from *Old American Songs*," Samuel Ward's "America the Beautiful" and Irving Berlin's "God Bless America."

The Mission Viejo Symphony in the Cities performance takes place at 7 p.m. on Aug. 14 at Oso Viejo Community Park on

the Village Green, 24932 Veterans Way.

The Irvine concert is at 7 p.m. on Aug. 15 at Mike Ward Community Park Woodbridge, 20 Lake Road, and the performance in Orange starts at 7 p.m. on Aug. 22 at Aitken Arts Plaza at Musco Center for the Arts at Chapman University, One University Drive.

All three performances are free.

For more information, visit [pacificsymphony.com](http://pacificsymphony.com).

— From staff reports



Glenn Koenig | Los Angeles Times

CARL ST.CLAIR conducts the Pacific Symphony and the Pacific Chorale at the Orange County Performing Arts Center in Costa Mesa.

## POLICE

Continued from page R1

used to initially glean community input on police oversight, respondents listed top priorities for the proposed commission to be transparency, community outreach, use of statistical pattern analysis, open communication with the police department, independence, access to public records, increased resources, increased protection for peace officer rights and support for government and elected officials.

At the forum, the experts described the various operations of their commissions.

Alden said the Oakland police review agency has the power to investigate every civilian complaint about police officer misconduct, though budgetary restraints require that they prioritize investigations.

He also said that the commission has "unfettered" access to police records, which is helpful when trying to figure out if an officer has a pattern of misconduct. Teichert said the Riverside commission has the power to subpoena for police records.

Gennaco said it's important for a civilian police oversight commission to have the assistance of a professional who understands law enforcement.

"In my view, a review board without a professional, without some sort of independent assistance and expertise, is going to be largely at sea, because policing is a very complicated operation," he said.

"There's so much to learn that even individuals of goodwill are



Richard Koehler | Los Angeles Times

SANTA ANA Police Department SWAT team members take cover behind a rescue unit as they shoot tear gas into a complex in the 2900 block of West Edinger Avenue across from Centennial Park in Santa Ana.

not going to be able to get up to speed in order to accomplish the objectives here. And I think that assistance of an independent third party, I think is crucial."

Anaheim has the only civilian police review board in Orange County. It's comprised of seven residents, but the city also contracts with Gennaco's Office of Investigative Review Group, which is given access to confidential files to provide investigations and reports on the police department.

Bailey said Oakland's police commission is the most desirable because it touches on all the components needed for effective oversight.

"An Oakland model that allows folks to be very involved in disci-

pline is particularly powerful. It means that it's just not a rubber stamp or just a review of the investigation, but the community is actively engaged in what's going on," she said.

"Also, similarly the unfettered access to police records and ability to review exactly what is going on in the department to ensure that the board is getting the information that it needs to really look at the issue and provide a fair and unbiased kind of recommendation ... And then also the ability to change policy, for it to not only be advisory, but to recommend it in some circumstances."

The City Council first brought up police oversight in June 2020, a few weeks after the police killing

of George Floyd sparked a nationwide reckoning with police brutality. In December, city staff presented the council with information on three models of civilian police oversight commissions: investigation-focused, review-focused and auditor/monitor models.

The investigation-focused model relies on independent investigations of complaints against officers, while review-focused models center around commentary on completed investigations and making recommendations to police executives.

The auditor/monitor model aims to instill change by making recommendations to police departments after reviews of police

policies, practices or training. This model examines how the department deals with complaints investigations, including the quality of the investigations, findings and whatever discipline was given.

Most council members were supportive of either an investigation-focused commission, an auditor/monitor model or a hybrid of the two.

Councilwoman Jessie Lopez proposed a model similar to Oakland's, which has the power to fire and hire a new chief. Mayor Vicente Sarmiento favored the Riverside model.

Councilman Johnathan Hernandez mentioned at the December meeting that he would like to have people on the commission who have been through the justice system.

"As this country is facing and as we've seen some very adverse police misconduct all throughout the country, I think it's necessary to have an ideological shift in the inclusivity of the criminal justice system," Hernandez said.

During the question and answer section of the oversight forum, a member of the public asked the experts whether people could be on a commission if they had a criminal background.

Alden said that the city of Oakland encourages people with criminal backgrounds to apply for the commission. Teichert said people are not qualified if they are guilty of a felony. She said the city of Santa Ana should be careful to not "inadvertently exclude people that [it doesn't] want to exclude."

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**UCI**

*Continued from page R2*

Hasen said. “That’s a cornerstone of democratic governance, is that people can try to convince each other and argue over who’s the best candidate to be elected to office. But we also have an unprecedented problem with virally spread misinformation, as well as a collapsing market

in traditional journalism, especially on the local level. “The technological revolution of the last couple of decades has decimated the business model of local journalism. So voters have a much harder time getting reliable information, and false information tends to be more easily spread. The challenge is figuring out how you can provide voters with the information they need, while keeping out de-

liberately spread misinformation without trampling on rights of free speech protected by the 1st Amendment.” The center will produce reports on free speech and election issues, and will possibly be involved in litigation, preparing amicus briefs and other work with the school’s law clinics. In addition to its research, the center will regularly hold public discus-

sions, conferences and speaker series. There are currently four virtual events slated for the university’s fall semester, including a lunchtime series on “Global Elections” starting Sept. 1, “Is the U.S. Constitution Up to the Task of Preserving American Democracy?” on Sept. 9, “Election Subversion: Is American Democracy in Danger?” on Sept. 24 and “Disinformation in Elec-

tions: How Big a Problem is it and What Should Be Done?” on Oct. 6. Kaye said the center will partner with various departments at the university. The center’s advisory board includes members at the law school and computer science, history and political science departments. “The goal is to recognize that election law and the pressures on voting are not just matters of statutes and

the Constitution but also matters of history and politics,” Kaye said. “Since so much debate is mediated online, it’s also a matter of the role played by companies like Facebook and YouTube and Twitter and so forth. So, we plan to really involve a whole range of experts and expertise to do this kind of work.”

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**MEALS**

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**ALEBRIJE’S GRILL**

Cubbon Street and S. Main Street, Santa Ana (714) 655-3253 \$8 for their famous taco acorazado.

In 2009 Gustavo Arellano, my former editor at OC Weekly and current L.A. Times columnist, took me to Alebrijes, the food truck that is now practically synonymous for their tacos acorazados (a.k.a. “Battle-ship tacos”). Things have changed since then. The owner upgraded to a tricked-out truck complete with a sound-system and LED marquee. And although the price for the signature dish has crept up little by little during the intervening years to its current rate of \$8, the portion size actually seems to have doubled since the first time I had it 12 years ago.

If you don’t believe me, you can compare what you get now to the picture I took of my 2009 meal. The photo is on the side of the truck. But the \$8 you pay in cash (which already includes tax) will be the best \$8 you’ll spend on a taco. A taco acorazado, by the way, is only a taco by name. It’s more of a knife-and-fork meal, consisting of a thin chicken fried steak and Spanish rice that happen to be served atop a thick, hand-pressed tortilla and garnished with grilled cactus, seared peppers, avocado, onions, tomato, and crumbled cheese. If a regular taco is a canoe; this would truly be a battleship.

**BAJA FISH TACOS**  
3664 S. Bristol St., Santa

Ana (714) 641-4836 \$7.50 for a single enchilada combo plate.

If you go to Baja Fish Tacos you won’t see the single enchilada combo plate on the menu. It’s not advertised. Though not quite a secret item like In-N-Out’s Animal-style fries, one enchilada is all you need for a good meal, especially if you opt for the excellent fire-grilled carne asada as the filling.

It’s essentially like eating a good steak for \$7.50. But no matter what protein you choose, Baja Fish Tacos’ enchiladas are proper enchiladas, draped in red sauce and smothered under a thin veneer of cheese melted under a broiler until all is bubbly and oozy. Flanking it on the plate, the rice and beans aren’t just supporting players. The beans are so slubbery they’re almost soup and the rice is flavorful and buttery. Both are already worth the sticker price.

**HEEMO SUSHI**  
1632 E. Katella Ave., Orange (714) 997-9953 heemosushi.com California Rolls and other basic rolls for \$3.99.

As a rule, you can’t use “good” and “cheap” simultaneously to describe “sushi”. Then a place like Heemo Sushi comes along and upends the rule. During what seems an indefinite half-off sale on all its sushi that lasts to this day, Heemo proves there is such a thing as “good cheap sushi”.

You can gorge yourself on the premium rolls with fanciful names like “Hot Night” that would other-



**BAJA FISH TACOS’** two-enchilada plate.

wise cost a small fortune elsewhere, but the best deals are the basic rolls offered at \$3.99. Pick anything from a sweet scallop roll to a crispy salmon skin roll, and of course, the always dependable California roll. Get two orders for a satisfying sushi meal that’s, yes, both good and cheap.

**MISASA**  
14230 Culver Drive, Irvine (949) 653-1443 \$8 pork cutlet curry with rice. Mitsuwa Marketplace isn’t the cheapest of grocery stores, so it might surprise you that it hosts one of the most reasonably priced

food stalls in its Irvine food court. At first glance, Misasa seems a prototypical Japanese food vendor complete with a display of plastic versions of all its menu items. But the offer of a bonafide pork katsu curry for only \$8 is not prototypical. Across town at Curry House CoCo Ichibanya, you’d pay \$11 for the same dish. Misasa’s lower price gets you the same experience: soft and tender rectangles of crispy breaded pork; plenty of rice; and most importantly, the curry gravy, a flavorful sludge

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**TACO ACORAZADO** at Alebrijes.



**HEEMO SUSHI** offers assorted sushi at half price.



**PORK KATSU** curry at Misasa.

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**TWO TACOS** at Sabrosada.

**MEALS**

Continued from page R5

where sweetness, richness, and spice exist in a perfect balance, but also a perfect price.

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17225 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley (714) 593-0069  
Monday Special: 2 tacos and an agua fresca for \$8.

It doesn't have the alliteration of Taco Tuesday, but Mondays are the time to go to Sabrosada for their \$8 two-tacos-and-a-drink special. Stuffed with either seasoned ground beef, or a ruddy stewed chicken that normally goes inside their enchiladas, these aren't the diminutive tacos that are gone in a single bite.

Rather they're hard-shelled half-moons the size of your face. Overflowing with shredded lettuce and tangy Mexican cheese, you'll need to use a fork at some point.

These tacos have a tendency to fall apart under their own weight. To wash them down, get the horchata or the pina agua fresca for your drink. When you finish, you'll be full enough to skip Taco Tuesday.

**THAI SPICE**

15455 Jeffrey Road, Suite 315, Irvine (949) 857-8424  
thaispiceusa.com  
\$5.50 Monday special for pad thai & \$5.50 Thursday special for pad kra pow.

The vagaries of the restaurant business (and the COVID-19 shutdowns) have dwindled the once mighty Thai Spice empire



**WHOLESOME CHOICE** in Irvine has a koobideh plate for \$7.99 on Fridays.



**PAD THAI** at Thai Spice.

from four O.C. locations to just one. But one is all you need, especially when it offers one of the best deals on this list: a \$5.50 pad Thai special on Mondays

and a \$5.50 pad kra pow (basil chicken over rice) on Thursdays.

To qualify for the price, you must order on their website and enter a coupon code that's specified there. Regardless of the discount, ordering online is the way to go — it's easier to customize your dish and during the dinner rush, it's nearly impossible to get through on the phone.

A warning though: the pad kra pow special ends at exactly 5 p.m. on Thursdays, while the Monday pad Thai special lasts practically all night. Also be warned that the "Medium"-level of spice here is considered "Hot" elsewhere, so it's best to be conservative

when specifying how spicy you want it. Otherwise, you'll need to spend the money you saved on some Pepto Bismol.

**WAHOO'S FISH TACO**

715 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine (949) 753-0251  
401 Newport Center Drive, Newport Beach (949) 760-0290

One enchilada plate with rice and beans \$7.69. Download the Retail Therapy app for a buy-one-get-one free offer.

Wahoo's Fish Taco's \$7.69 enchilada plate shows it's not impossible to pay less than \$10 for a satisfying restaurant meal at Irvine Spectrum or Fashion Is-



**OUTSIDE THAI SPICE** in Irvine.



**WAHOO'S FISH TACO'S** enchilada plate.

land. It comes with rice and beans, and an enchilada filled with one of the protein options, including tender carne asada and succulent carnitas.

But as reasonably priced as it already is, it can be had for even cheaper. Download the Irvine Company's Retail Therapy app for a buy-one-get-one-free coupon that only works at these two locations. Then congratulate your frugality further by loading up at the free salsa bar, or better yet, ask for the Mr. Lee chili paste.

It's not a salsa, but an Indonesian-style sambal of an unparalleled complexity, flavor and depth — the best condiment you'll slather on one of the cheapest meals from a quasi-Mexican restaurant in Orange County.

**WHOLESOME CHOICE**

18040 Culver Drive, Irvine (949) 551-4111  
Friday special: \$7.99 for koobideh plate. Wholesome Choice may



**CHICKEN KOOBIDEH** at Wholesome Choice.

sound like Whole Foods, but the two supermarkets couldn't be more diametrically opposed. One is a fiercely independent Persian grocer with a single location and the other is owned by Jeff Bezos.

The biggest difference is at the register, where you pay a pauper's price instead of billionaire's for the same amount of fresh produce.

And then there's Wholesome Choice's international food court, of which Whole Foods has no analog. And if you go to the Persian food counter on a Friday you'll discover the koobideh plate.

You get your choice of a foot-long tube of fire-roasted seasoned ground chicken or beef, served over an avalanche of steamed Persian rice with a charred tomato for \$7.99 — which, I don't have to tell you, is much more filling than Whole Foods' infamous \$6 "asparagus water."

**EDWIN GOEI** is a contributor to TimesOC.

Photos by Edwin Goei

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