

# Daily Pilot

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2020 /// Now including Coastline Pilot and Huntington Beach Independent /// [dailypilot.com](http://dailypilot.com)



Photos by Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

**JUDE TRAPP** ice skates with his daughter Stella, 3, at the Pasea Hotel and Spa's ice rink in Huntington Beach on Monday.

## Santa Claus cleared for takeoff

With an expected overnight low of 49 degrees, forecasters reported 0% chance of snow and ice in Orange County for Christmas Eve and 10-mile visibility, should someone traveling from the North Pole (wearing a mask, of course) visit overnight with a sleigh full of toys. The National Weather Service on Thursday lifted its red flag warning for gusty winds in effect earlier in the week, giving gift-givers the all clear to land on rooftops. However, it would be advisable to complete any such activity before 1:52 a.m., when the moon is expected to set.

— From staff reports



**SANTA CLAUS** interacts with Halaiano Aholelei, 1, and his father Kalanie at Pacific City in Huntington Beach on Monday.



**KELLY CORNELL** poses with family dog Kirby at the Pasea Hotel and Spa.



**DAVID YUMIBE TAKES** a photo of his wife Karen and beagle Bubba in front of the Christmas tree at Pacific City Beach on Monday.

## Costa Mesa throws \$2M lifeline to businesses

BY SARA CARDINE

To support local restaurants and personal care services, businesses hardest hit by the pandemic and stay-at-home orders, Costa Mesa is starting a small business bridge grant program that aims to help proprietors survive until new federal stimulus funds arrive.

City Council members recently approved taking \$1.995 million from the declared disasters reserve fund to implement a three-phased assistance program for independent restaurateurs and the owners of local nail and hair salons and other by-appointment services.

Small businesses that previously qualified for and received relief grants through a city-run

See *Lifeline*, page A2

## F.V. hospital therapists claiming burnout

BY SARA CARDINE

Fountain Valley Regional Hospital & Medical Center respiratory therapists — whose skills and training place them squarely in the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic — are describing increasingly untenable work conditions as the facility struggles against its capacity to admit and treat COVID-19 patients.

Concerned about urgent safety issues that have so far gone unaddressed as the patient census continues to rise, employees reached out to representatives from the National Union of Healthcare Workers to intervene on their behalf.

See *Therapists*, page A3

## O.C. reports two deaths, 4,406 new virus cases

BY ANDREW TURNER

Orange County reported two deaths and 4,406 new cases on Wednesday in the latest data provided by the Orange County Health Care Agency regarding transmission of the coronavirus.

The county has now seen 1,781 deaths attributed to COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, and the cumulative case count has climbed to 134,820.

Public health officials have repeatedly warned against gathering throughout the holiday season.

See *Virus*, page A3

## H.B. Mayor Pro Tem Tito Ortiz derided for not wearing mask during food drive

BY MATT SZABO

Huntington Beach Mayor Pro Tem Tito Ortiz continues to be a lightning rod during the pandemic for refusing to wear a mask at public events.

The issue resurfaced Wednesday when Ortiz and other volunteers handed out food in the Oak View Community Center parking lot and were met by a small band of protesters.

"As a kid growing up, a couple of my buddies lived in this neighborhood and I lived downtown," Ortiz said. "It felt like I fit in here, and I've always gave to charity every Christmas-time ... It was a good opportunity."

Oak View community activist

Victor Valladares attended the event and criticized Ortiz, the top vote-getter in the last council election, for his positions on disease transmission and other topics. Speaking through a megaphone, Valladares demanded that Ortiz put on a facemask. The councilman declined.

Valladares is the co-founder of Oak View ComUNIDAD, a grassroots organization that helps residents of the predominantly Latino Oak View neighborhood.

Ortiz has refused to wear a mask at City Council meetings and other events throughout the pandemic.

"For a City Council member who just recently got elected and is now our mayor pro tem, he

should set a model, a precedent of public safety for the residents that he's representing now in Huntington Beach," Valladares said. "The denial of COVID, and refusing to wear facemasks?"

"Even the police officers here have their masks on. Everybody out here has their mask but him. This is a representative, and he's not even leading by example. Little kids see that he's not wearing one, and he's the mayor pro tem? It's not good."

Ortiz, a retired mixed martial arts fighter, said he is taking other precautions.

"I wash my hands over 10 times a day," he said. "People want me

See *Ortiz*, page A4



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

**WHILE HELPING** load frozen turkeys onto a vehicle, Huntington Beach Mayor Pro Tem Tito Ortiz, center, was repeatedly asked by local activist Victor Valladares, second from left with megaphone, why he wasn't wearing a mask.

**THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE**

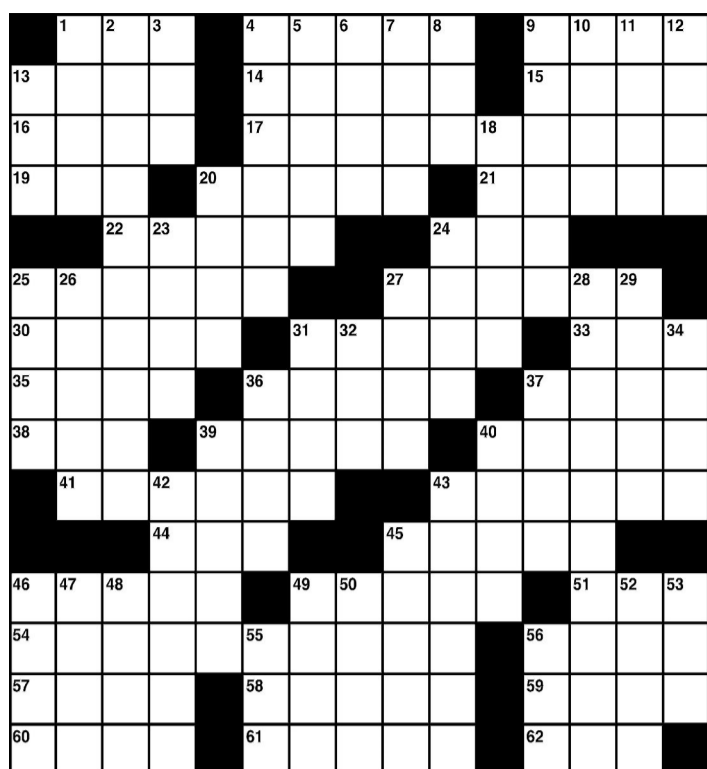
By Jacqueline E. Mathews

**ACROSS**

- 1 "No \_\_, Jose!"
- 4 Oscar hopefuls
- 9 Hockey disk
- 13 Rank's partner, in phrase
- 14 Leg bone
- 15 As wise \_\_ owl
- 16 Trials and tribulations
- 17 Payback
- 19 "The Catcher in the \_\_"; Salinger novel
- 20 Most awful
- 21 Bring joy to
- 22 Profits
- 24 Crony
- 25 Freestyle \_\_; Winter Olympics event
- 27 Colorful parrots
- 30 Untrustworthy folks
- 31 Elbow room
- 33 "Old MacDonald \_\_ a"
- 35 Has the deed to
- 36 Apply sealant to cracks
- 37 Breeze
- 38 \_\_ Tac; breath mint
- 39 Complain
- 40 \_\_ Rica
- 41 Charred
- 43 Put up money in advance
- 44 Female animal
- 45 Off the leash
- 46 Bothersome people
- 49 Unflinching
- 51 Batter's stat
- 54 Charge of wrongdoing
- 56 Unaccounted-for GIs
- 57 Informal talk
- 58 " \_\_ We Almost Have It All"; Whitney Houston song
- 59 Actress Meara
- 60 Heavy book
- 61 Don togs
- 62 \_\_ foo yong

**DOWN**

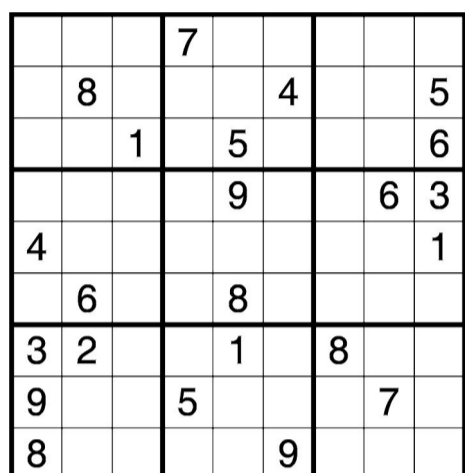
- 1 Devious
- 2 Loyalty



**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).



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

- 3 TV's " \_\_, Dear"
- 4 Powerful
- 5 Wedding cake layers
- 6 Letters
- 7 Very funny companion
- 8 Ted Danson's "Cheers" role
- 9 Spanish rice dish
- 10 Annapolis acad.
- 11 Throw
- 12 \_\_-highs; long socks
- 13 Forest tree
- 18 Tranquillity
- 20 Victories
- 23 Haughtiness

- 24 Fill a suitcase
- 25 \_\_ machines; casino draws
- 26 Small green fruits
- 27 Man or boy
- 28 Speaking in hushed tones
- 29 December visitor
- 31 "You \_\_ it!"; words of agreement
- 32 Baby pooch
- 34 June 6, 1944
- 36 Ship's staff
- 37 Troubles
- 39 Disgusting
- 40 Gator's cousin
- 42 Very perceptive
- 43 \_\_ to; indicates
- 45 Diving birds
- 46 Formal agreement
- 47 Reverberate
- 48 Ponzi scheme
- 49 Start to wake up
- 50 Wave motion pattern
- 52 Gunshot noise
- 53 Suffix for treat or expert
- 55 Combine figures
- 56 Daisy \_\_; lover of Li'l Abner

Tribune Media Services

**LIFELINE**

Continued from page A1

program this summer would be eligible to receive another \$10,000 in the program's first phase, while other operators with gross annual receipts under \$2.5 million could apply for grants of up to \$10,000 starting in January.

The details of a third phase, similar in structure to Phase 2, would depend on federal stimulus dollars coming to the city in early 2021. City officials will look into hiring a third party to administer the program with a portion of the funds.

Dan Inloes, Costa Mesa's economic development administrator, told the council in a Dec. 15 meeting businesses have been hard-pressed to accommodate ever-changing pandemic restrictions, particularly restaurants and personal care services, whose customer base has been whittled away or completely shut out.

While a second Congress-approved \$900-billion COVID-19 stimulus package — still in the works at the time the council approved the program but passed by lawmakers Sunday — may offer some relief, Inloes acknowledged Costa Mesa businesses need help now. "Help is coming, but it's not here, and that's what this proposed bridge grant program is for," he said. "It's meant ... to help them survive until additional support comes."

About \$1.1 million will be distributed in the coming weeks to some 110 local establishments that previously qualified for assistance. Those were independently owned, licensed brick-and-mortar businesses operating in good standing in Costa Mesa that had not already received federal coronavirus assistance.

Under the original proposal, an additional \$800,000 of second-phase funding would be used to offer grants starting at \$5,000 to another 160 busi-



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

**SERVICE WORKERS** in Costa Mesa protest on Dec. 7. Last week, the city approved a bridge grant program for restaurants and personal care service providers.

nesses through an application and lottery process. In their deliberations, council members maintained the fund level but increased grant amounts to \$10,000.

Phase 2 grantees would have to have at least one business officer residing in Orange County, fewer than 100 employees and operate a restaurant or personal care service with a city-issued business license active for six months as of June 1.

Eligible businesses would have to be legal and located in commercial or industrial spaces.

Franchisees would not qualify, Inloes said.

Recipients would also have to affirm they would follow all state and county reopening guidelines, including those mandating mask-wearing and social distancing.

Mayor Katrina Foley acknowledged many business owners who received assistance earlier this year would no longer qualify, due to their continued defiance of state health orders.

"I suspect, of the grants we issued in the first go-around, there will be many businesses that will not be eligible based on what is going on in the community," Foley said. "I can think of six restaurants that will not be eligible because they will not comply with the governor's orders."

A handful of Costa Mesa restaurateurs and shop owners shared in public

comments the dire straits they've experienced since a three-week stay-at-home order took effect Dec. 7.

"We continue to do the right thing, but we're left in a position to where we're feeling strained and somewhat helpless about how we're going to survive into the new year," said Old Vine Kitchen & Bar owner Mark McDonald. "We are in desperate need of a grant like this."

Tim Taber, who owns Dick Church's restaurant, said when Orange County moved last month back into the more restrictive purple reopening tier, sales went down 30%. When restaurants were forced to forego outdoor dining under the regional stay-at-home order, sales plummeted another 80%.

"This is a desperate time for many, many people in the restaurant and service industries," Taber said. "We are running on fumes. We are running out of cash. And we are trying desperately to keep some people employed."

Mayor Pro Tem Andrea Marr thanked city staff for pulling the program together so quickly.

"We all know businesses are going out of business, and we all know people are losing their jobs. So, whatever we can do as a city to try and stop that, to stem the tide, we should be doing," she said.

sara.cardine@latimes.com  
Twitter: @SaraCardine

You are unique  
and so is your taste in wine

rp & -b/2a  
 ip & v(-D)/2a  
 Display rp+j(ip) and rp-j  
 (ip) as roots  
 5.1: factorial  
 factorial\*1  
 i+1

r1 & (-b+D)/2a  
 r2 & (-b-v)/2a

IM >= 0

Sugar

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

HO-C6H4-OH

**6 bottles for \$39.95**  
Valued over \$120

Take the quiz and receive delicious wines curated to your palate.



Get your wines at  
**LATimes.Wine/Cork**

**FREE SHIPPING TO YOUR DOOR**

## THERAPISTS

Continued from page A1

"We had a call with therapists over the weekend, who said we need to sound the alarm," said Barbara Lewis, NUHW's Southern California hospital division director. "Our members see how bad it is right now. There needs to be a breakthrough because this is not sustainable."

In a Dec. 20 email to CEO Kenneth McFarland and other hospital officials, Lewis asked for a meeting to discuss "a very bad situation regarding patient safety." When they got no response, they sent a follow-up message and got an immediate reply from Human Resources Officer Mark Fisher.

"There is a lot going on and I am please asking you to be patient," Fisher wrote, explaining leaders were too busy working in patient care to address the issues. "Please outline your concerns in writing and then I will work with the leaders who can address."

Several of the 70 or so therapists employed by the hospital, however, say working conditions are far too dire to explain in a list and seek to remedy the situation.

Five employees speaking



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

**A TENT OUTSIDE** the emergency room of the Fountain Valley Regional Hospital & Medical Center is shown in April. Respiratory therapists at the facility say the recent spike in COVID-19 patients has caused a severe staffing shortage and conditions are "not sustainable."

in an interview Tuesday reported 169 COVID-19 patients were being treated at the Fountain Valley facility, compared to 73 patients during the summertime peak. The recent explosion in the number of ventilated patients, coupled with staff shortages, has been pushing respiratory therapists to their breaking point.

Therapists typically work 12-hour shifts in which they are assigned a series of duties that each have a point value that tends to top out at 30 points, said Fountain Valley employee Michael Kingston. Ventilated patients, for example, may account for six to 10 points, depending on their medical

need.

But in the current surge, one employee could be assigned 100 points' worth of duties in a single day. Meanwhile, it's not uncommon for a 12-hour shift to stretch by another four, six or eight hours.

"We've taken on big workloads that have included triple or quadruple the patients," Kingston said, adding that the usual ranks of 12 to 15 respiratory therapists working each shift have dwindled to just five or six. "We have people who are on leave or are sick because they've been exposed [to coronavirus]. And we'll be exposed multiple times in 12 hours."

Annie Do, a respiratory therapist who's worked at the hospital for two years, said patients now are sicker than ever before with respiratory symptoms from COVID-19. It's not uncommon for therapists to have to drop what they're doing to respond to a "code blue" call, indicating a patient with cardiac or respiratory arrest, several times each shift. A coding patient can pull a therapist from regular floor duties for more than two hours.

"We are running on skeleton crews, and our skeleton crews are already running on empty. We are working extremely hard, without breaks and without

lunch, and we are still unable to care for these patients," said Do, adding that employees' pleas for assistance have fallen on deaf ears.

"At this point, we are in a crisis situation," she continued. "Our licenses are on the line. These patients' lives are on the line. And they are dying — that's a fact."

In addition to an extremely high patient census, which ties up physicians and nurses who would otherwise respond to coding patients (some of whom code multiple times per shift) employees say a shortage of oxygen is complicating treatment.

Therapist Luis Ramos said that on Sunday, oxygen in the East Tower, where COVID-19 patients were being housed before the surge caused patients to overflow into main building units, simply went out.

"When oxygen runs out, [patients] start crashing from low oxygen levels in the blood," Ramos said, describing the potential for tissue, organ and brain damage.

Officials with Fountain Valley Regional Hospital and Tenet Healthcare, which operates the facility, did not speak in an interview or respond directly to employee claims. Tenet

spokeswoman Jennifer Bayer acknowledged in an email comment the demand to care for COVID-19 patients was "putting a strain on our hospital staff."

"We take the concerns of our employees seriously and are currently reviewing the issues recently brought to our attention from the union representing our respiratory therapists," she said. "Fountain Valley has the capacity to treat patients presenting at our hospital, and we can safely care for our patients with the supplies that we currently have."

Lewis said NUHW representatives will continue to urge hospital leaders to bring in more respiratory therapists to work, either through hiring or incentivizing employees with extra shift bonuses. Fountain Valley Regional recently began offering nurses \$2,000 per extra shift plus pay, she said, and in a crisis like COVID-19, respiratory therapists are more crucial than ever.

"There has to be a correction now, because Christmas is coming," she said, "And respiratory therapists are the people who take care of the patients who are most critical."

sara.cardine@latimes.com  
Twitter: @SaraCardine

## VIRUS

Continued from page A1

On Wednesday, with Christmas Day just two days away, the healthcare agency's numbers showed 1,854 hospitalizations countywide, with 394 of those patients being treated in intensive care units.

An additional 21,535 tests were reported within the last day, bringing the number of tests administered countywide to 1,906,582.

The agency estimates that 77,076 people in the county have recovered after contracting the virus.

Regional stay-at-home orders have gone into effect for regions where the ICU capacity availability

dropped below 15%. Southern California — which includes Imperial, Inyo, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties — was placed under the order on Dec. 7.

Orange County currently has an ICU capacity of 8.2%, and the county has 44% of its ventilators available.

The county is seeing seven-day averages of 51.8 daily new cases per 100,000 residents and a testing positivity rate of 15.2%. Those numbers come with a seven-day lag.

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

Orange County:

- Santa Ana: 26,352 cases; 358 deaths
- Anaheim: 22,871 cases; 381 deaths
- Huntington Beach: 5,388 cases; 96 deaths
- Costa Mesa: 4,405 cases; 51 deaths
- Irvine: 4,908 cases; 20 deaths
- Newport Beach: 2,035 cases; 28 deaths
- Fountain Valley: 1,695 cases; 25 deaths
- Laguna Beach: 451 cases; fewer than five deaths

Here are the case counts by age group, followed by deaths:

- 0 to 17: 12,601 cases; one death
- 18 to 24: 19,215 cases; five deaths

- 25 to 34: 28,085 cases; 26 deaths
- 35 to 44: 21,279 cases; 42 deaths
- 45 to 54: 21,806 cases; 131 deaths
- 55 to 64: 16,476 cases; 242 deaths
- 65 to 74: 8,234 cases; 350 deaths
- 75 to 84: 4,148 cases; 393 deaths
- 85 and older: 2,907 cases; 591 deaths

Updated figures are posted daily at [occovid19.ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc](http://occovid19.ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc).

For information on getting tested, visit [occovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing](http://occovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing).

andrew.turner@latimes.com  
Twitter: @ProfessorTurner



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

**HOLIDAY SHOPPERS** at South Coast Plaza on Saturday.

Make the Holidays  
= **BRIGHT** =  
GET \$50 GIVE \$50

Give the gift of natural lighting this holiday season.

- Brighten kitchens, hallways, bathrooms, etc.
- Enhance your space with decorative fixtures

Replace your old, cracked skylights fast.

- Get natural light inside your home
- High performance insulated glass

BEFORE

AFTER

©2020 Solatube Home Lic. # 847890

Call for promotion details  
**714-242-5053**

SolatubeHome.com/LAT

Virtual Consultations • 2 Hour Contactless Installation • CDC Safety Procedures

BRIGGS & RILEY

The  
Holiday  
Sale

UP TO

\$100  
OFF

\$100 OFF any item \$399 or more  
\$50 OFF any item \$199-\$398

Great gifts for everyone!

ROOTEN'S  
LUGGAGE CENTER

17775 Main Street, Irvine, CA 92614  
**949.250.0774**  
Monday thru Saturday 10am-5pm • Sunday 11am-4pm  
[www.rootensluggage.com](http://www.rootensluggage.com)

