

# SPACE WALKER

Mission Viejo native  
**Michael López-Alegría**  
to be inducted into the  
U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame

BY ALIESE MUHONEN



**F**ifty-one years ago on July 20, 1969, a then 11-year-old Michael López-Alegría was playing on Laguna Beach's shores with his family and friends. He remembers the adults calling the kids out of the water and everyone gathering around transistor radios that broadcast Apollo 11's historic landing onto the surface of the moon.

"And once they said, 'Tranquility Base, the Eagle has landed,' all these adults who were kind of strangers to each other were hugging and, like, slapping each other on the back like they were relatives or friends," López-Alegría, 62, said. "It was really quite a moment."

Later that day at his family's home

in Mission Viejo, López-Alegría was entranced watching grainy black-and-white footage of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walking on the moon.

The events on that summer day were influential in inspiring López-Alegría's 20-year career as an astronaut for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and 37-year career in aviation and space flight.

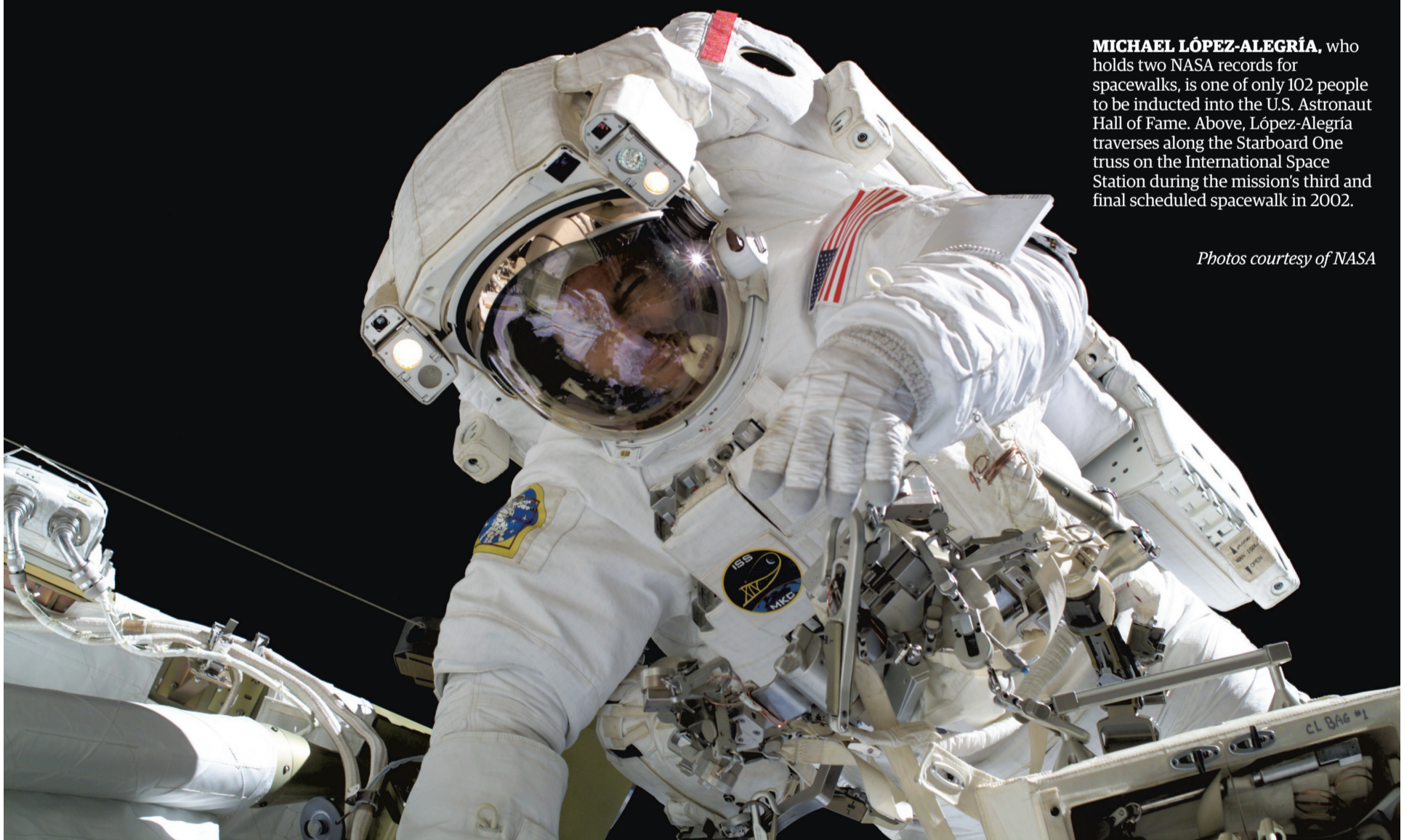
Now López-Alegría will join his childhood heroes as an inductee for one of the industry's highest honors: the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame. Though it was announced earlier this year (the ceremony was originally scheduled for May 16), the 2020 ceremony has been postponed due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. López-Alegría and two other retired astronauts — Pamela A. Melroy and Scott Kelly — will be inducted at a later date.

"They exemplify bravery, dedication and passion, and their hard work has paved the way for what promises to be an unprecedented new decade of space exploration and interplanetary travel," said Curt Brown, space shuttle astronaut and board chairman of the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation, which oversees the selection process.

A place in the Hall of Fame is a rare honor. López-Alegría will be one of only 102 people in a revered company of space greats that includes Neil Arm-

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**MICHAEL LÓPEZ-ALEGRÍA**, who holds two NASA records for spacewalks, is one of only 102 people to be inducted into the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame. Above, López-Alegría traverses along the Starboard One truss on the International Space Station during the mission's third and final scheduled spacewalk in 2002.

Photos courtesy of NASA

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# ‘I could not imagine a more infected group of officers’

Orange County sheriff’s deputies involved in the “vicious” beating of a Black man have faced investigations for prior misconduct including Taser-ing a suspect in the back of a patrol vehicle and filing dozens of false police reports, according to court documents recently filed by the public defender’s office.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Orange County sheriff’s deputies involved in the “vicious” beating of a Black man have faced investigations for prior misconduct, including Taser-ing a suspect in the back of a patrol vehicle and filing dozens of false police reports, according to court documents recently filed by the public defender’s office.

The beating of Mohamed Sayem made national headlines after dashcam footage of the incident surfaced in 2018. Sayem was allegedly intoxicated and sleeping in his car in a parking lot in Stanton when a group of deputies confronted him in mid-August of that year.

“The victim was beaten to the ground and then terrorized,” according to the court documents. “While lying face-first on the pavement, the victim looked up at the assailant and his accomplice — both well-armed — and asked whether they were going to shoot him. The second assailant said he would ‘like to.’ When the victim asked whether he meant this, both remained cruelly silent.”

The district attorney’s office charged Sayem with a felony of resisting an officer through force or violence.

When reached for comment this week, sheriff’s spokeswoman Carrie Braun responded with former Sheriff Sandra Hutchens’ statement at the time.

“The deputy used force appropriate for the situation to gain control of an uncooperative, assaultive and intoxicated person,” Hutchens said. “Any assertion otherwise substantially misrepresents the facts, and serves only to swell an anti-law enforcement narrative.”

The public defenders’ account laid out in the recently-filed documents dispute Hutchens’ claims.

“I could not imagine a more infected group of officers at the scene,” said Assistant Public Defender Scott Sanders, who in 2016 discovered that the district attorney’s office and sheriff’s department were illegally using jail-house informants to obtain confessions.

According to the court documents and the widely-viewed vi-

deo, Deputy Michael Devitt “yanked” Sayem from the car and punched him repeatedly in the face, yet Devitt changed his account in teletype entries made on scene and in his final report, claiming that Sayem stepped out of the car and tried to grab his safety vest.

Devitt is currently under investigation unrelated to this case. The public defender’s office received the documents on the details of that investigation in court on Friday, though they were placed under a protective order despite Sanders’ objection.

While he was on the ground, Sayem asked the deputies whether they were going to shoot him and Deputy Eric Ota said he would “like to.”

Ota omitted this from his report, the documents say. Ota never faced an investigation for his alleged comment.

Then, as Sayem sat bloodied in the backseat of Devitt’s patrol car, Deputy Blake Blaney “mused nostalgically” of another fight he had been in.

“I got in another good one last week,” he told his fellow deputies after laughing, the court documents say.

Blaney was the first sworn

member of the Sheriff’s Department to illegally access inmate calls to their attorneys in 2015. He didn’t report this or face any punishment for the misconduct.

Meanwhile, Sgt. Christopher Hibbs, a supervising officer on scene, was attempting to make sure his audio recorder was on.

“It says on,” Hibbs said, according to the documents. “On is on, right?”

One of the deputies was heard on the recording saying, “You’re recording this now?” Another said, “You’ve been recording this the whole...” But before the deputy could finish his sentence, Deputy Brant Lewis walked over and turned Hibbs’ recorder off, the documents say.

That left about an 11-minute gap in the audio recording of the incident. Without the audio being recorded, Devitt “changed his version” with his teletype, the documents say.

Sanders said Hibbs’ dashcam footage was the only one the department said existed.

At the time, Lewis was being internally and criminally investigated for writing false reports and failing to book evidence on time, the documents say. Lewis was a key subject in the highly publi-



Courtesy of OC Protests

**ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER** Scott Sanders, left, is shown with Mohamed Sayem outside a courthouse recently.

cized evidence mishandling scandal. “...and just three months earlier [Lewis] was interviewed by an investigator and sergeant with his attorney present about actions that should have led to felony prosecution,” the documents say.

“Brant Lewis, inexplicably is out in the field even though he is one of the 17 key subjects in the evidence booking scandal,” Sanders said. “He’s out in the field, it makes absolutely no sense. He walks up to his supervisor, unaffected by the criminal investigation he is in... He still felt comfortable walking up to his supervi-

sor and turning off his microphone.”

According to the documents, Lewis filed 47 false police reports and was late to book evidence on several occasions, including one instance where he was 227 days late, and another after 158 days after a suspect had already pled guilty.

Lewis also claimed on nine separate instances that he seized evidence that was never booked.

Lewis was never charged for his actions and still works in Stanton.

Hibbs, who was tasked with writing the use of force report, was prosecuted a decade prior for allegedly Taser-ing a suspect who was already detained in the back of a patrol car, the document says. Hibbs wasn’t convicted and was eventually promoted to sergeant. That incident also occurred in Stanton.

The document says that the Sheriff’s Department and county counsel attempted to hide the existence of the report, “because they knew disclosure would reveal that the OCSD has unlawfully and systematically hidden this type of report from courts...” Hibbs allegedly left out of the report that Devitt had changed his version of events, the documents say.

Through seeking the use of force report, the public defender’s office discovered that the Sheriff’s Department has hidden use of force reports for years.

“This is not debatable — in court, county counsel denied the



Courtesy of OC Protests

**PROTESTERS GATHER** in support of Sayem. Another protest is planned at Sayem’s next hearing on Sept. 2.

See **Officers**, page R6

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# The state of O.C. theater will only get rockier as the pandemic continues, but many forge on

BY ADA TSENG, VERA CASTANEDA

In June, Nick Charles, the founder of Stage Door Repertory Theatre in Anaheim Hills, was on a Zoom roundtable panel with local producers about the future of theater.

Joined by James Huffman of Attic Community Theater in Santa Ana, Amanda DeMaio of STAGESTheatre in Fullerton, Madison Mooney and Sean Gray of Long Beach Playhouse and Joel Roster of El Campanil Theatre in Antioch, Charles remembers everyone being very positive about O.C. theater's future.

So when he heard earlier this month that the Attic theater was closing, he was shocked.

Huffman said that he didn't make the decision to close until the last month, but he had been thinking it was a possibility for longer than that.

There was only \$100 left in the Attic's bank account. He said that he had a good, decade-long relationship with his landlord, who wanted them to stay, but it was too much rent, too much time and too much to ask.

He finally decided to let it go and try again after the pandemic is over. His wife is a hospice nurse who works in elder care facilities and with COVID patients. His daughter also works with COVID patients as an ICU nurse.

"Even if you could open, who's crazy enough to go? I don't think I'd go," he said. "Most of the people that I know who go to the theater are older. I personally feel it's completely irresponsible to have an assembly and have people anywhere near each other during this because you can't be safe enough."

David Carnevale is the co-founder and managing director of Orange County's LGBTQ theater, Theatre Out, which closed in 2017.

He recently created an "Orange County Return to Theater" survey, focusing on smaller O.C. theaters and asking survey participants questions about when they'd feel comfortable returning.

About a third said they'd feel comfortable returning in September, while a third said they wouldn't feel comfortable returning until there was a vaccine. The majority said they'd want special precautions including masks for all audiences and staff, sanitizing stations and deep cleaning in order to return, and that they'd feel more comfortable attending shows with small casts.

Carnevale also notes a bias that "a large number of actors, technicians and creators completed the survey and did so not as an audience member but focusing on their own role in the theatre."

And since he shared the results of the survey, Carnevale said several major announcements were made from the unions, the Center Theatre Group, and Broadway producers about production delays into 2021.

With instructions from health officials changing rapidly, he thinks if the survey were given out today, less would be comfortable returning in the fall.

Most theaters in Orange County, and around the nation, are in a similar position. Audiences are a fundamental part of theater, and the pandemic has made it unsafe for audiences to gather. Even if audience members could socially distance, there is the safety of actors and crew members to consider.

Also, what is the cost of putting on a show like this, when the likelihood of making the money back is slim?

In the meantime, some are continuing their programming online to keep their members engaged. Some are hosting Zoom readings. But these efforts,

for the most part, are more for community building and the opportunity for artists to hone their craft.

"There isn't a whole lot that theaters can do to make any money right now," Mike Brown, president of Costa Mesa Playhouse, said.

Some theaters, like Costa Mesa Playhouse, Newport Theatre Arts Center and the GEM Theater in Garden Grove are subsidized, either by their city, their landlords or their donors. But many of the smaller theaters like the Attic, Stage Door, Maverick, STAGESTheatre, Modjeska and more are at the mercy of their landlords and trying to make deals with them.

Larger theaters like Segerstrom Center of the Arts and South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa are also not immune to the pandemic.

"I really think it's about the nature of the business, rather than the size of the business," Casey Reitz, president of Segerstrom Center for the Arts, regarded as one of the most prolific, well-known and well-funded theaters in the county. "If you're in hospitality, if you're in air travel, it doesn't matter what your size is. You're significantly impacted."

Seventy-five percent of Segerstrom's budget comes from ticket sales. In June, they furloughed and laid off over 60% of their staff. South Coast Repertory, which operates on the same campus, furloughed approximately half of their staff in early April.

"The bigger the company, the bigger the financial hit," Craig Tyril of the Wayward Artist in Santa Ana. "Regardless of size, audience base or budget, the whole art form with live audience is not happening, and it's a tremendous loss for everybody. Everyone's working hard to survive this."

## ATTIC COMMUNITY THEATER



Courtesy of Modjeska Playhouse

**MODJESKA PLAYHOUSE** in Lake Forest is one of many small theaters in Orange County that is in limbo. They don't have income and can't pay rent, but they are hesitant to accept donations if they will eventually be forced to shut down or move out.

After a decade, James Huffman, owner of the Attic Community Theater, closed and moved out of its Santa Ana location in early July. The theater shut down in mid-March anticipating to be closed for about a month.

But soon it became clear to Huffman that the theater was going to be closed for a year or more. He described the last four months as a "slow-motion train wreck."

"Everybody's just clinging on and draining any money they have and then going into their own pockets, which is what we all do anyway," Huffman said. "I'm just trying to be a realist and say, 'There's no possible way.' A landlord won't pay my rent for a year, and I think it's unreasonable for me to expect him to."

Since the theater is volunteer-run for the most part, it didn't qualify for a PPP loan. He thought it best to execute an exit strategy.

The plan is to keep the essentials needed to reopen (seats, lights and sound system) and sell the rest in a rummage sale. He's going to fundraise for, what he calls, the Attic 2.0 and expects to open in 2021.

Huffman has received an outpouring of support, including from those who also want to donate money. Although he said he wants business partners and volunteers, he isn't taking donations.

"I won't accept any donations until we're completely closed down ... What I jokingly told people, we have to finish act one before we can start act two," Huffman said.

## MODJESKA PLAYHOUSE

The Modjeska Playhouse co-founder and artistic director Christopher Sullivan calls the Lake Forest-located theater a "baby" or "young theater of Orange County." And it's struggling.

"We're trying to hang on. That's probably the best thing that we can say," Sullivan said. "Any theater that says they're doing well is

probably fooling themselves a little bit unless they have major donors or corporate sponsorships or are funded by the city. We don't have any of that."

The idea for Modjeska Playhouse started with three friends who met at Trabuco Hills High School during the 1990s.

They also didn't qualify for a federal PPP loan since they don't have a payroll. They may try to fundraise to keep the theater open, but are hesitant to do so if they will be forced to close.

"We've had a handful of people reach out to us, super generous, people that wanted to offer donations. But I think all of them together wouldn't cover our rent for a month," Sullivan said. "We would feel guilty if we raised money but weren't able to raise enough money and then shut the door."

## BREATH OF FIRE LATINA THEATER ENSEMBLE

Breath of Fire is a theater ensemble based in downtown Santa Ana, the only culturally-specific theater organization in Orange County. Founding artistic director Sara Guerrero remembered that when they started, they had no space or budget. Artists donated their time to teach, neighbors offered their backyards and workshops were always filled.

They are volunteer-run, and since COVID-19 hit, they've shifted it their artist ensemble grant fund to an emergency fund, raising money for those who have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

Literary Director Diana Burbano said that they were one of the first in the nation to start doing virtual play readings when quarantine began in March.

"As a small theater company, we had more leeway to jump right in; we're so used to being scrappy and doing things on a quarter that we weren't afraid to do that," she said. "And in some ways, we've been able

to have a bigger impact than we've had before, because the virtual space is a lot more open to organizations that don't have a lot of money."

They likely won't produce another show until there is a vaccine.

"There are resources that smaller theaters just don't have," she said. "The idea of getting mikes for everybody onstage is already a prohibitive cost."

They say that in the past, they haven't always felt included in the O.C. theater scene. But they've been able to find cohorts in Latino theater companies outside of O.C. as well as small women-led theater organizations across the country.

As protests spread across the nation and Orange County, the Breath of Fire ensemble thought hard about how they could help elevate voices. They've been regularly hosting "Staged Stories," a live streamed series highlighting plays, monologues, poetry and other new works of BIPOC artists, and they recently partnered with Garden Grove High School's Black Student Union to offer their storytelling education workshops as well as fundraise for their organizing efforts surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement.

"We're volunteer-based, so there's only so much we can do, but it feels important to be accountable," Guerrero said. "Moving forward, I think we need to partner with other organizations, but it's important to think about: how do bigger parties partner with smaller parties without turning them into work-horses."

## STAGESTHEATRE

"There's so many things up in the air," said Amanda DeMaio, executive director of STAGESTheatre in Fullerton. "Not unlike many theaters, we have rent and no income, and we don't have

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# THEATER

Continued from page R4

a landlord clarifying whether payments missed will be dismissed as opposed to deferred.”

She explained that while landlords are being understanding now, “what nobody says is: what happens in a year when we reopen? If we reopen with \$10,000 in back rent, that’s almost insurmountable for a small theater.”

Pre-pandemic, STAGESTheatre rented three spaces, and for now, they are only keeping one. On Aug. 8 and 9, from approximately 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., they will be having a big rummage sale of their props, costumes, furniture and scenery in the parking area behind their theater (400 E Commonwealth Ave, Fullerton) to raise money for the nonprofit to pay their debts and continue to cover future rent.

DeMaio is also the president of the OC Theatre Guild, which was founded in 2015 by Sharyn Case and Brian Page but only became an official nonprofit in 2019. The goal was to create a more united theater community in Orange County, and the board started with creating regional auditions and the OCTG Awards Program. When the pandemic hit in March, they quickly created an artist relief fund.

In the meantime, as protests for George Floyd spread around the nation and in Orange County, DeMaio said that the members of the OC Theatre Guild are thinking deeply about issues of diversity, inclusion, equity and anti-racism.

“At this level of theater, often it’s volunteer-based or there are one or two people who do a lot of the work,” she explained. “So often you’re trapped in the cycle of ‘I’ve always done things this way,’ without the time to really think about how we can be better, how to lay the groundwork so that when we come back, we can be a better, more equitable and transparent place.”

What she hopes is that this shared experience will create a tighter-knit community among local theaters, and that even if spaces need to shut down, that the opportunities don’t disappear. She hopes that in 2021, the theaters that still have space will reach out to those that don’t in order to work together to help fill the voids.

## CHANCE THEATER

Oanh Nguyen, executive artistic director of Chance Theater, and Casey Long, managing director, remember clearly when they closed because it was Friday the 13th. The day after, they were about to have a major fundraising event with about 1,000 people and 40 different performances, and they had to shut it down.

Looking forward, they know it won’t be financially viable for them to produce plays unless it’s safe for them to have their shows at 80% capacity, which means they are likely not going to be able to produce until there is a vaccine.

Their annual operating budget is about \$1 million. About half their income comes from ticket sales, subscriptions and other earned income, while the other half comes from grants and donations.

They’ve furloughed the whole staff, and so far, they have eight staff members left, all at 16 hours a week or less.

But they do have the support of their donors. They kicked off a \$200,000 fundraiser that would be matched by a few of their donors, and as of press time, they were at \$199,244. But the initial goal was just to get them through the summer, so they’re about to announce the next goal.

“In the world of mid-size to larger theaters, we’re struggling because we don’t have the reserves and endowments,” Nguyen said. “In the world of small theaters, we might seem to be doing much better, but at the same time, we have a lot more costs. We pay our staff and artists. We have a larger amount of rent.”

In the meantime, they’re creating virtual programming to keep their community connected. “Chance Cyber Chats” is a virtual theater trip where they pick five theater shows available on BroadwayHD and other streaming platforms, encourage their members to watch and then join time on a Zoom call for a panel.

They started “Some Good News OC,” inspired by John Krasinski’s popular quarantine series of the same name, where they share good news around Orange County and also give updates. They continue to do workshops and develop other series where they bring back past cast members and catch up.

“At this moment, the feeling is optimistic,” Nguyen said.

“Cautiously optimistic,” Long said.

“We have to be; we have



Scott Smeltzer / Staff Photographer

**MIKE BROWN** is the president of the board of directors for the Costa Mesa Playhouse.

no choice,” Nguyen said.

## COSTA MESA PLAYHOUSE

Founded in 1965, the Costa Mesa Playhouse is housed at the Rea Elementary School campus.

“We were very fortunate because our landlord is the Newport Mesa Unified School District, and they give us a very reasonable rent, so we are able to keep paying our rent throughout the year that we’ll be shut down,” said Mike Brown, president of Costa Mesa Playhouse.

They also had a patron that recently passed away and left them a large donation, which Brown said will be helpful.

“I know a lot of theaters are not as lucky financially as we are; a lot of them are struggling,” he said.

Costa Mesa Playhouse is an all-volunteer organization. They pay directors, musical directors and actors a small stipend, but with no shows in production, they don’t have to pay anyone. They rent two storage facilities, but decided to shut one down during the pandemic and store costumes and furniture in the theater while they aren’t operating.

They are also storing some of the Attic Community Theater’s costumes and lights as the Santa Ana theater shuts down and hopes to find a new theater in 2021.

“Some of [the theaters] are a lot more hip on what to do,” said Brown, pointing to creative ways his fellow theater directors have fundraised and created virtual programming during the pandemic. “We’re not very good at that but fortunately our financial situation is such that we don’t have to worry too much about it.”

## 3-D THEATRICALS

3-D Theatricals closed in the middle of their “Kinky Boots” production but executive producer and artistic director T.J. Dawson said it’s surviving.

“I believe we will come out of this pandemic swinging hopefully,” Dawson said. “We were among the businesses that were able to get the PPP loan which allowed us to be able to continue to employ our staff and keep people on payroll, which is a huge blessing.”

In the meantime, the theater is working on developing its educational branch with its 3D + U program. It has offered free classes ranging from pilates, dance, drag makeup to round table discussions. The classes drew in local and international viewers and will continue through Aug. 14.

Since the teaching artists leading the classes are donating their time, Dawson said it doesn’t feel fair to ask them to continue working for free or to charge people when most don’t have an income.

The virtual experiment allowed them to play with a masterclass idea they’ve wanted to do in person. Once it’s safe to open for group gatherings, Dawson expects to provide in-person and virtual classes and compensate teachers.

He also predicts auditions will be conducted online in a permanent way, saving actors money by not having to drive or print resumes and headshots.

“It’s been the most exciting thing to kind of come from the challenges of how do we stay relevant and how do we stay a part of this community,” said Dawson. “While [COVID-19] has been devastating, we’ve been given the gift of time to figure things out. I think it’s going to change our industry forever.”

3-D Theatricals may start programming small scale or single performer shows in a drive-in concert set up as a temporary solution. But Dawson doesn’t see theater coming back until next year.

The theater is housed in Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, and they hold rehearsals in their Anaheim studio. The Cerritos-located venue announced it would be dark through August 2021.

“I’m just hoping that in 2021, [theater] will be responsible, caring and careful. We all want to come back to work,” said Dawson.

## WAYWARD ARTISTS

The Santa Ana theater, which started in 2017, was in the middle of rehearsing Michael Mejia’s “Feliz” which they closed.

Though they’ve had to cancel the rest of their third season, artistic director Craig Tyrl said he believes the theater, which is volunteer-run, can financially weather the storm.

“Luckily we have strong donors who believe in us and want to support us dur-

ing the difficult circumstances,” said Tyrl. “Every theater is different. Some theaters have outrageous rents, other theaters have more reasonable rents.”

They have a space in Cal State Fullerton’s Grand Central Art Center, which is currently closed.

“One positive [of these times] is that it forces artists to figure out how to express their art in this new environment,” he said.

Tyrl said he anticipates that Wayward Artists will reopen in summer 2021, “if we’re lucky.”

“It’s really a question of how long one can survive. If this thing goes on for two years, who knows where we’ll be,” Tyrl said.

## MAVERICK THEATER

“It’s still out of our control,” said Brian Newell, founder and artistic director of the Maverick Theater.

The small Fullerton theater which opened in 2002 is known for its cult hits including “Plan 8 from Outer Space,” “Night of the Living Dead” and “Santa Claus Conquers the Martians.”

They were about to open their production of “The Crucible” when the shutdown happened in March, and Newell said that the cast has been rehearsing lines on Zoom since, hoping they can open.

“We all know it might not happen this year, but the cast enjoys the break and having something to focus on,” he said.

The Maverick Theater often produces larger-than-life shows, like “King Kong,” in a small space.

“The biggest challenge is not social distancing audiences but social distancing performs on stage with mask coverings,” he said. “With a cast of 19 on a 23’ by 21’ stage, it’s very problematic. But even if we could somehow pull off a live performance, would an audience even show up? I don’t believe the public has the confidence yet to stay indoors with a small crowd for 2 and a half hours.”

“So now we just wait and hope we can continue to cover rent until we reopen.”

See **Theater**, page R6

# TimesOC

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## THEATER

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### SOUTH COAST REPERTORY

After furloughing and reducing hours for about 33 of their employees, South Coast Repertory's remaining staff returned to their offices with social distancing measures in place in June.

The pandemic hit when it was about to begin the run for John Patrick Shanley's "Outside Mullingar." Its final performance was a preview performance in March 12 before social distancing guidelines had been ordered. Because the staff had coincidentally filmed it, they offered a link to stream the performance.

As the months passed, they eventually canceled the rest of the season, including their annual "A Christmas Carol" show that has run for 40 years and has never been canceled until now.

In the meantime, they've been creating videos on their YouTube page including a "At Home With Ivers" series where Artistic Director David Ivers gives updates and interviews artists



RMA Photography

**THOUGH THE** Segerstrom Center of the Arts does not have any concrete plans to reopen yet, they plan to do it in stages: first in their outdoor plaza and then in their smaller Samueli theater when it is safe.

during the quarantine.

Also, on August 17, they will launch a new, free online community-based storytelling series called SCR Community with "MASA," a live reading of four plays that explore Mexican food. Curated and directed by Juliette Carrillo, the plays include "The Gardens of Aztlan (An Acto Hecho A Mano)" by Luis Alfaro, "El Maiz" from Café Vida by Lisa Loomer, "Tejuino" from Tejuino by Amilcar Jauregui and "The Path to

Divadom, or How to Make Fat-free Tamales in G minor" by the late Diane Rodriguez.

"MASA" is the first of three events curated by Carrillo in a series titled "El Teatro de la Comida (Theatre of Food)," and the next two events will take place on Aug. 31 and Sept. 14.

### SEGERSTROM CENTER OF THE ARTS

A recent transplant from New York to Orange County, Casey Reitz started his role

as president of Segerstrom Center for the Arts last December and only had a few months to get to know the staff, board members and audiences before everything closed down.

Segerstrom Center of the Arts is a unique space in Orange County, because they have multiple venues that are categorized in different ways. The outdoor George Argyros Plaza is in Stage 2, their Samueli Theater is in Stage 3, while their larger concert halls are in Stage 4.

"We don't really know what the protocols are," Reitz said. "Everyone kind of thinks they know what they are ... the Performing Arts Coalition is using information from the CDC to come up with guidelines, but we don't know how it'll align with the state's guidelines."

But even if they came up with good staging plans for the Argyros Plaza and Samueli Theater, he said a lot of performers unions haven't agreed to what protocols would be necessary for performers to come back to work.

He thinks whenever they can start having shows again, they'll reopen in stages. They'll start with the

outdoor venue and start small: solo singers, stand-up comedians, quartets, small jazz bands and speaker series. Before it's safe to travel, they will highlight local performers.

"This is a painful time, but I think the silver lining is that it's very clear that once people feel safe, they will come," Reitz said. "During this time of isolation, people want social interaction, they want connection, they want live performance. When we come back, I think we're going to come back strong. It's just a little bit of a question of when."

### STAGE DOOR REPERTORY THEATRE

Nick Charles clearly remembers the full moon on the Friday the 13th that they opened their production of "Forbidden Broadway's Greatest Hits."

At the time, the theaters had been asked to cut back on attendance, so the staff only allowed about 35 people in, and they rearranged their seating to table seating, so groups would be properly distanced.

After one weekend, they shut down, first hoping to come back in two weeks,

then a month, before they realized the hiatus would be indefinite.

"When we told the landlords [the situation], they almost flipped," he said. "Nine months without paying rent? Yes, nine months without running our business and all the people we are letting down. Imagine how we feel."

At the moment, they have already paid royalties for the shows they had planned to do in 2020, so instead of asking for the money back, he hopes they can just erase 2020, and continue as planned in 2021.

"I'm not that worried yet," Charles said. "I think if all these other theaters start saying, I think it's time for us to close., then I'd get real scared. As long as the theater community is staying strong and saying, 'Hey, we're going to come back and be better than ever,' it kind of gives you that hope."

That said, he said if they can't open in 2021, then "all bets are off. I can't see holding on indefinitely. I just can't."

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## OFFICERS

Continued from page R2

report existed, but later came back and admitted its existence," Sanders said.

"This would lead to a study by us and our analysis in the current motions that approximately 98% of use of force investigations are improperly hidden from the Pitchess/peace officer discovery process."

The public defender's office estimates that over a five-year span, 3,667 of the 3,742 use of force reports, or 98%, were unlawfully hidden from courts and defendants, court documents say.

These reports may have included cases where suspects sustained a broken nose, an orbital fracture and a fractured arm.

Sanders said he doesn't understand why the district attorney's office is still pursuing the case.

"After all this the ques-

tion is why are we still in this litigation..." Sanders said. "You file these felony charges on [Sayem] which are so impacting on his life ... it's just insane. You are going to stick with it no matter what. You just don't want to give in. ... They should absolutely walk away from this litigation right now, just to be smart."

D.A. spokeswoman Kimberly Edds said Tuesday the office will not comment on the Sayem case because it's pending litigation.

Sayem's case is again starting to gain public attention in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

OC Protests and Black OC, local Black-run activist groups, held a rally outside the courthouse on June 24 to draw attention to the case and show solidarity with Sayem.

"Today we began this process by calling upon OC District Attorney Todd

Spitzer to do the right thing in the case of Mohamed Sayem," Black OC said in an Instagram post.

"Moving forward from here, we will raise awareness about Mohamed's case and all involved parties, amplify our communities presence and participation throughout every step of the trial process, and we will not fail to remember OC District Attorney Todd Spitzer's action in this moment: whether it's because he recognized the legitimate plea of our community and did the right thing in the case of our brother Mohamed Sayem, or whether it's because he turned a deaf ear and blind eye to POC in OC in the matter of Mohamed Sayem."

Zoe-Raven Wiannecki, who runs OC Protests, said they are planning on holding a protest at Sayem's next hearing on Sept. 2.

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## SPACE

Continued from page R1

strong, Buzz Aldrin and John Glenn. Not that he'd brag about it. López-Alegría is down-to-earth (pun intended) about his accomplishments.

"Let's be clear: I think the people I looked up to as a kid and even later as a 20-something-year-old — they really accomplished a lot more in terms of being on the cutting edge," he said. "I mean, people who walked on the moon or flew to the moon or were the first in space — that's a pretty elite group. I'm honored to be a part of it, but I'm not really in the same league as those guys."

López-Alegría went on four spaceflights for NASA (three Space Shuttle missions, and one mission as the commander of the International Space Station), holds two NASA records for spacewalks (for the highest number of spacewalks — 10 — and duration of time spent — 67 hours and 40 minutes), and speaks four languages (English, Spanish, Russian and French).

When asked which career highlight he's proudest of, López-Alegría points to his experience in spacewalks, or extravehicular activity (EVA).

"I didn't set out to specialize in that, but I ended up being in the right place at the right time, and it is sort of the most iconic of the activities that an astronaut does," he said. "And so, having [those records] is special. I know that [they] will fall someday, and I'd be happy to hand the baton to the next person."

Born in Madrid and naturalized as a U.S. citizen, López-Alegría moved to the U.S. with his family at age 2 and to Mission Viejo at 8. He graduated from Mission Viejo High School in 1976, then from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1980. Designated a naval aviator, López-Alegría's childhood

dream of becoming an astronaut was reinvigorated at age 25 after he read a magazine article about Navy test pilots segueing into astronauts.

He trained at the U.S. Naval Test Pilot school and earned a master of science in aeronautical engineering before joining NASA in 1992. Three years later, López-Alegría was launched into orbit for his first Space Shuttle mission — the first Spanish-born astronaut to do so.

Among his favorite aspects of space flights are the launch ("an incredible roller coaster, white knuckle thrill ride"), the fun of floating in microgravity, and the consuming but rewarding hours spent on research.

His most tense moment on a spacewalk — and likely the most comical — involved the "least important" work he ever had to do: He and his Russian crewmate were tasked with hitting a golf ball in space for a commercial.

López-Alegría nearly lost his grip on the ball when it was exposed to the vacuum of space,

"And then my next thing was to hold my partner's feet, like an anchor, while he took a swing, and the bad news is that he shanked it, and we didn't get much video of it at all," he said with a laugh.

Initially skeptical of space tourism and commercial space flight, López-Alegría had a change of heart after Iranian-American entrepreneur and engineer Anousheh Ansari joined the crew on his last mission in 2006.

Ansari was the fourth space tourist in history and the first self-funded woman to fly to the International Space Station. Her blog and subsequent book about the experience introduced space travel to people who may not have considered it before.

"Literally a million people were reading her blog, and these are people who would otherwise not care two cents about what was

going on in space and human space flight," López-Alegría said. "This sort of idea of sharing the experience clicked with me, and really ever since then I've become a pretty big proponent of this idea of democratization of access to space."

Following his retirement from NASA in 2012, López-Alegría moved to Washington, D.C., and served as president of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation, an advocacy group for commercial spaceflight companies. He continues to work in D.C. as an independent consultant for the industry, serves on advisory boards and is a public speaker.

He is excited about the industry's progress — that there has been "a little of a renaissance in human spaceflight" in the past several years — and suspects that it will be accessible to laypeople sooner than he thinks.

With the return of Elon Musk's SpaceX Crew Dragon Demo-2 mission on Sunday — the first private company to send astronauts to the International Space Station — that reality just got a little closer.

He hopes that whoever goes into space — whether it's astronauts or tourists — will get to experience the Overview Effect, a phenomenon where space travelers return with a different perspective about life on Earth.

"When you come back, you definitely feel more connected to other people and to the planet. A little bit more tolerant maybe, a little bit more skeptical about conflict," López-Alegría said. "It just seems like we all ought to figure out a way to get along together, because we're all crew members on the same spaceship — planet Earth — and there's only one of them. And I think the more people who experience it, the better off our planet."

**ALIESE MUHONEN** is a contributor to TimesOC

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