

Doctors in O.C. fear outbreaks of disease in children

Pediatricians worry that parents are delaying immunizations for fear of exposing their kids to the coronavirus.

BY BEN BRAZIL

As many parents delay crucial immunizations for their children due to fears of exposing them to COVID-19, Orange County pediatricians are concerned about future outbreaks of measles, whooping cough and meningitis.

"Our concern is once society starts to get back to normal, there is a risk that we may see outbreaks of these very dangerous, vaccine-preventable illnesses," said Dr. Steven Abelowitz, a pediatrician with Coastal Kids Pediatrics. "... For children, they're far more dangerous than COVID."

Abelowitz said that many parents haven't been bringing their children in for needed wellness medical visits since the beginning of the pandemic.

He estimated that about 20% of the children who go to Coastal Kids are behind in their vaccines. The practice has offices in Newport Beach, Laguna Niguel, Ladera Ranch, Irvine and Laguna Hills.

"Without a doubt it's imperative for the well-being of the health of the children," Abelowitz said. "The benefits of maintaining their well visits and preventative vaccines far outweighs the children's risks to COVID."

Abelowitz said Coastal Kids has made a number of changes to make parents more comfortable bringing their children in for visits. He said the practice started outreach in the early months of quarantine.

"We've developed a number of measures to alleviate their concerns," Abelowitz said.

"We have drive-up visits and remote check-in ... But with all of that, you know, there's a concern of coming in or going into any somewhat public place, especially a medical facility, where

See **Outbreaks**, page R2



Photos by Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

TAYLOR DECOSTA is the founder, chief executive officer and executive chef of Taylor Made Cuisine in Irvine. Taylor Made is a catering and meal-prep company that has transitioned to a meal delivery service due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

'These are my recipes'

Founder of an Irvine catering business shares how she's thriving during the pandemic.

BY LORI BASHEDA

If you have a great idea but keep blowing it off because you lack the confidence to follow through, remember this tale of how a single plate of homemade chicken enchiladas turned into a \$2-million business.

It all started nine years ago.

CHEF AND

kitchen supervisor Liana Bates lays out cooked black beans as she prepares a pork chile rojo at Taylor Made Cuisine in Irvine.



Taylor DeCosta, then 22, had just quit her job at Nordstrom and was living with her grandmother in Garden Grove when she met a handsome personal trainer named Mike at a party.

She hatched a plan to win him over with her cooking skills and invited him to grandma's house for dinner. The enchiladas she served up were a hit.

"Mike was like, 'Have you ever considered making this your career?'" she recalled.

Why, no, she hadn't.

She had long envisioned herself finding a home somewhere in the world of fashion, but now she didn't feel like she fit in there.

Mike's comment made her think. DeCosta had been cook-

ing since she was a kid. She grew up watching the Food Network where her favorite personality was Rachael Ray, mostly because they shared the bubbly fun factor.

Now DeCosta found herself driving to Orange Coast College to enroll in its nationally com-

See **Recipes**, page R5



KETO thumbprint cookies by Taylor Made Cuisine in Irvine.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County looking for mentors



Courtesy of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County

WILLIAM BURROWS and Andrew were paired together through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County three years ago.

BY VERA CASTANEDA

It's national mentorship month, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and Inland Empire is looking for volunteers.

The mentoring organization has been in operation for more than 115 years nationwide with the O.C. and Inland Empire branch ranks as the second in size, serving about 4,000 kids a year, according to CEO Sloane Keane.

The O.C. branch started in a residential Tustin garage in 1958 before moving to 1801 E. Edinger Ave. in Santa Ana seven years ago. The organization owns the building and rents out half of the property to other nonprofits.

The programs vary from tradi-

tional one-on-one matches, couples matched with one child or teen, a high school volunteer mentoring an elementary school student and a corporate employee mentoring a high school student.

The latest program, College

pared to the 2,227 matches in 2019.

"Every child who's in our program has their own unique and specific mentor," Keane said. "A lot of that is done face to face so we had to shift that overnight and become virtual."

Museum docents became science instructors teaching kids how to make slime out of glue. Some became TikTok dance instructors. Volunteers turned into tutors providing additional support to the challenges of virtual learning. Others became a lifeline to essential needs like food.

One of the programs that decreased in activity was high school volunteers mentoring elementary school students. Keane said most

"The one thing that sets Big Brother Big Sister apart from elsewhere is — yes, the mentor applies — but the mentee has to agree that they want to be a part of the program."

— William Burrows
Huntington Beach

Bigs, which launched at the end of 2020, matches first-generation college students with high school students. Chapman University and UC Irvine are participating institutions.

In 2020, the number of program matches decreased to 1,586 com-

See **Mentors**, page R5

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Luis Sinco | Los Angeles Times

A NORTHGATE MARKET in Norwalk. The Santa Ana City Council has approved a plan to demolish a Northgate Market on East Fourth Street and erect “luxury” apartments in its place.

Santa Ana residents hope to save market

The City Council approved a plan to tear down a Northgate store for apartments.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Santa Ana residents who live near the Northgate Market on East Fourth Street have for years relied on the low-cost grocery store.

But last month the Santa Ana City Council approved a plan to demolish the market and erect “luxury” apartments in its place. It was one of the first controversial decisions by the new council, which added three members and a new mayor in November.

In response, the local activist group Chicanxs Unidxs started a petition calling for a boycott of all Northgate Markets in Orange County. As of Thursday afternoon, about 400 people had signed the petition.

“Santana [sic] residents & community organizers have made it clear that they do not support the building of luxury apartments at their Downtown Santa Ana location because it will cause further displacement of Santana residents and will contribute to the development of a food desert in an already nutrition depleted area of the city,” the petition reads.

“Many residents rely on this specific location for groceries because it is

within walking distance of their homes. We have seen time and time again that luxury apartments do nothing for the existing community except gradually force them out due to the rising costs of living.”

Eriza Gonzalez, an organizer with Chicanxs Unidxs, said in a phone interview that the apartments will also be too expensive for Santa Ana residents who are most in need of housing. Estimates for the apartments range from \$1,500 to \$3,500.

“Which is way out of range for the average Santa Ana resident, especially in that location because that’s one of the lowest-income neighborhoods in the city,” Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez said there has only been one community meeting since 2018 regarding the development, and more than 100 residents showed up to that meeting in opposition. She started the petition a month ago after the council’s decision.

Gonzalez said a few other nonprofits, like Orange County Environmental Justice, are helping to circulate the petition.

“There’s not a lot of supermarkets in the area — the closest thing a lot of times is like maybe a corner store, and that doesn’t have anywhere near the vegetables and fruits that someone would need for a nutritious diet,” said Patricia Flores, director of OC Environmental Justice. “So it’s what we call a food

desert. It’s a low-income area with mostly people of color who in a way are being cut off from healthy foods. And that market is one of the only ones in the area that’s accessible. So taking away that market would be a huge blow to the health of the community.”

Gonzalez said she’d like to gather 1,000 signatures and send the petition to Northgate representatives. Eventually, she’d like to present the petition to the City Council.

Some supporters of the petition mentioned the need for affordable housing over expensive apartments.

“This isn’t for the people of Santa Ana,” one person wrote in the petition comment section. “It’s for profit and profit only.”

“Residents are being pushed to their breaking points, this should not be the focus,” another supporter of the petition wrote.

The Kennedy Commission, an affordable housing advocacy group based in Orange County, came out in support of neighborhood residents in mid-December.

“The proposed Northgate Gonzalez Real Estate fails to help address the housing needs for lower-income families that live in the surrounding Lacy neighborhood community, one of the neighborhoods with a high population of lower-income fam-

See **Market**, page R4

Virtual town hall addresses COVID-19 vaccine concerns in O.C.’s Asian American community

BY AGNES CONSTANCE

The Orange County Health Care Agency hopes to have the majority of the county’s approximately 3.2 million residents vaccinated by July 4.

“That’s the day for O.C. to celebrate when we’ll perhaps be able to go back to a near normal situation,” agency director Dr. Clayton Chau said Thursday during a virtual town hall hosted for the county’s Asian American community, which constitutes about 20% of O.C.’s population.

That date, however, is dependent on how many residents are willing to take the vaccine, he said.

The OC Asian Pacific Islander Taskforce, along with the healthcare agency and UCI Cancer Center, hosted the town hall to address concerns in the Asian American and Pacific Islander community about vaccine side effects and distribution plans.

More than 200,000 cases of the coronavirus have been confirmed in Orange County. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have posted lower infection rates compared to other racial and ethnic groups, deputy county health officer Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong said.

But she noted that while Asians account for about 11% of positive cases, they represent about 19% of deaths from COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus.

“When you look at other ethnicities, typically the percent of death rates is very similar to the positive case rates for the ethnicity. But here you see in Asians it’s significantly higher than the actual percent of positive cases,” she said. “So that’s concerning to me, and we’re going to continue our efforts to vaccinate.”

The county is prioritizing the vaccination of healthcare workers and residents ages 65 and older.

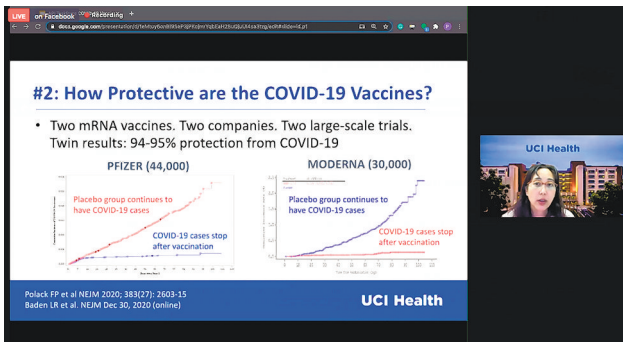
The eligibility was established after a review of COVID-19 hospital patients found that more than 70% of hospital beds were occupied by those ages 61 and older, Chinsio-Kwong said.

She added that more than 600,000 residents may be eligible for the vaccine based on criteria outlined by the county.

To date, however, O.C. has received approximately 183,000 vaccines and had administered about 56,000 doses as of Jan. 8, she said.

To reach its July target, the county plans to establish five “super PODs” (points of dispensing) that will have the capacity to vaccinate 7,500 to 8,000 people per day, Chau said.

The first super POD was launched Wednesday at Disneyland, where more than 3,000 residents were vaccinated on its first day,



Screenshot by Agnes Constance

DR. SUSAN S. HUANG, UC Irvine School of Medicine professor of infectious diseases and medical director of epidemiology and infection prevention, explains the safety of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines on Thursday.

Chinsio-Kwong said.

O.C. is also developing mobile PODs, each equipped to vaccinate 1,000 people, to reach residents who may have trouble traveling to super POD sites, Chinsio-Kwong said.

Chau and Dr. Susan S. Huang, UC Irvine School of Medicine professor of infectious diseases and medical director of epidemiology and infection prevention, clarified misconceptions about the vaccine during the town hall.

One concern Chau addressed was whether or not one vaccine works better for certain ethnic groups. He said neither one is superior to the other for different groups, citing the nearly 95% effectiveness of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Huang addressed doubts about safety by explaining that the vaccines don’t affect genes and only stay in the body for a short period of time.

She added that the 95% effectiveness of both vaccines far exceed the 50% effectiveness the FDA was willing to consider last year.

“We could not have dreamed up a better pair of vaccines,” she said. “You couldn’t have gotten anyone to take bets that a 95% vaccine would be available in six months.”

Another concern in the community is that there weren’t many Asians, pregnant people or those with immunocompromising diseases in the vaccine trials.

Huang said the main thing to look for is if the vaccine works in humans and in the elderly, who have difficulty creating an immune response for some vaccines.

“We don’t see a big difference in the ability to make an immune response if you’re Black or Asian or Hispanic,” she said. “It is largely, dominantly, an age difference.”

Both vaccines have shown to perform just as well in younger and older groups, she added.

A prevalent question among those who tuned into Thursday’s event dealt with the accessibility of Othena, a platform that can be downloaded on a smart-

phone and accessed online that residents can use to schedule a vaccination appointment, particularly for the elderly.

Othena, currently available in English, will be made available in Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Spanish, and public libraries will be available to assist people who may not have smartphones or internet access, Chau said. He added that the county will soon ask senior centers to help with Othena.

Ellen Ahn, executive director of Korean Community Services, said the OC API Taskforce will also be working to pinpoint areas where seniors typically gather, such as churches, so it can go to those locations to assist them with using the platform.

The taskforce is working to ensure information about COVID-19 is made available in Asian and Pacific Islander languages.

“We are doing our best to be on the frontlines, to make sure equity runs through the entire vaccination and COVID response process,” she said.

Ahn urged community members who have a primary care physician or other means of accessing the vaccine to pursue those avenues rather than reaching out to community-based groups.

She said these groups serving Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are seeking to reserve the limited vaccines they receive for the neediest and most vulnerable, including those who are undocumented and speak limited English.

“One of the areas we’re focused on are really underserved, very low income, limited English-speaking Asian and Pacific Islander older adults,” Foo said.

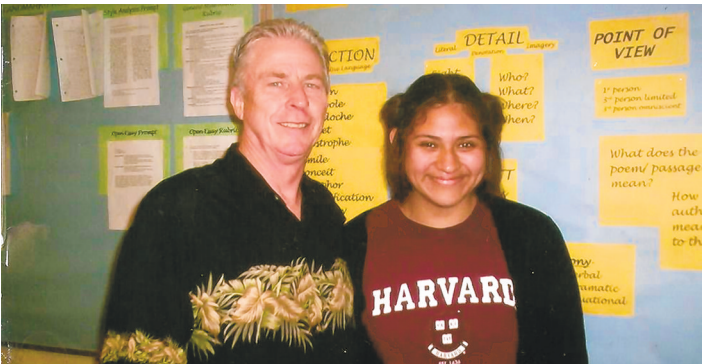
“It’s very hard for them to access healthcare. So this is one of the ways we’re trying to make sure that we’re getting the information out.”

Residents are encouraged to visit occovid19.ochhealthinfo.com for more information about COVID-19 testing and the vaccine.

AGNES CONSTANCE is a contributor to TimesOC.

OBITUARY

SANTA ANA High School English teacher Bill Roberts poses with student Gloria Montiel in 2005.



Courtesy of Gloria Montiel

Bill Roberts, influential Santa Ana High School teacher, dies at age 75

BY PRISCILLA VEGA

Gloria Montiel knew she wanted to attend Harvard University since she was 12, but the path to her dream college appeared unattainable. The Santa Ana High School student did not have legal status long before being a Dreamer was a cause.

Her parents, both restaurant workers, could neither offer her the support — financial or firsthand experience — she would need in becoming the first person in her family to attend college, let alone Harvard.

Disillusionment and apathy were all elements of Montiel’s education up until she met Bill Roberts, an English teacher at Santa Ana High.

Roberts offered more than just a curriculum to the predominantly low-income and Latino student population. He fostered acceptance and empathy while requiring diligence, accountability and most importantly: self-belief.

Roberts played an instrumental role in helping these students shatter stereotypes and attend presti-

gious universities such as Yale and Cornell. As for Montiel, she is believed to be one of the first students from the school to attend Harvard. Accepted in 2005, Montiel has since helped others pave a similar path.

“It’s been really, really hard, but at the same time I see the beauty in what he started,” she said of Roberts. “The belief he placed in me is a gift I keep moving forward. Now it’s my turn to give it to somebody else.”

Roberts, who taught at Santa Ana High for nearly 30 years, died Christmas Day after battling prostate cancer for five years, his wife, Jeri, said. He was 75.

Roberts started his career at private Catholic schools, including Damien High in La Verne and St. Anthony High in Long Beach. He taught history and coached basketball until he transferred to the Santa Ana Unified School District, where he stayed until he retired.

“Bill saw their potential,” Bob Dukus, a Santa Ana High science teacher who befriended Roberts in 1989, said of the school’s stu-

dents. The two hit it off and Roberts recruited Dukus to help lead Santa Ana High’s Quiz Bowl, an academic sport akin to “Jeopardy!” “He was there to support them 100%. A lot of our kids need that and Bill was one of the main ones who did that.”

Although Roberts didn’t earn any districtwide recognitions, he was revered by many, even those who weren’t his students. He believed that in order to be a successful teacher, he needed to convince students that he genuinely cared about them. His charismatic leadership, witty remarks and drive to teach beyond the curriculum captivated students.

During his final days, Roberts received flowers and nearly 100 letters from his former students. Many told Roberts how he helped them find their voice and ultimately changed their lives for the better.

Roberts is survived by his wife; his son, Ryan; his daughter, Erin; and four grandchildren.

PRISCILLA VEGA writes for the Los Angeles Times.



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

CHILDREN PLAY at a park in 2019, before COVID-19 came to Southern California.

OUTBREAKS

Continued from page R1

people are worried that they could come in to get vaccines and they get COVID.”

Katherine Williamson, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics Orange County chapter, said parents also haven’t been bringing their children in for medical visits because they believe their particular hospital could be closed.

This could be due to smaller practices being forced to close at the beginning of the pandemic.

“But I feel pretty comfortable saying that most, if not all, primary care doctors are open,” Williamson said. “It’s possible that information has not reached out to all the parents.”

Williamson said the more likely outbreaks could be measles or whooping cough, though she said almost every illness that children are vaccinated for

could potentially spread.

Blue Cross Blue Shield predicted last year that children could miss close to 9 million doses of vaccines in 2020.

“If kids aren’t vaccinated for things like measles and polio, it doesn’t take many kids not getting vaccinated for those diseases to re-emerge, and we can have epidemics,” Williamson said.

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Photos by Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

STRONG WINDS reduce visibility and cause spray off the top of the waves near the pier in Huntington Beach on Tuesday. High-wind warnings were issued in parts of Orange County that day.



WINDS BEND palm trees and wave flags on the 100 block of Main Street in Huntington Beach.



A SURFER catches a wave on a windy day off the pier in Huntington Beach on Tuesday.

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O.C. leaders mark MLK Jr. Day with 92-year-old Rev. James Lawson

BY VERA CASTANEDA

The coronavirus pandemic and recent insurrection didn't subdue Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations on Monday.

More than a handful of local organizations including the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., New Spirit Baptist Church, Women for American Values and Ethics, National Women's Political Caucus and the Democratic Party of Orange County, partnered on a virtual celebration with non-violence theorist and educator the Rev. James Lawson as the guest lecturer.

Shelley Henderson, who ran for Westminster City Council last year, hosted the event and introduced speakers including Black Chamber of Commerce Orange County President Robert McDonald, Aliso Viejo City Councilman Richard Hurt, cardiologist Jacqueline Eubany and state Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris.

"White supremacy has been in the soil of America since 1619," Henderson said at the beginning of the celebration. "But today, we recommit ourselves to the legacy and the leadership of Dr. King, a legacy of strength of protest, love for humankind and a legacy of creating the beloved community."

King's direct connection to Orange County includes two speeches — the first in 1962 at Chapman College and the second in 1968 at the Anaheim Convention Center just weeks before he was assassinated.

Henderson said whenever America makes progress there is backlash. She pointed out local progress in political leadership and national progress in figures like the late U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisholm and Vice President Kamala Harris.

In 2020, there were many firsts in O.C. Black leadership. Leticia Clark became



Courtesy of Democratic Party of Orange County

ORANGE COUNTY groups joined to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day in a virtual celebration featuring a guest lecture from the Rev. James Lawson, 92, a nonviolence theorist and educator.

the first Black woman to lead Tustin as mayor. Richard Hurt became the first Black city council member in Aliso Viejo. David Crockett was elected as the first Black trustee to the Rancho Santiago Community College board, and Vicki Calhoun became the first Black trustee in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District.

Lawson, 92, started holding seminars to train people in nonviolent direct action. He helped coordinate the Freedom Riders in 1961, the Meredith March in 1966 and has been involved in campaigns for labor rights and immigration reform. John Lewis, the late congressman, named him as one of the most influential men in his life in "March: Book One," a comic book recounting Lewis' years in the civil rights movement.

Lawson's Monday lecture focused on reflecting on the Black Lives Matters movement and creating a "beloved community" — a notion based on economic and social justice popularized by King.

He called Black Lives Matter "the largest, most diverse, most creative non-violent movement the nation has ever produced"



SHELLEY HENDERSON, who ran for Westminster City Council last year, hosted and introduced speakers during a virtual Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration.

and said most of the violence came from police, Antifa, looters and white supremacists. Lawson referred to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol as an example of a violent campaign that produces more harm than good.

Lawson said he's tried to continue the "beloved community" vision and methodology for justice and truth through working with families in Unite Here Local 11 and other unions in Los Angeles.

"The struggle today is more widespread than it ever was in 1950 or 1960," Lawson said. "More issues of injustice are brought to

the surface than ever before ... Since the '60s, a larger number of people elected in our offices in all 50 states have a clearer vision of what the nation can be ... We have changed far more institutions of our society across 16 years than we even know about ... and yet at the same moment the struggle for justice, liberty and equality for all has just begun."

The nearly 90-minute celebration can be watched online through the Democratic Party of Orange County's Facebook page.

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MARKET

Continued from page R2

ilies," the Kennedy Commission said in a Facebook post. "This development needs to provide affordable housing to help address existing housing needs and mitigate the gentrification and displacement that its project will create.

"The Northgate Gonzalez Real Estate team cannot claim that this development will serve the Santa Ana residents without including housing that will be affordable to families with extremely low and very low incomes."

Northgate Market took umbrage with the petition in an emailed statement.

"Northgate Gonzalez Market has read the petition in question and we find it unfortunately misrepresents the facts of the matter," the statement reads. "As a family-owned business, Northgate Market has been invested in Santa Ana for 28 years with six stores providing fresh fruits and vegetables and additional grocery items at affordable prices for local residents, and good paying jobs for 1,200 associates including 600 Santa Ana residents. Additionally, there are two additional planned stores in the works for Santa Ana creating more jobs for residents.

"The new housing project will not create a food desert given the fact there is a major grocery store located a few blocks from the current site, and a planned bigger, more modern replacement Northgate Market located a few blocks from the current downtown store. And there was absolutely no relocation of any residents in the planning of this project.

"The current planned downtown quality housing project was designed to address the need for additional housing units for downtown workers in the city while meeting the needs of today's modern extended families. Additionally, we are currently

planning two affordable housing projects in the city including a project in conjunction with Santa Ana College for low-income students."

The 4-2 decision of the seven-member council could be seen by some as a surprise. The three new council members — Johnathan Hernandez, Jessie Lopez and Thai Viet Phan — all included affordable housing and support of underrepresented groups as part of their platforms. Mayor Vicente Sarmiento, who replaced the 26-year incumbent Miguel Pulido, also considers affordable housing and helping the immigrant communities of Santa Ana to be top priorities.

Hernandez and Lopez voted against the development, while Sarmiento abstained due to family members owning nearby property. But Phan voted in favor of the development along with Phil Bacerra, David Penaloza and Nelida Mendoza.

Phan said over the phone that she stands by her decision because Santa Ana needs a variety of housing. She also referenced that she recently voted in favor of a 100%-affordable housing project.

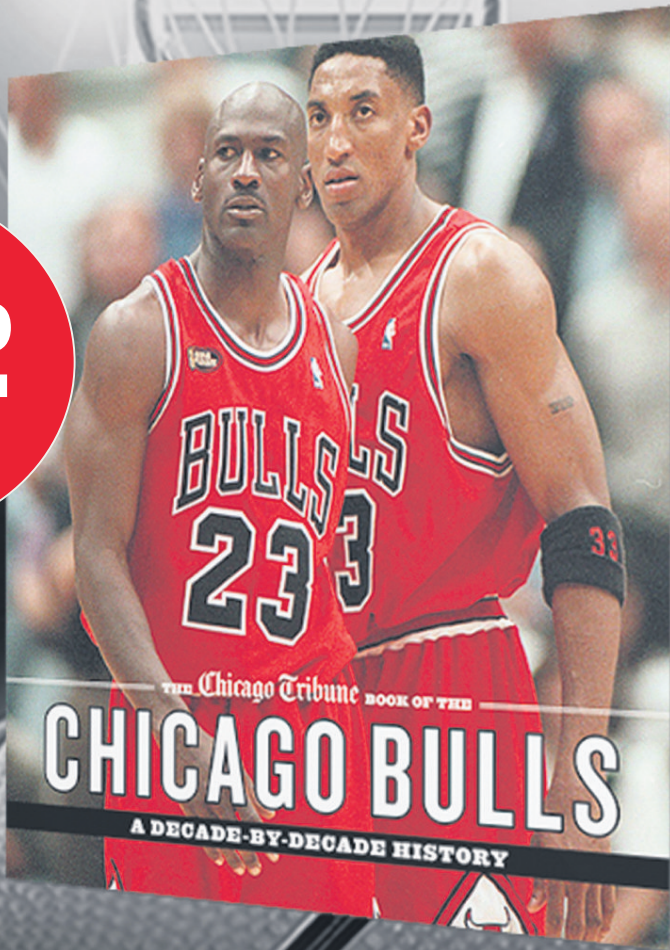
"I know I personally got a lot of pushback and a lot of folks are like, 'You should have continued it' ... but I really believe that this project was a good-faith effort to bring in not just revenue for the city with the commercial space but also to provide more housing in the downtown area," Phan said.

When asked about the petitioners' claims about the lack of affordable food in the community, Phan said she has written a paper before on food deserts. She also referenced another Northgate Market that is slated to be built "not too far away."

"But less than a 10-minute walk from Northgate is a Food 4 Less and there are other smaller markets nearby," she said.

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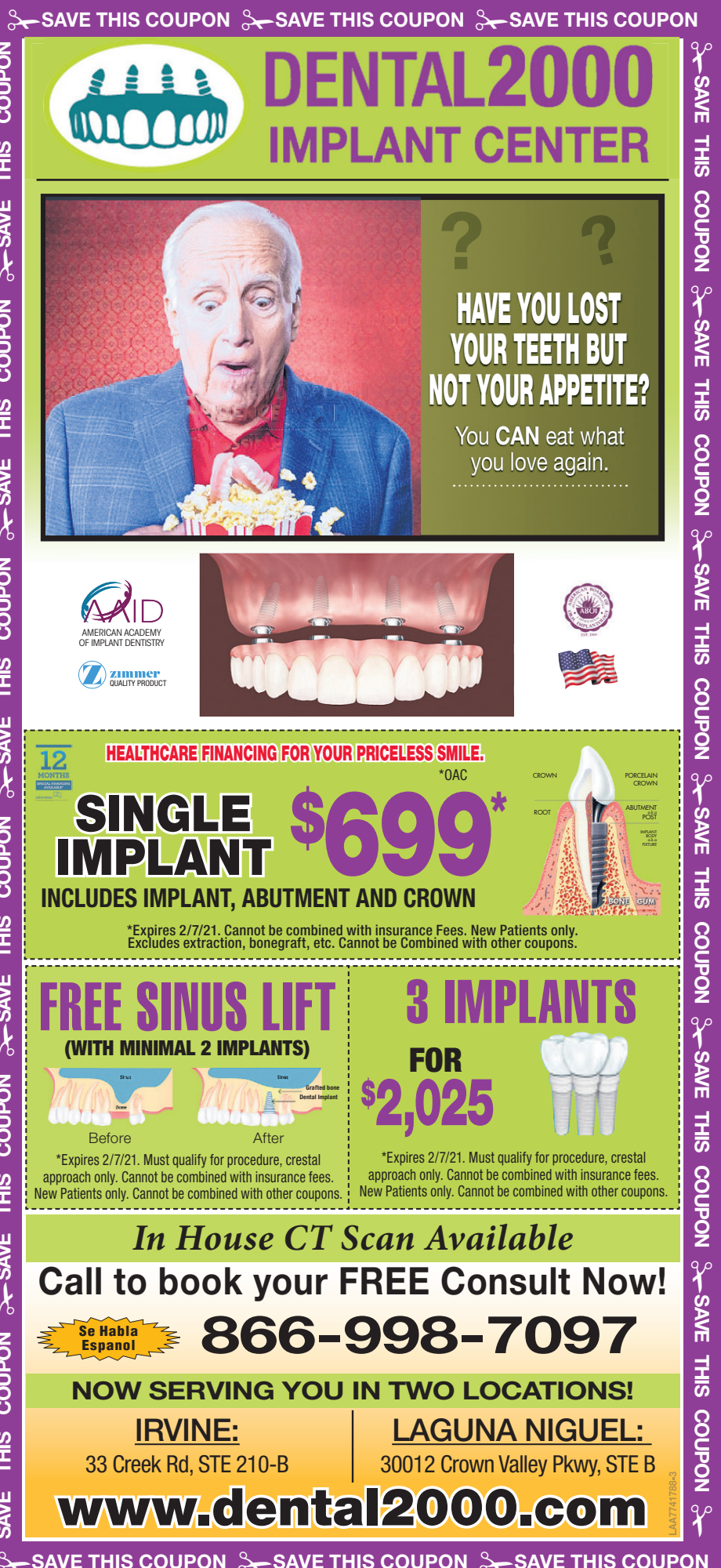


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