PLHS seniors willing to wait for in-person commencement ceremony

By DAVE SCHWAB | THE BEACON

Nearly everything is going remote during this pandemic, except apparently most 2020 senior graduations throughout the San Diego Unified School District, including Point Loma High School.

And, at least in the Pointers case, the student body has already made its first choice for a graduation ceremony.

"Based on my consultations with the student body, we do not want a virtual graduation, so a lot of work has gone into alternative options to avoid that scenario," said Ila Jade Komasa, ASB president at PLHS, and president of SDUSD Council of ASB Presidents. "Although it is still a possibility in case public health guidelines will not allow us those alternative options, we are not currently planning a virtual graduation for the June 9 graduation celebration."

Komasa said PLHS' preference is to postpone its graduation ceremony.

"We are planning class of 2020 celebrations that are alternatives to a graduation ceremony for our original date of June 9," she said. "This allows us more time to plan a postponed graduation for over summer. The goal for this postponed graduation is to have an in-person ceremony while following all health guidelines outlined for the time of the ceremony. Obviously our top priority is the health and safety of all staff and students, but it is important to the student body to have as close to a traditional graduation as possible."

Added Komasa: "These decisions are the result of weeks of planning with the student body and all of the initial recommendations came from the direct opinions of over 2,600 seniors within our school district. The survey results expressed an overwhelming majority that students would rather postpone and hope for in-person ceremonies than have virtual graduations."

The SDUSD Board May 12 accepted recommendations from student ASB leaders who have worked with seniors on what graduation will look like this year, noted SDUSD spokesperson Maureen Magee. "Basically, the board said schools could come up with their own graduation plans, as long as they are accessible to everyone, are in sync with public health guidelines, and are approved by their principals and school leaders," said Magee.
State officials approve San Diego County’s plan to allow dine-in customers

The state has approved San Diego County to move further into Stage 2, allowing dine-in customers at restaurants and in-person shopping for retail businesses, with modifications to protect the spread of coronavirus. Businesses need to follow the guidelines, complete and post safe reopening plans.

EMPLOYEE HEALTH MEASURES
- All employees have been told not to come to work if ill.
- Employees receive a thermal or temperature scan prior to the beginning of each shift.
- A health survey is conducted with each employee prior to the beginning of each shift to verify staff have not experienced symptoms consistent with Covid-19 in the past seven days or exposed to someone who has experienced symptoms in the past 14 days.
- Employees with Covid-19 like symptoms are not allowed to work and encouraged to contact their medical provider or 2-1-1.
- Face coverings are worn by all staff that interact with the public and when unable to social distance with other employees.
- Clean and disinfect employees’ restrooms and breakrooms frequently.
- All employees have read and understood the Covid-19 fact sheet (available in multiple languages).
- Employees shall not share food, beverages, and food-ware.
- Employees do not shake hands, high-five or do similar greetings that break physical distance.
- Employees must frequently wash their hands with soap and warm water.
- A copy of this protocol must be shared with each employee to ensure they understand and will implement the procedures.

OTHER MEASURES BEING TAKEN
- All tables are six feet apart or if un-moveable, a barrier or partition has been installed to separate the tables.
- Tape or markings of at least six feet separation are used in any area where members of the public may form a line.
- Staggered seating times are used to space traffic flow.
- Limit the number of patrons at a single table to a household unit or patrons who have asked to be seated together.
- People in the same party seated at the same table do not have to be six feet apart.
- All members of the party must be present before seating and the host must bring the entire party to the table at one time.
- Tables are spaced six feet away from all food preparation areas, including beverage and server stations.
- Other measures used to ensure social distancing is adhered to while customers are waiting to be seated, during ordering or during pick-up of food.

FACE COVERINGS REQUIRED
Health officials want people to know that face coverings and physical distancing will be required when entering these businesses. In restaurants, the coverings will be needed until the customers are seated.
“As San Diegans prepare to eat out and go shopping, it’s important for people to remember they must wear a face covering when in public and close to other people,” said Wilma Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., County public health officer. “The County is enormously grateful for the public’s effort to date.”

When you wear a face covering, you protect those around you. When others use a face covering, they protect you. When you couple face coverings with physical distancing and good hand hygiene, the risk of getting Covid-19 diminishes.

Face coverings “disrupt the trajectory of a cough, sneeze or breath” preventing droplets carrying the virus from traveling between people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Two recent studies have estimated that between 12,000 and 15,000 local lives were saved because of the preventive measures.
“Had we not practiced physical distancing and respected the stay-at-home order, many thousands more individuals, including our elderly, would have died from Covid-19,” Wooten said. “The County has made great progress in the fight against Covid-19 and it is now safe for certain businesses to resume operations if they can implement safety measures outlined by the County and state.”

STAGE 3 PILOT PROPOSAL
The board also approved proposing a pilot program that would allow a select number of businesses from Stage 3 to gradually reopen ahead of the schedule outlined by the state.

Read more online at sdnews.com
OB man helps rescue of unique Surf Scoter

On Monday, May 18, Ocean Beach resident Manmadh Rebba and a friend got their coffee from Villa’s on North Avenue and headed to the beach for an early morning walk. Rebba, who is employed at San Diego International Airport in the Airport Design and Construction Department, was scheduled to work from home that day, which turned out to be fortunate for a distressed Surf Scoter.

“I noticed a bird struggling and being swept by the waves. It was moving and struggling to get back on its feet and the waves kept pushing the bird in and out,” Rebba said. “I thought it was a regular beach bird from a distance, but when I got closer it was something I had never seen before in my life.”

The male Surf Scoter, a sea duck that is nicknamed “old skunk head,” is not commonly seen in Ocean Beach because it’s pelagic, but is a rare bird. Compared to most Northern American sea ducks, the Surf Scoter breeds exclusively in North America, mostly in Northern Canada and Alaska. Then, they take different migration routes to spend the winter in more temperate environments.

Rebba took photos of the bird and then asked members of the Facebook group Ocean Beach how he could help it. After about a few minutes, he saw another bird struggling on the beach. The second bird, which was not a Surf Scoter, was brought to San Diego Humane Society for medical treatment. Rebba said he is glad he was able to rescue the Surf Scoter.

“It was a great experience and I enjoyed being able to assist,” Rebba said. “I’m told that the bird is mated, but in guarded condition, so SeaWorld spokesperson said, ‘SeaWorld spokesperson Terry Kelly.’

“It was a great experience and I was glad I got the opportunity to help in the rescue of this unique bird. It was a great way to start the week,” Rebba said.
The idea behind creating a free grocery-delivery service by students to the needy occurred to Point Loma High School student Madelyn “Maddie” Wozniak pre-pandemic, when her high-risk grandparents moved in with her family.

“We needed to get them groceries and they just couldn’t leave the house,” said the 16-year-old junior. “It was very hard to find a service that could help us get those groceries. It took us hours (of looking) to find one.”

Noting she didn’t want others to face the same dilemma, the notion struck Wozniak that there was a community void that needed to be filled.

“I texted a few friends and asked if they would be interested in delivering groceries to seniors or other needy people like women with babies,” she said.

Her friends’ response was so positive, it prompted Wozniak to start Store-2-Door with a website promoting a free student delivery service.

“It just took off from there,” said Wozniak noting those availing themselves of Store-2-Door’s services pay for their own groceries while adding there’s no charge whatsoever for delivery.

“In March we started doing runs to places like Target and grocery stores, even take-out,” Wozniak said. “We posted on Next Door on March 29, and we got two clients that day. Since then, we’ve done about 50 runs, about 25 of them regulars, about three a day, that we keep track of on a spreadsheet.”

Of Wozniak’s efforts, PLHS principal Hans Becker said, “She is the student who masterminded this. I’m so proud of her.”

Store-2-Door is also active now on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The student-run delivery program was recently featured in a CBS TV 8 news feature.

Wozniak said that, right now, the idea is to continue the delivery program “until we’re through with the pandemic.”

She added the program, which now started in Point Loma, has now gone regional.

“We have different student groups in different areas around San Diego like in North County and Chula Vista,” Wozniak said. “We have at least 60 students now participating from different high schools. If someone needs help, I just text one of our student volunteers who are available to do a run in that area.”

Wozniak added all deliveries are made with Covid-19 safety precautions in place.

“We make sure all of the students are wearing masks and gloves and wiping everything down,” she said. “It’s very safe.”

Open registration begins for summer session

The San Diego Community College District for the first time is offering its entire schedule of summer classes online, with open registration beginning May 18 and sessions – which range from four to eight weeks – starting as early as June 3.

With the COVID-19 pandemic creating an abundance of uncertainty for suddenly out-of-work San Diegans, there may not be a better time enroll at the SDCCD which is the region’s largest provider of workforce training and education.

“In these turbulent economic times, your decision to attend a community college is the best choice you could make to ensure you are competitive in the job market,” said Chancellor Constance M. Carroll. “Because of the excellence of our faculty, small class sizes, and the personal attention that is provided to students, our students achieve their goals of employment or high academic performance when they transfer.”
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Since retiring from his role as CEO of Pioneer programs in 2018, Jim has focused his efforts as the board president of the Pioneer Foundation of San Diego, a volunteer driven 501c3 nonprofit that strives to create much needed opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities.

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Residents, businesses can adopt Point Loma High School seniors

With their students unable to experience many senior activities, Point Loma High School parents have created a way for community members to adopt a member of the school’s Class of 2020. Michele Huber, Senior Class chairperson, notes the 95th graduating class has adapted to the sudden change in the way they will celebrate moving on and reinventing myself, and that is what drives me,” Becker wrote. “I’ve been at PLHS for 12 years, five years as vice principal and seven as principal. It’s actually one of the longest tenures of any administrator at Point Loma and I am honored to be a part of this school’s fabric.

“When I cannot tell you the gratitude I feel for the positive impact you have had on me as a person,” Becker told the community. “I’ve always believed what makes a school amazing is its people, and that’s you. It’s the amazing students, artists and athletes, it’s the top-notch staff and the always supportive families—generation after generation.”

Becker succeeded previous Principal Bobbie Samelson in 2014. His new position begins in July and the San Diego Unified School District will post the open position initiating a process that hopefully will result in the naming of a new leader prior to the opening of the new school year on Aug. 31.

Becker anticipates his successor will be chosen prior to the end of the school year.

“Point Loma (High School) is a highly desired school for the finest aspiring administrators,” he noted. “I can assure you that the next principal of this school will be an excellent educational leader; nothing less will be tolerated by our community and the San Diego Unified School District.”

Becker assured current students and parents he will continue to advocate for them.

With insights on how graduation has changed for the class of 2020. The insights include how grads are adjusting to virtual graduations, and what steps they are taking to maintain a sense of community.

HIGHLIGHTS:
• Casual Graduation Attire: Over 80% of graduates are attending their graduation this year; over 60% are wearing PJs or athleisure clothing.
• Grad Travel Plans: 80% of graduates rescheduled travel plans, with 75% shifting to 2021.
• Putting Plans on Hold: 70% of seniors have postponed or canceled moving.
• What Grad Will Be Doing Instead: Graduates plan to celebrate, how their summer plans have changed, and the gifts they’re most excited to receive.

Read more online at sdnews.com
UPDATE: Rowdy crowds after dark continue at Sunset Cliffs

By DAVE SCHWAB | THE BEACON

Reacting to Sunset Cliffs’ residents’ complaints about increasingly large and unruly crowds leaving garbage, noise, and traffic behind, District 2 Councilmember Dr. Jennifer Campbell earlier this month called for reassessing the situation, with the possibility of temporarily closing the park.

"Since our parks and beaches have been opened San Diegans have, for the most part, done an excellent job following public health orders while returning to public spaces for passive use," said Campbell in a press release. "Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Sunset Cliffs Natural Park or in the greater Sunset Cliffs community."

Both Campbell’s and Mayor Kevin Faulconer’s offices have been closely monitoring the situation at Sunset Cliffs, after receiving numerous reports of people parking and partying in nearby residential neighborhoods into the evenings.

“While I appreciate the resources we have invested there – it’s clear this issue is not getting any better,” said Campbell. “Protecting public health, discourage illegal gatherings, and keep people safe.”

With Memorial Day weekend coming up, SDPD has said they will increase their presence at Sunset Cliffs checking on alcohol use, social distancing, and beach gatherings. Laura McLean, captain of SDPD Western Division, responded to residents by pointing out police officers have been and will continue issuing citations and warnings at the park.

"Just because you don’t see enforcement being taken on a particular incident, doesn’t mean enforcement hasn’t been done.” McLean wrote in an email to Sunset Cliffs residents. “Maybe it wasn’t done on the incident you called about, but that doesn’t mean enforcement has not occurred at all.”

Most of the rowdy activity occurs after the sun sets and people return to their cars parked throughout the neighborhood.

Sunset Cliffs neighbor Glen Volk, who recently embarked on a full-court-press lobbying effort of City officials to spur action on curbing Sunset Cliffs’ crowds, said he is not in favor of shutting the park down 24/7.

“My belief is that we should be closing Sunset Cliffs after dark, but not during the daytime where we haven’t had any major issues,” Volk said. “It’s been busy with the usual crowds, and surfers use it. I would hate to see them get their legs cut out from underneath them. It wouldn’t be fair to them. This is a nighttime thing.”

Added Volk: "When the sun goes down, the park turns into a different animal. Police closed parking lots on the cliffside of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard, and the surrounding neighborhoods have been inundated since with people parking there and partying.

“Still in school? We will have a place for you to do your work and tutors to help.

"The City really needs to shut down the neighborhood from all the traffic. They need to shut down the park at night, and tell the people who’ve been parking on residential streets, ‘If you’re not a resident, you have to leave.’”

Since Sunset Cliffs Natural Park was reopened on April 27, after it was closed for about a month due to the Covid-19 pandemic, neighbors claim the situation has increasingly become unmanageable and have been flooding SDPD and City officials with calls and emails to take more action to curtail the traffic, litter, and late night shenanigans.

"The City really needs to shut down the neighborhood from all the traffic. They need to shut down the park at night, and tell the people who’ve been parking on residential streets, ‘If you’re not a resident, you have to leave.”’

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Added Campbell, “Sunset Cliffs Natural Park is more than just a neighborhood park like Kate Sessions or Western Hills. As a regional attraction, Sunset Cliffs is more aligned with Mission Bay or Balboa Park and therefore similar restrictions should apply.”

Dedicated in 1983, Sunset Cliffs Natural Park is a 68-acre source-based park stretching along the ocean bordering the western edge of Point Loma. The 18-acre linear section of the park lies to the west of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard between Aridai and Ladera streets.

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Short-term vacation rental operators hoping for rebound this summer

By DAVE SCHWAB | THE BEACON

Like a ship trapped in the dol drums at sea, the Covid-19 pan demic has temporarily taken the wind out of the sails of local short term vacation rental owners and operators. The ongoing pandemic has changed the "typical" tourist, said industry spokesperson Jonah Mechanic, owner of SeaBreeze Vacation Rentals in La Jolla and president of Share San Diego, AirBnB's San Diego arm. "The client now is not your typi cal tourist who comes here to go to the beach and see all of San Diego's attractions like the zoo, Balboa Park and SeaWorld, which are all closed," Mechanic said. "People are now staying here for more ex tended periods of time. For exam ple, many people living outside San Diego, who have family here, are coming and renting for a month or multiple weeks, so they can stay in the same house and quarantine together. It's something we haven't seen before."

With kids, and sometimes par ents both at home, they're finding their space has "shrunk," which Mechanic said is causing some to consider taking on a short-term rental "to have a larger house and maybe some outside space with a yard to help with the kids while quarantining together."

Will the new normal ever get back to normal for short-term rentals?

"Two theories on that," an swered Mechanic. "The first is that unemployment rates are through the roof right now and finances will be tough. Even when things go back to normal, people may remain hunkered down and not go on vacation. The other is that people, being cooped up during the lockdown, that they'll really want to get out of the house and go on vacation (post-pandemic)." It's Mechanic's take that not only is who is coming - but how they're getting here - could likely be per manently altered by the pandemic.

"What I’ve read is that interna tional travel will be the last to come back," he said. "What will be coming back more quickly is road travel, therefor e San Diego has always been a predomi nantly drive-to destination. Once we get back to some sense of nor mally, people are going to choose to drive to Southern California. But these are all theories. We’re in un preceded times." "I'm an STR long time re al estate agent in Mission Beach who deals with short-term vaca tion rentals through her compa ny. Magical Mission Beach, noted Covid-19 restrictions are ham stringing everyone in the industry right now.

"The governor's executive or diers say vacation rentals are not an essential business and I could be fined," said Wise, who presently manages 18 short-term rentals. "Of the two residents – Greg Knight who is not essential. I’ve been go ing along with that because I’m trying to follow the rules." Wise is now getting phone calls from vacationers saying "the beach is open, start renting again." To which she responds, "No, the ocean is open – the sand is not. It’s just a delicate situation.

Of the future of short-term rent als, Wise counseled, "We all need to take a collective breath until we find out what’s next, instead of becoming arm-chair scientists."

Post-pandemic, Wise sees short-term rentals coming back gradually. "I think we’re going to have people coming from driving distance," she said. But with current pand emic restrictions presently in place. Wise warned. "You can’t just let people come to this community and party and play volleyball on the beach as if there weren’t any restrictions."

Ben Smith, owner/operator of 710 Beach Rentals at 4990 Mission Blvd., concurs with Mechanic that the "new normal" in short-term rentals likely will be different. "After the lockdown order in mid-March, the cancellations started coming in," Smith said, adding "STAT which is a long time re al estate agent in Pacific Beach that we’ll rebound once the lockdown is lifted. But I think it’s naive to think we’re going to have the same demand we had prior to the pandemic."

Added Smith: "I think people will be uneasy about traveling in an airplane, and that demand for air travel will be down. Obviously, it’s also going to take time for people to be comfortable going and staying in new places and venues, especially ones that are larger for homes. It’s my take that it’s going to take time to get consumer con fidence back."

Smith said the jury is still out on whether short-term rental op erators will convert to longer-term rentals, as a consequence of the pandemic. "It’s a little too early to tell the impact of how many short-term rental properties will convert to long-term," he said. "There has been an uptick in mid-term rentals, but as full as possible to pull out of the sandwich term ... I do think that’s going to happen. I just don’t know to what extent. After the lockdown is lifted, what we’ll be seeing is anybody’s guess."

Samuel Cryan, a longtime short-term rental operator who represents properties countywide including Ocean Beach, said he is holding his right now during a depleted market. "I’m still getting bookings here and there," Cryan said. "During this time of quarantining, I’ve got ten five bookings now not on the beachfront. I don’t know if they’re low-cost rentals, or nurses dealing with Covid or random strangers."

Noting he’s been dealing with short-term rentals since the begin ning, Cryan added, "We’ve been very lucky. It’s covered the costs. We’re making do."

Regarding the future of short term rentals, Cryan advised short- term operators to stay the course. "The reality is a lot of people are getting scared and putting their houses on the monthly rental market," he said. "They’re freak ing out, not getting their money. But I guarantee you 100% that when it (market) comes back, the ones who stick it out are going to be the breadwinners and make a $5k load of money." Cryan concurs that tourism, once it revives, is likely to involve, at least early-on, driving to San Diego, not flying.

Beach residents concerned if short term rentals begin to ramp up

By DAVE SCHWAB | THE BEACON

With short-term rentals presently hobbled by a lack of tourism during the pandemic, the question of whether or not they’re over saturating the beachfront is resurfacing. With the Covid-19 lock down two months old, and Gavin Newsom’s decree that STRs cannot be rented to non-essential ten ants, STR operators admit rentals are way down. They’re also noting the market demographics have changed. With airport traffic cratering, San Diego, at least temporarily, has become a drive-to destination. Many operators, including Cryan, have seen a rise in demand, with two residents – Greg Knight and Gary Wonacott of Mission Beach, the coastal community ac knowledged as having the largest proportion of STRs - to get their take on what the present short-term rental situation may bode for the future.

"We are seeing a decline in the amount of STRs that are being rented and many of the responsible owners and property managers have stopped renting all together with the stay-at-home order in place," said Knight, a small-business owner and member of Mission Beach Town Council. "However, many property managers are seeing their busi nesses losing money, which means they are doing anything and everything to get a unit rented."

Added Knight: "This means lowering the prices and going after the people that are not taking this situation as serious. An STR on my court actually rented to a group of people that Smith that were just here for the (lockdown) protest in PB."

"Grocery stores limit the number of shoppers, but we do not put a limit on the number of visitors coming into our residential ar eas. This seems insane," said Gary Wonacott, a former MBTC mem ber who resigned recently, who has advocated for stricter STR regulations.

Meanwhile, Wonacott said the pandemic has brought some changes to MLB that some residents are not pleased with. "Mission Beach last summer was inundated by STRs, scooters, airp
The impact of the COVID-19 virus on most of our local businesses has been devastating. Many have been shut down entirely for months. Others have been able to remain open but operating only in a limited capacity.

One of the local businesses affected is Gianni Buonomo Vintners. Located on Newport Avenue in Ocean Beach, this award-winning wine making operation had seen steady growth over the last five years until the pandemic hit. We recently caught up with owner/winemaker Keith Rolle to ask him how his winery has been impacted by COVID19.

Q: In early March you were forced to stop all operations. How has the shutdown affected Gianni Buonomo Vintners?

When revenue drops dramatically and most operational costs remain steady, it is a recipe for many sleepless nights. Most businesses on the Peninsula are in the same boat. We still must pay rent, insurance, license fees, and taxes and more taxes. It is not sustainable.

For my winery, the mandate stresses that no tastings or glass pours are allowed, but customers may enter the winery to purchase bottles.

Unfortunately, a large part our business depends on beach foot traffic and private dinner events. With the beaches closed, there is little to no foot traffic. Maintaining strict social distancing protocol means we will have to modify how we host special events.

Q: How have you adapted to the “new normal?”

With stay-at-home orders in effect, the first thing we did was to start a free delivery service to our wine club members in San Diego County. Then we expanded free delivery to anyone living in 92106 and 92107 with no minimum purchase. This has helped, but it barely enough to keep the lights on. Now we are looking at partnering with local restaurants.

Q: What are the biggest obstacles you are facing?

There are a couple. First, is the social distancing issue. To assure everyone’s safety we will only be able to accommodate a fraction of the guests we did in the past. I am not sure how to overcome that obstacle. Another obstacle is helping Peninsula residents understand that there is an actual award-winning winery in their community where grapes are brought in and the wine is made on site. The concept of a winery without vineyards creates kind of a disconnect for some.

Q: Moving forward, where do you see your business and the other Peninsula businesses in the coming days, months, and years?

My business is like many others. Because tourism in San Diego is basically shut off and social distancing restrictions will limit the number of guests that can be serviced, businesses will not be able to generate the amount of revenue they did just months ago. Rents on the Peninsula and specifically on Newport Ave. are due for a major adjustment. If not, our community will populate with deep pocket franchises like you see in Pacific Beach. Many of the small stores and restaurants that survive will struggle to afford the current rent prices with reduced income. They will be forced to close permanently or leave the area.

I am confident our Peninsula community can pull together to help our independent businesses keep their heads above water, or wine in our case, until we are able to move about freely again.

GIANNI BUONOMO VINTNERS: 4836 Newport Ave. gbvintners.com

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Deemed essential, local cannabis shops negotiate the pandemic

By DAVE SCHWAB | THE BEACON

It’s hard to say if the legal cannabis industry has “escaped” the economic downturn from Covid-19, or risen above it.

In any event, local legal marijuana dispensaries, which were designated by the state as essential businesses, have remained open and have fared better than many other small-businesses during this two-month pandemic pause.

The Peninsula Beacon caught up with two local dispensaries for a Q&A to discuss how they’ve been holding up against the economic downturn.

PB: We’re hearing that there was a surge in business for marijuana products January and April after the virus hit. Was that true with your business?

URBN LEAF: “Initially yes,” said Kendall Barquist, store manager at URBN Leaf, which has three San Diego dispensaries and covers coastal counties and other areas of the City and County. “Especially once we put in the new policy for following lockdown protocols, social distancing and mandated facemasks.

COLUMBIA CARE: “That was exactly our experience,” said Carolyn Kates, promotions and community outreach specialist with Columbia Care San Diego Dispensary at 4645 De Soto St. in Pacific Beach. “In March, we had

quarantine. However, as soon as the official ‘stay at home’ order came, our sales dropped in half.’”

Added Kates: “As the weeks went by, many people lost their jobs and it seemed as if they had less expendable income. Finally, some of our customers opted to have their cannabis delivered by a delivery service, which we do not offer at this time. All those resulted in our sales dropping each week, except for the weekend prior to 4/20, and on 4/20, when we witnessed a return of our shoppers, almost back to normal.”

PB: Tell us a little bit about your clientele, are they from the surrounding area?

URBN LEAF: “Usually we primarily have tourists because we’re the closest location to the airport,” said Barquist. “But since the travel ban due to the pandemic, we started to get people from all over including North County and

PB: Were you surprised at all that marijuana dispensaries were determined to be essential businesses?

URBN LEAF: “I’m so proud to be in this industry,” said Barquist. “We went from illegal to essential within two years. It’s been an amazing thing to see.”

COLUMBIA CARE: “No, we weren’t surprised,” said Kates. “We are both a medicinal and recreational dispensary and have a significant number of seniors and disabled veterans that shop at our store for their medicine.”

PB: Have you totally, or mostly, switched over to take-out as opposed to people coming inside your place like dine-in restaurants?

Barquist. “But once we received more clarity on restrictions, we decided to stay open through this pandemic with state-mandated laws in place. Now gloves are mandated for every employee, and no patrons are allowed to touch any product.”

COLUMBIA CARE: “We closed our physical store on April 6 and reopened May 8,” said Kates. “Our clients were still able to order online via Weedmaps, buy/return your orders and pick-up. We also had curbside pickup available. In response to closing our physical store, we created a virtual shopping app—VirtualCA, on which our clients could meet with a budtender to get their questions answered or to get product suggestions.”

PB: Once the lockdown is lifted, do you expect business to bounce back?

URBN LEAF: “I think we will bounce back no problem,” said Barquist. “There will always be a need for cannabis now that it’s legal. The clientele will always be there. If anything, we’ll be back—and better than ever.”

COLUMBIA CARE: “I think that our business will return,” said Kates. “It may be slower than we want it to be. But, we will all find a new normal way of being, and for selling and buying cannabis.”

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Major event organizers in San Diego embrace the virtual experience

By DAVE SCHUH | THE BEACON

With major public events continuing to be canceled, the choice for those remaining now becomes postponement—or going virtual.

That wasn’t even an option, or much of one, pre-Covid-19. But now, with no clear end to the pandemic in sight, event promoters are finding they’ve run out of alternatives.

The question now becomes, is it worth it to stage a major event remotely? Will it be financially feasible with far more restrictions, and far fewer attendees?

And the answer, according to local event promoters is: It all depends.

The Peninsula Beacon caught up with four event promoters in town—Sherry Ahern, Laurel McFarlane, Meredith Hall-Chand, and Armando Cepeda—to get their take on the viability of virtual events, and whether we’ll continue to see them more moving forward.

Laurel McFarlane, CEO of McFarlane Promotions, promotes numerous major events annually including the St. Patrick’s Day and Halloween block parties downtown, as well as Old Town’s Cinco de Mayo.

“It worked out great, the virtual fiesta went really well for the businesses there,” said McFarlane of the recent virtual Cinco de Mayo. “Businesses were slammed for that day, and consumers from all over had fun watching it virtually for two hours.”

But it can be really hard to do free events virtually, pointed out McFarlane, adding its almost unfair to compare live with remote.

“Live is a whole different thing, a whole different experience,” she said adding, “And with a free event, unless you’ve got sponsors to support it, it may actually end up costing you more (to stage).”

Sherry Ahern of La Jolla, founder/promoter of both the La Jolla Farmers Market and the La Jolla Art & Wine Festival, recently got the market reopened by adhering to strict state health guidelines. But the La Jolla Art & Wine Festival ended up being postponed until 2021. Ahern said it just didn’t pencil out.

“You would have had to have social distancing with people walking about ensuring they weren’t in clumps,” she said. “And we also would have had to have social distancing in the wine and beer garden... not to mention that a lot of our event sponsors might not be in their best shape then.”

Adding it all up Ahern conclud- ed, “We just wanted to be the best we could be for that event. We just didn’t think it would be feasible to do it.”

Meredith Hall-Chand with the Susan G. Komen San Diego Breast Cancer Foundation said it worked out for her group to go ahead and virtually stage a fundraising dinner on May 29 for the three-day event, presently planned for Sept. 26.

“With a virtual event you really have to think creatively to make sure you’re engaging your community.” Hall-Chand said. “And you have to have the capacity to figure out how to go virtually. You have to figure out a way to do it from a different platform.”

The answer for Komen in doing its fundraising dinner virtually was to have had a lot of online attractions.

“We have videos showing and talking about (cancer) patients here in San Diego,” Hall-Chand said. “We’re having a silent auction, VIP packages, a doctor from Scripps speaking, an electronic violinist and a large contingent of the restaurant community that supports us. We already have almost 300 people signed up and they’re excited and interested, to see what it’s going to look like.”

Armando Cepeda represents both Encore, a music and entertainment production company, as well as the Virtual Event Collective, three businesses creating seamless customized virtual experiences for clients.

With the advent of virtualism, events have “taken on a new life,” said Cepeda.

“We’re doing lots of small things now like putting up webcasts so people can see what’s going on at events and the new formats have been really cutting-edge,” he said. “We’ve been able to do virtual events for graduations, fundraisers, galas, fashion, etc.”

Is the trend toward hosting more virtual events a temporary trend in response to the pandemic, or a permanent change in event promotion?

“The East Coast had already been doing more virtual stuff with the possibility of hurricanes and such,” said McFarlane. “More and more people are getting exposed to events online. Though there’s something really amazing about live events. You just can’t get that on virtual. Probably, we’re going to have a hybrid of live and virtual, when this is done.”

“I believe it (virtual) is deeply embedded now in the public con- sciousness,” said Cepeda. “It just makes sense to offer virtual services from here on out. Even if we do go back to ‘normal,’ virtual is still a unique way to engage people and get them to interact.”

Added Cepeda: “Once you get past the learning curve, virtual becomes more comfortable. But it will never replicate live events or live interaction. It’s not meant to. It’s meant to be a tool, if you will, to provide a different experience.”

San Diego’s Small Business Relief Fund to top $20 million

Continuing to take steps to provide relief to San Diegans affected by COVID-19, Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer announced that resources made available to San Diego small businesses will now top $20 million following the mayor’s decision to direct $1.3 million in federal CARES Act funding to help small businesses get back on their feet.

“Small businesses are the lifeblood of San Diego’s economy and they need our help now more than ever,” Faulconer said. “The Small Business Relief Fund has delivered financial assistance to hundreds of businesses so far, and the work has only just begun. This new funding will go to even more businesses as they plan for the reopening of our economy.”

This week, Faulconer released a revised fiscal year 2021 budget proposal that prioritizes federal CARES Act stimulus funds for small businesses, homeless services, and childcare for frontline workers. The proposal calls for using approximately $13 million for small business relief.

Read more online at sdnews.com

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Circulate San Diego encourages residents to ride bicycles this May

By DAVE SCHWAB / THE BEACON

May is Bicycle Safety Month and regional nonprofit Circulate San Diego, which promotes mobility choices, is encouraging people to walk, drive, or ride their bikes while practicing social-distancing. With shelter-in-place orders continuing, San Diegans still need to get to essential jobs, run errands, or go outside to exercise.

As a result, vehicular traffic has reduced significantly and alternative modes of travel have become increasingly popular. That is evidenced by several areas that have seen more than 1,000 pedestrian trips per day, and greater biking by families and people of all abilities.

That is why San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer recently unveiled his “Slow Streets” pilot program. The program makes it safer for San Diegans to walk and bike by creating more space for physical distancing and reducing congested foot traffic at parks, beaches, and outdoor trails.

The City has closed select streets, such as Diamond Street in Pacific Beach from Mission Boulevard to Olney Street, to thru-traffic to implement Safe Streets. This prioritizes pedestrian and cyclist use as cost-effective transportation for essential workers during a time of economic strain and decreased transit service. Safe Streets include temporary barriers and signage allowing residents to move about while avoiding close quarters and the pandemic.

Riding a bicycle is popular after our experience with the pandemic. Riding a bike may become more popular after our experience with the pandemic. Riding a bicycle allows people to get around while avoiding close quarters and recirculated air,” added Parent. “While there are still fewer cars on the road, many have observed that cars have been traveling faster than usual. That creates a new danger for cyclists, so we need to continue our efforts to educate all road users to operate safely.”

As part of Safe Streets, the City has reopened key bikeways as transportation corridors to connect essential workers to their jobs. Those include major commuter bikeways like the SR-56 Bikeway, the San Diego River Bikeway from Ocean Beach east to Mission Valley, Rose Creek Bikeway, Rose Canyon Bikeway, the SR-52 Bikeway and Murphy Canyon along I-15 and Lake Hodges Bridge.

Of Safe Streets, Andy Hanshaw, chair of the City’s Mobility board said: “Safe, outdoor spaces for residents to access their jobs and essential needs by biking and walking is critical during this time. These include the existing commuter bikeways that also make these connections. We look forward to helping identify additional streets that build on this network.”

A bike month resource page on-line is at circulatesd.org/may_is_bike_month. There is also a Bike Month Bingo game people can play that encourages more biking.

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Savannah Ames is a dual student-athlete on San Diego Mesa College’s softball team. Ames, a Point Loma High School alumna, attends both San Diego Mesa College and Point Loma Nazarene University. Ames majors in communications and plans on graduating from PLNU in fall of 2020. She carries a GPA over 3.0 at both colleges, PLNU 3.4 GPA and Mesa 3.8 GPA.

Martha Smith-La Jolla High

Martha Smith-La Jolla High Valdecarzana and 4.0 average. Martha earned a full scholarship to UCLA studying Marine Biology and Bio-Tech. Martha was active in water polo and track and field. We love you and are so proud! We love you, Mom & Dad

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There is now a new concern over short-term rentals besides lack of enforcement. “Many people are coming in and do not know what the rules and regulations are during this virus,” Knight said. “Many aren’t wearing masks. When you just show up in town and find that you are limited to no boardwalk, no restaurants, very limited supplies, and not knowing where to find sources of information, it makes it next to impossible for renters to figure out what to do and where they can go.”

Added Knight, “MB is a very tight community geographically with a lot of units right on top of each other and many doors that open with in six feet of one another. MB also has a lot of senior citizens living in close proximity to college-age and mid-20s people, many of whom don’t take this situation very seriously. We are concerned that if the virus were to come to MB, it has the potential to spread like a wildfire with severe consequences for some. If vacation rentals are allowed to come back in with no consequences, our population in Mission Beach could increase by 400-plus percent, which could be deadly.”

Wonomac’s longstanding view that MB is oversaturated with short-term rentals remains unchanged. And he believes the present “pandemic pause” will have much long-term effect. “The percent of STRs in PB has been around 7 percent of total dwellings compared to over 50 percent in MB,” he said. “I doubt there are many communities in California that compare with MB, which is why we are so concerned about a sudden increase in coronavirus here brought in from STRs.”

I do expect the percent of STRs in MB to drop substantially for now. I don’t see a dramatic decrease in STRs in the long term due to the virus.”

Reacting to the contention that short-term tenants aren’t aware of local pandemic restrictions, rental industry spokesperson Jonah Mechanic said: “From direct interaction with our guests, that is simply not true. Virtually every guest that calls or emails our office looking to come to San Diego always asks what the rules are so that they are prepared. They ask about the beach closures, restaurant availability (dine-in versus take-out), masks, and social distancing. These are responsible people who are in need of accommodations so they too can responsibly shelter-in-place.”

Read more online at sdnews.com
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