



Signal Hill City Manager Charlie Honeycutt is pictured in front of the city's new library adjacent to city hall. The library is scheduled to open this summer. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

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Signal Hill – which was incorporated 95 years ago on April 26 – has come a long way since then. Its housing stock and retail offerings have grown, and the city's parks – especially Hilltop Park with its sweeping view of the South Bay, Los Angeles and the mountain ridges to the east – have drawn in visitors, businesses and new residents. "Our city's a regional draw for tourists and visitors," Hansen said.

To accommodate the needs of a growing population, the city is working on several projects to create more public spaces and deepen community engagement. The most prominent endeavor, the city's new library next to city hall, is finally nearing completion after a long and tumultuous history. It's expected to open its doors in May or June of this year, according to City Manager Charlie Honeycutt. "The library is the jewel of all our projects right now," Honeycutt said. "That's a project that was a long time coming. It's been a vision of the current council and past council."

A majority of funds for construction came from a redevelopment bond, which

was temporarily frozen by the state after voters approved the abolition of local redevelopment agencies in 2010. Hansen said efforts to regain the funds took years, and city staff had to search for additional funding sources when bids came in higher than initially projected. "I'm proud that the city kept moving forward, even when it didn't seem like it would ever happen," she said.

Hansen said she's been particularly passionate about the project because of her own lived experience. "I grew up in a library, I was a really shy child," Hansen said. "Some people say: 'Why do we need libraries?' I think that's a crazy notion, really," she added. "No matter your age, you need to have a place where you feel like you can go and go anywhere you want, through your imagination or through research, through reading. Nothing will ever take the place of that."

At the new facility, the city is planning to host educational and cultural programming for residents of all ages. Hansen said partnerships with local organizations like the Long Beach Islamic Center, a mosque located on 27th Street in Signal Hill, could help bring in representatives from the city's

diverse community. "I just want to take advantage of the diversity we have in the city and make sure that people feel like their culture is welcomed and other people can learn about it," she explained.

In an effort to showcase the diversity of businesses Signal Hill has to offer, the city council is inviting small businesses to present at city council meetings. "I revived the small business spotlight during council meetings," Hansen said. "I think we have a great relationship, and that's why businesses stay here or they want to expand here."

Another reason why business owners feel confident investing in Signal Hill is the city's police department, Signal Hill Police Chief Chris Nunley said. "Businesses oftentimes tell us that they come here specifically because of the Signal Hill Police Department," Nunley said. "We work hard every day, and the women and men who work here are exemplary police officers that have dedicated their lives to providing as safe [of] an environment as they possibly can to our residents, visitors and business owners here in town."

Crime has been down across the board, except for an increase in aggravated as-

saults that's consistent with a larger trend in the region. "A lot of that [improvement], specifically with shoplifting, has been through partnerships with our retail partners," Nunley said. Police regularly share suggestions with retailers in the area to help them combat shoplifting in their stores, he explained.

The city depends heavily on sales tax revenues created by the retail industry, a reliance Hansen sees as a challenge. "There are constant threats in Sacramento to change where sales tax is collected. You always have the possibility of another economic downturn looming," she said. Still, she added, "we don't really have the ability to diversify that much."

The Town Center East shopping center on Cherry Avenue has seen the departure of Batteries and Bulbs, a national specialty retail chain and according to Honeycutt, others might follow. "Retailers are contracting, is what we've heard. When their leases come up, they'd rather have less floor space than more floor space," Honeycutt explained. But, he added, the city is already seeing interest from other businesses to take over those properties, and staff are working to accommodate them. "We're hearing that there might be food uses, some types of unique restaurants to come in, but they might need our help relaxing the parking requirements," Honeycutt said.

The city manager said Signal Hill is in good financial shape. "Our revenues and expenses are expected to come in as we had estimated at the beginning of the fiscal year," Honeycutt said. With enough reserves to cover 60% of its operating costs for a year, he said the city would be able to withstand a recession some experts are predicting. "We're in a good position to handle that if our revenues start dropping some, we've set money aside to get through any rough patches."

In the meantime, the city continues to invest in infrastructure, from roads to stormwater management. The Los Cerritos Channel Stormwater Capture project at the Long Beach Airport, which Signal Hill is tackling in partnership with the City of Long Beach, is one of this year's major undertakings. "It's an underground reservoir, where water can be diverted out of Los Cerritos Channel, be captured, and it'll percolate in the ground and get naturally cleansed



Signal Hill Mayor Tina Hansen is pictured in front of the Signal Hill City Hall. In a March 5 election, voters approved Measure N, moving the city's municipal elections to November and thereby shortening the terms of all current councilmembers by four months. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)



Signal Hill Police Chief Chris Nunley told the Business Journal, "Our community really wants a genuine partnership with their police department, so we work really hard to make sure and try to accommodate that," Nunley said. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

by the earth and replenish the groundwater aquifer," Honeycutt explained.

It's projects like this that have fostered a positive working relationship between staff in Signal Hill and the City of Long Beach, Hansen said. "We are well respected in the region for our leadership role on stormwater especially," she noted. "We're a small city, but we're a big player."

Former City Councilmember Larry Forester, a driving force behind the city's

efforts on stormwater treatment, recently departed from the city council after 20 years of service. Due to health issues, Forester decided not to run again in the city's municipal election on March 5, 2019. Voters re-elected Hansen and entrusted former City Clerk Keir Jones with the remaining seat on the dais. Signal Hill's mayor is selected on a rotational basis, and current Councilmember Lori Woods is expected to be sworn in as mayor

tonight, March 26. The other members of the five-member city council are Edward Wilson and Robert Copeland.

Hansen said the city has no plans to switch to district elections or a directly-elected mayor. "Each person that's up there, they truly have been chosen by the citizens to represent them," she said. "They like us having the chance to represent the city as the mayor."

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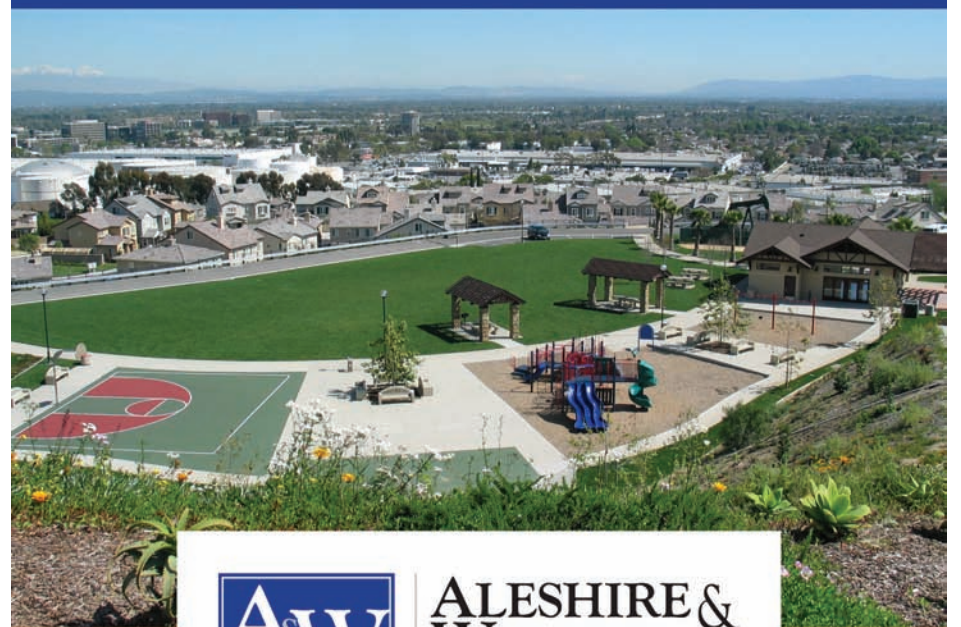
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The 3.2-acre Hilltop Park in Signal Hill pays homage to the city's roots in the oil industry and offers panoramic views of Long Beach, the South Bay and Los Angeles. Hilltop Park includes barbecue areas, picnic tables and restrooms. The site can be rented out for weddings and other special events. Visit the city's website for more information: www.cityofsignalhill.org. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

Signal Hill Welcomes New Business

■ By **PIERCE NAHIGYAN**
STAFF WRITER

Though Signal Hill remains a thriving oil town, its business portfolio has diversified since the oil boom of the 1920s to include the automotive and health care industries, major retail and service chains, and multi-generational mom and pop stores.

Some of the city's most high-profile businesses are Costco, Home Depot, Office Depot, Best Buy, Kaiser Permanente, Mother's Market, EDCO and Encore Welding, as well as automotive dealerships representing most major carmakers. The 2.25-square-mile Signal Hill also boasts three public schools and its own police department.

Signal Hill tax policy provides significant incentives for incoming business owners, according to Frank McIlquham, vice president of the Signal Hill Chamber of

95th Year – Key Dates In Signal Hill's History

In 1541, Juan Rodriquez Cabrillo sails into what is now San Pedro Bay and names it *Bahia a Las Fumos*, or Bay of Smokes. The smoke came from campfires of antive Indian tribes, who also sent smoke signals from atop a 365-foot hill. The area was first occupied by the Hogan Indian tribe, the the Gabrielinos, and later by Spaniards, who also used the Hill to send smoke signals. Gabrielinos were the first to discover a sticky goo they called *capapote* and used it to waterproof canoes, baskets and robes. The Spaniards called the same substance *brea*. Little did they know that *capapote*, otherwise known as crude oil, would become such a valuable commodity, central to the history of Signal Hill.

The Spanish regional occupation began in the late 1760s. Two early California ranchos – Los Alamitos (meaning the "little Cottonwoods") and Los Cerritos (meaning "the little hills") were then established. What is now Signal Hill overlapped those two ranchos, which remained in Spanish hands until the early 1840s, when American pioneers Abel Stearns and Jonathan Temple purchased them for \$6,000 and \$3,025 in 1842 and 1843, respectively.

In 1889, a U.S. Coast Survey team supervised by John Rockwell gave Signal Hill its official name based on the Native American name, which means, "the hill for signaling."

June 23, 1921 – After three months of drilling at what is now Temple Avenue and Hill Street, Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company's well called Alamitos No. 1 hits paydirt.

Early 1924 – With oil riggers transforming the landscape, the local political climate changes as well. A battle is brewing between residents, landowners and oil companies of Signal Hill, and Long Beach government. Long Beach announces a barrel tax to be levied on all crude oil and petroleum products produced within its



Alamitos No. 1
Temple Avenue and Hill Street

city limits, which at that time included Signal Hill.

April 26, 1924 – Signal Hill oil companies begin a countermovement which results in the incorporation of Signal Hill on this date. Residents elect Jessie Elwin Nelson as president of the Signal Hill Board of Trustees (the equivalent of today's city council). This made Signal Hill the first city in California to elect a female mayor.

1927 – The Signal Hill City Council votes to sell \$250,000 in bonds to build the city's water reservoir.

1934 – Signal Hill City Hall is built at Hill Street and Cherry Avenue.

1936 – Signal Hill Elementary opens at Walnut Avenue and 23rd Street.

1941 – Both the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce and Signal Hill Historical Society are founded.

World War II – Signal Hill fields produce up to 15% of the 1 billion barrels of oil California contributes to the Allied war effort.

1946 – After efforts to turn Signal Hill into a "little Las Vegas," the city council passes an anti-gambling ordinance

that "prohibited wagering with cards, dice or other 'devices' for money, checks, chips, credit, pennants, cigars, candy, merchandise or other."

1949 – John Burroughs Elementary opens at 1260 E. 33rd Street.

1954 – An F-86 Sabrejet crashes along 19th Street on January 12, destroying four homes and killing five people.

1958 – The Hancock Oil refinery fire is the most devastating in the city's history. It rages on for 52 hours and involves 600 firefighters.

1968 – The Signal Hill Lions Club erects the first phase building of the Signal Hill Community Center.

1972 – The "secondary recovery" of crude oil resources begins through a process of injecting water into wells to free previously untapped reserves.

1974 – The city council empowers a redevelopment agency and creates a redevelopment plan to encourage more rapid and uniform conversion from an oil-based to a commercial driven economy. The project area includes 840 acres, or about 60 percent of the city.

1978 – The original Signal Hill Fire Station's conversion to the Signal Hill Public Library is completed on December 15.

1981 – The second phase of the redevelopment plan targets retail and services and creates a business-friendly development policy.

1983 – Signal Hill is the fastest growing city, per capital, in county. Population increases by about 25% since 1970 to more than 7,300 people.

1984 – Redevelopment agency efforts to assemble property for development purposes keeps the city's largest employer and sales tax generator, Eastman Company, from leaving.

1984 – Shell Oil sells its Signal Hill holdings – a number of oil wells and prime, undeveloped, hilltop land – to Orange County real estate developers Bryan Tarnutzer and Jerrel C. Barto.

1986 – In August, Eastman's 450,000-square-foot headquarters is completed. Less than three months later, Price Club (now Costco) opens

at Town Center East development.

1987 – Office Club (now Office Depot) opens across the street from Price Club.

1989 – Bryan Tarnutzer sells his share of Signal Hill holdings to Irvine-based Southwest Diversified, which plans to build a 1,200-unit hilltop home community.

1989 – Southwest Diversified files a lawsuit against the city after city officials delay the project to reconsider the number of allowable units.

1990 – In December, Long Beach BMW becomes the first dealership to open in the new Signal Hill Auto Center.

1992 – Home Depot opens its 122,000-square-foot store in Town Center East on Cherry Avenue.

1992 – Kaufman & Broad creates the California Crown housing tract with 92 single-family homes along Temple Avenue.

1993 – In September, Office Depot merges with Eastman.

1995 – The Lee Group develops Signal Hill Village, 52 affordable homes, along Pacific Coast Highway.

1998 – The Signal Hill Preservation Society is formed by citizens concerned about the preservation of the city's rich, local, cultural heritage.

1999 – Bixby Ridge residential development and Town Center West are under construction. Town Center North opens

2000 – First phase of Bixby Ridge residential development is completed. Hilltop residential development (Promontory) breaks ground. Hilltop Park is completed

2001 – Town Center West opens. City approves the construction of the Las Brisas Phase 1 Affordable Housing development

2002 – Signal Hill gets its own Zip Code – 90755. City establishes the Crescent Heights Historic District. Rossmoor Pastries relocates to Signal Hill. Unity Monument is dedicated.

2003 – Mercedes Benz of Long Beach and Long Beach Mini join the Signal Hill Auto Center. City opens the Panorama Promenade Trail and Discovery Well Park. Los Angeles

County Fire Department returns to Signal Hill

2004 – First phase of Las Brisas Affordable Housing development is completed. City approves construction of the Las Brisas Phase 2 Affordable Housing development. City completes the widening of Spring Street to create economic development opportunities along the Spring Street Corridor (Gateway Shopping Center).

2005 – Home Depot breaks ground at Gateway Shopping Center. City opens Calbrisas Park. City completes construction of Temple Reservoir Water system improvements.

2006 – Best Buy opens Signal Hill store. City dedicates Tribute to the Roughnecks statue.

2007 – Las Brisas Phase 2 Affordable Housing development opens. Long Beach Islamic Center receives City approval.

2009 – Petco opens in Gateway Shopping Center. Great Recession strikes.

2011 – In N Out opens in Gateway Shopping Center. City's first Tattoo Studio is approved.

2012 – Boulevard Automotive Group celebrates its 50th Anniversary. Black Bear Diner opens in Town Center West. EDCO Transfer Station opens. Jessie Nelson Academy Middle School opens. Signal Hill resident, Scot Chamberlain, leads the 2012 LB Pony All-Stars to World Championship.

2013 – City opens its new Police Station. Applebee's opens in Gateway Shopping Center. Signal Hill Speed Run movie is released

2014 – City opens its Community Garden.

2015 – BMW opens new dealership. The long awaited widening of Cherry Avenue at Pacific Coast Highway is completed.

2018 – Zinnia workforce housing development opens providing affordable housing to working families. City opens its new Dog Park. Mother's Market opens. 10 Mile Brewery opens.

2019 – City opens its new public library in the summer. ■



Nader's Furniture Vice President Paul Nader and Store Operations Manager Yesenia Morado are pictured inside the company's Signal Hill store. Nader co-owns the family business with his brothers Chuck, George and Fred Nader. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

Signal Hill A 'Fertile Ground' For Both Small Business And National Franchises

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**

STAFF WRITER

Signal Hill is home to a variety of retailers, and a majority of the city's budget is dependent on sales tax revenue. From big box stores like Costco and Home Depot (of which there are two in the city), to small family-owned stores and regional chains, Signal Hill retailers sell everything from ammunition to zebrafish.

In fact, exotic pets are one of the best-selling categories at the Signal Hill Petco location on California Avenue, according to Guest Services Leader Eddie Lopez. Conures – colorful, medium-sized parrots – sell “like hot cakes,” especially during the past holiday season, he noted. “That’s a \$500 bird, and while other locations can hold one for months at a time, we go through them pretty quickly.” Reptiles and snakes, which are often equally pricey, have also been popular at the Signal Hill store, Lopez noted.

Increasing product prices due to changes in the cost of manufacturing and shipping sometimes result in disgruntled customers, but Lopez said there's little the company

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Commerce and executive director of non-profit The Rock Club Music Is The Remedy. The city has a lower sales tax rate than neighboring Long Beach – 9.5% versus Long Beach's 10.25% – and no utility user tax. “The City of Signal Hill works hard for every new business applicant,” McIlquham said. “Then, once you become a member of the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce, you are invited to meet likeminded business owners in our community to grow and be nurtured.”

The only major impediment to bringing in more businesses is the lack of available storefronts because the current tenants are thriving, McIlquham said. Two planned

projects could open up space for new leases. Oil and real estate company Signal Hill Petroleum has proposed turning its undeveloped lot near Mother's Market into a mixed-use building for retail, restaurants and residential units. The other project is an 8.7-acre light industrial park located at 2020 Walnut Ave. An environmental review for the intended park was approved by the Signal Hill City Council last month, McIlquham said.

In its 75-year history, the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce has worked hand in hand with the city to encourage new commercial development, McIlquham remarked. Its goal for 2019 is to maintain its

new members and bring on still more. “The City of Signal Hill welcomes new businesses to come and open up shop,” he said.

The Business Journal spoke with owners and managers from the city's various industry sectors to get a feel for the state of business in Signal Hill. A competitive real estate market, convenient location and a strong sense community were all cited as beneficial to the commercial success of the area. “It's a business-friendly city with low business license fees,” John Eddy, executive vice president at Coldwell Banker Commercial BLAIR WESTMAC, said. “There's been a lot going on in Signal Hill with retail and residential.”

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can do. “It comes directly from the manufacturers. They bump the price, the price goes up,” he said. Instead, Petco is counting on customer service to attract shoppers to their brick-and-mortar stores. “The company is really pushing all store partners to stay engaged with the guests,” Lopez said.

The new year has brought increased interest in the store’s on-site services, he noted. “Right after the new year, people tend to get puppies and our salon business has increased a great deal,” Lopez said.

Services are a main focus area for Jonathan Guthman, assistant store manager at Home Depot’s Spring Street location, and he is hoping to create greater customer awareness of the professional support available at the store. Home Depot continues to benefit from the do-it-yourself trend, he noted, and from a steady pace of home renovations in the area. “[There are] a lot of renovations going on in houses when it comes to flooring. Vinyl’s a big trend right now that’s taking off in the area.”

This spring, Guthman is expecting seasonal goods like patio furniture and live plants to pick up again. “We’re a big seasonality store, so it comes down to what’s in season right now,” he said. “Everyone’s going to start sprucing up their house.”

While many retailers have seen the trend towards a more digitally-focused lifestyle as a threat to their physical stores, Guthman said Home Depot has not seen a negative

impact yet. Devices with online connectivity, such as air conditioning units and lamps that can be controlled from a mobile phone, are selling well, and the hardware store chain has adapted to consumers’ changed shopping habits to allow for more e-commerce. The company is offering in-store pick-up and lockboxes for deliveries from its online store.

“Instead of having to come to the customer service desk, if the order is small enough, it can go into a locker. We send them a code via e-mail, they can walk straight up to the locker and pick it up,” he explained. “As much as our brick-and-mortar stores are our backbone, e-commerce is interconnected and it’s still a booming business for us overall.”

For those planning to spruce up their home with a new couch or coffee table, Nader’s Furniture offers home goods in a variety of styles at three locations in the South Bay, including a storefront in Signal Hill. The company added its Signal Hill location in 2010, and Vice President Paul Nader said it has been his favorite store ever since. “We were excited about getting that store,” Nader said, noting that the location on Pacific Coast Highway was a big selling point. “We were astonished by how quickly it became profitable,” he added.

The company already had a customer base in the Signal Hill and Long Beach area, Nader noted. “We had a Long Beach and Signal Hill client base that used to

come to our Carson location quite a bit, so we moved to the area,” he said. “We’re building a loyal base, which is nice.” Now, the company is planning to bring more lights and fixtures to their Signal Hill location, which once housed a lamp store.

Nader said the family-owned company keeps prices low by maintaining positive relationships with manufacturers and relying on low-cost marketing techniques. “We’re not on TV and radio, so we don’t burn up a lot of cash there,” he explained. “We build up our clientele mostly by word-of-mouth, our local fliers and our Internet [presence].”

Aside from competitive prices, it’s the friendly atmosphere and local connection that has customers coming back, Nader noted. “It’s been that way since 1956, when my father started this company and my brothers and I grew up in the business,” he said. “We’re a local family serving local families.”

Local roots and independent ownership have been a main selling point for another local legacy, The Wine Country, owner Randy Kemner said. “Especially younger people are really responding to the fact that we’re a local, independent store,” Kemner said. “There’s a great movement towards craft spirits, craft beers, small wineries. Those are things that we’ve always specialized in.”

In addition to a steady stream of new locally-brewed beers, The Wine Country

has expanded its offerings by doubling the store’s gourmet section over the past three years. The store also offers storage for wine enthusiasts who don’t have the space to adequately store their bottles at home, and the wine lockers are currently at full capacity.

Kemner attributes the store’s continued success to his specialized product selection, a convenient location near the 405 Freeway and a reinvigorated support for small businesses in the area. “Everywhere in Long Beach and Signal Hill we’re seeing small businesses pop up, and it makes for a very interesting, fertile business environment,” Kemner said. “I feel more positive about our business and the business environment than I ever have. And it’s all because the community embraces us, the City of Signal Hill embraces us.”

According to James Sturdy, General Manager at the Applebee’s Neighborhood Bar + Grill on Spring Street, the national franchise’s Signal Hill location has also been doing well. Sturdy, who has been with the company for 10 years and joined the Signal Hill restaurant six months ago, said deals like the chain’s three for ten dinner special – which includes a salad, an appetizer and an entrée for \$11.99 – are a main draw for cost-conscious diners.

“We’re always looking to increase value for our customers,” Sturdy said. Sales have been up, he noted. “There’s no rest for the wicked over here, I can tell you that.”

Jimmy E’s Bar And Grill – A New Dining and Craft Beer Spot On Spring Street Opens Soon

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
STAFF WRITER

Today, the oil pump jacks bobbing up and down in the parking lots of some Signal Hill shopping centers seem out-of-place, like fossils of a bygone era. But local restaurateur Jimmy Eleopoulos still remembers a time when the city was known for its oil fields, not its sweeping views, car dealerships and big box retailers.

“Back then, there were no houses, [It was] pretty empty. I remember driving to work, back when I opened the first store in ’86. In October and November you would have to avoid the tumbleweeds going across Temple Street,” Eleopoulos recounted. Today, he owns Big E Pizza on Pacific Coast Highway in Signal Hill and is getting ready to open his newest venture, Jimmy E’s Bar and Grill on Cherry Avenue, slated to open its doors in May.

In addition to his business dealings in the city, Eleopoulos has been deeply involved with the communities of Signal Hill and Long Beach, whether it’s as a boardmember of the Signal Hill Police Association or as the president of the Greek church in Long Beach. “I’ve surrounded myself with good people and good things happened to me,” he said. “So, I believe the same thing is going to happen here.” This sense of commitment to the community has prevailed in his restaurants as well, Eleopoulos noted. “I’m a firm believer in respecting your employees,” he said. “In my original store, I have grandkids of the original employees working there in the summer.”

Eleopoulos got his first job in Signal Hill as a teenager, working in construction. Later, he worked as a roustabout in the oil fields, he said. “From there [on], I’ve always been



Jimmy Eleopoulos is pictured inside the future dining room of his newest venture, Jimmy E’s Bar and Grill on Cherry Avenue. Eleopoulos said he’s expecting foot traffic from Signal Hill’s many offices and car dealerships. “We’re centrally located in a prime area right here,” he said. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Brandon Richardson)

here.” When the property that formerly housed Delius Restaurant came on the market, Eleopoulos saw his chance to further expand his offerings in the city. “When I saw this opportunity come around for this restaurant – I’ve always had my eye on this place for years – I said: this is perfect,” he said. “I know exactly what this city needs.”

If you ask Eleopoulos, what the city needs is an old-school, “Chicago-style” restaurant and bar, with comfy leather booths, 16 TVs and 20 beers on tap. “This is going to be a very family-oriented restaurant,” he said. The menu hasn’t been finalized yet, but based on popular dishes at his other restaurants, Eleopoulos said it will feature a variety of soups based on his father’s recipes, as well as sal-

ads, steak, seafood, gourmet burgers, pizza and pasta.

The building is undergoing significant remodeling ahead of the anticipated soft opening in mid-May, including the demolition of the front and side walls to make room for a glass facade and side patio. A dining room next to the kitchen is being converted into a tap room to host kegs filled with 20 specialty beers, many of them local craft brews, connected directly to the full bar in the front of the restaurant.

Eleopoulos has already hired a chef as well as a general manager, and said he’s planning to start vetting applicants for general staff positions soon. While other restaurateurs in California have expressed concerns over rising employment costs due to an annual minimum wage increase, Eleopoulos said he’s not worried. “Ultimately, it will be passed on to the consumer,” he said. “If you give good food and good service, you’re always going to survive.”

Delivery services have also caused disruption in the restaurant industry. Eleopoulos said rather than feel threatened by it, he’s embraced the change.

At Jimmy’s Bar and Grill, he will rely entirely on drivers from outside providers, such as Doordash and Grubhub, for the first time. “It helps my business,” he noted.

Overall, Eleopoulos is optimistic that the business climate is ripe for his newest venture. “I’m very bullish on our economy, so I don’t see any problems or any major dips in the near future,” he said. The location of Jimmy’s Bar and Grill at 2951 Cherry Ave, right on the corner of Cherry and Spring, has added to his confidence. “We’re centrally located in a prime area right here,” Eleopoulos said. “Signal Hill is great, especially with all the car dealerships and the offices,” he added. “It’s the best little



Pete's Plumbing President Patty Hillis took over the leadership of the company after her husband, Paul "Pete" Hillis, passed away in 2014. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

Strong Economy, Local Development Boost Supply And Services Industry In Signal Hill

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
STAFF WRITER

Plumbing, printing, payroll processing: Signal Hill businesses offer a variety of services and supplies to other companies and individual customers. Plenty of com-

mercial real estate, built atop former oil wells, has provided a fertile ground for many small and medium-sized companies to grow and serve the diverse industries in the South Bay.

"Typically, our clients are middle- to large-sized businesses," Mercedes Sepko, owner and principal of Marketink XL, said. Her own business, Sepko noted, has been growing steadily, albeit a little bit slower than in previous years. "As we mature as a business, we're being more selective of the type of clients that we work with," she explained. "We do believe in [it] being a good match both ways."

Marketink XL focuses on large-scale graphics, such as banners, canopies, step-and-repeat backdrops for events and fence



Encore Welding Supply President Ben Anderson is pictured inside the company's warehouse on Temple Avenue. "Signal Hill is just such an easy place to do business," Anderson said in an interview with the Business Journal. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

graphics. A boom in construction around Signal Hill and Long Beach, both spurred by private investors and Long Beach's Measure A infrastructure improvements, has kept Marketink busy, as the company produces graphics that cover fencing and provide information on the project.

Because of the company's focus on large-scale graphics, Sepko said their Signal Hill location – right next to the 405 and 710 freeways and the businesses along those corridors – has been an asset. "Printing, nowadays, has become a commodity, with a lot of companies just buying online and they ship it to you: brochures, business cards, fliers, whatever you need. But when it comes to large graphics, that's a

different story," Sepko said. Shipping costs for large and bulky print products allow local suppliers to offer more competitive pricing than their online counterparts. "Companies tend to buy local and want to buy local," Sepko noted.

Sepko also pointed to the business-friendly climate of Signal Hill as a benefit to her company: "It's a perfect combination, because Signal Hill is a great city to do business with because there's no red tape – it's super easy."

A new member of the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce's board of directors, Sepko is hoping to help other businesses succeed in the city and introduce the next

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POLLUTION CONTROL CLEAN AIR SOLUTIONS MANUFACTURED IN **SIGNAL HILL, CA**



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generation of professionals to the local industries. “It’s our responsibility to help our next business generation learn the things that they cannot learn at school,” Sepko said. To foster the professional development of young people in the area, Marketink XL is working with student interns, and Sepko is encouraging other companies to do the same.

Patty Hillis, president of Pete’s Plumbing, agrees with Sepko on the need for more training opportunities for future employees and entrepreneurs in the community. “I really hope that some of these schools go back to the trades,” Hillis said, noting that her company often has to train new employees on the job due to a lack of practical training in schools. “Not all men – or women – want an office job. Some people still like to work with their hands,” she pointed out.

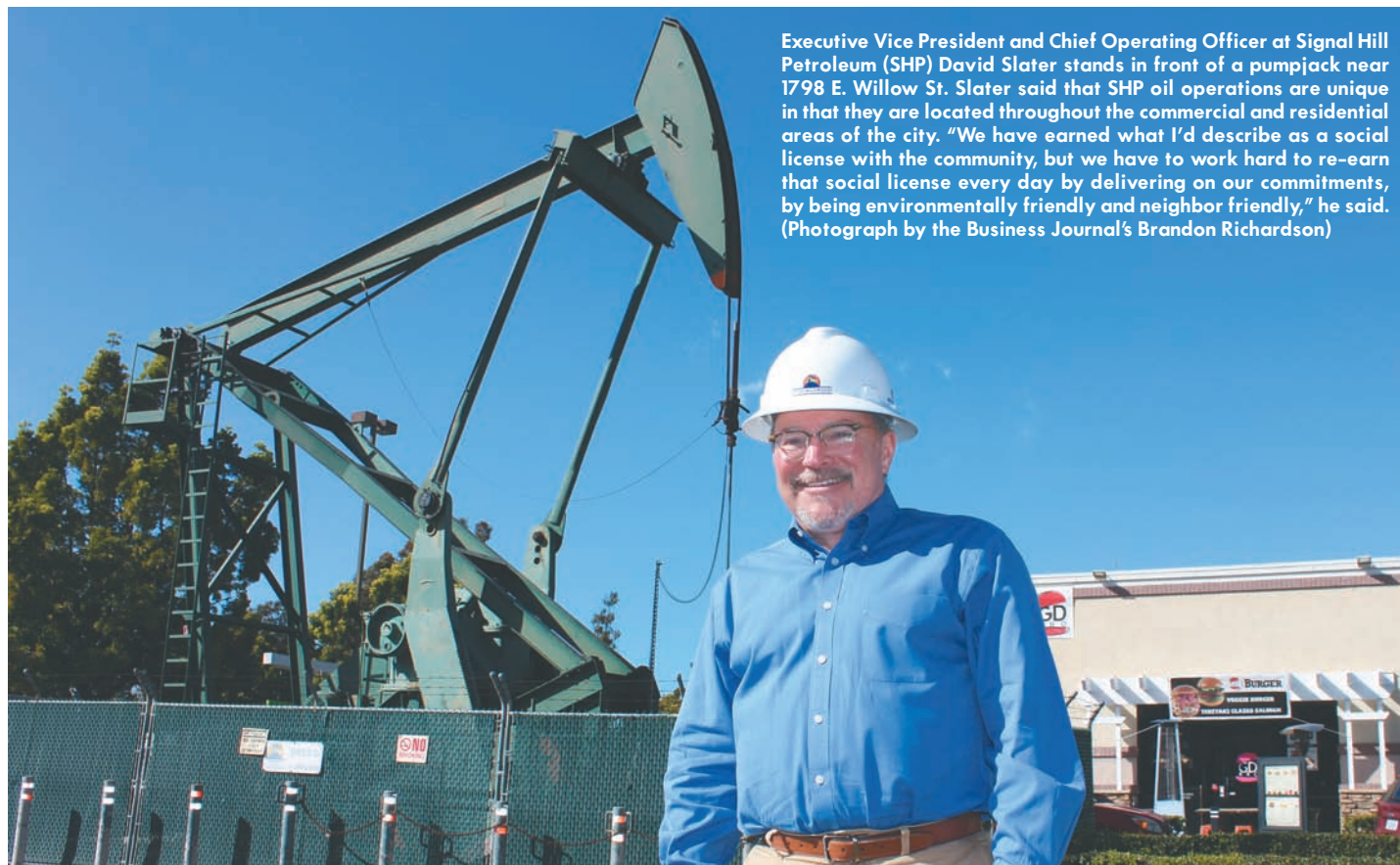
Founded by her husband, Paul “Pete” Hillis on Lakewood’s Pacific Avenue in 1972, Pete’s Plumbing moved first to Long Beach and later to Signal Hill in search of a more spacious, yet central location. “It’s been a really good fit,” Hillis said. Her company’s main source of revenue comes from multi-family homes in need of “repeat services,” such as regular repairs and appliance installations. “That’s the way my husband started the business. He wanted to do that little service call and get our name there, and build a relationship with the customers,” Hillis said. Then, “hopefully, they’ll remember that, and they’ll call us for those larger projects if they come down the pipe.”

Hillis said Pete’s Plumbing continues to focus on providing local service with a quick turnaround, and Signal Hill has been an ideal location because of its proximity to several freeways and easy access to other densely populated markets like Lakewood and Long Beach. “That way we can offer same-day service and 24-hour service, and that’s really the key component to the repeat business that we generate,” she explained.

The real estate boom in Long Beach and a strong economy have helped the company, Hillis noted. “We’ve seen a big rebound in business this year and last year,” she said. “It seems as if there’s more disposable income, so people are looking at bigger repairs or remodels to their homes.” Many who are remodeling are also looking for more energy and water-efficient plumbing systems, another area of business for the company. “We get called in a lot for those things,” Hillis said.

A trend towards more sustainable technologies has also been driving business for Sean Blake’s D&N Signs, a Signal Hill company specialized in the design, production, installation, and service of signs. “Everybody’s converting to LED,” Blake said. “Because they’re low-voltage, they use less electricity and they also require less maintenance.”

Blake said a strong economy has spurred an uptick in business for his company. “It really started picking up towards the end of the year, and it’s been moving at a pretty brisk pace,” he said. “The economic numbers have been good, and people with money are confidently looking to spend it.” Larger clients, such as chain stores with plenty of signs to produce and maintain, have been driving demand for his company’s services, he said. “We are seeing



Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Signal Hill Petroleum (SHP) David Slater stands in front of a pumpjack near 1798 E. Willow St. Slater said that SHP oil operations are unique in that they are located throughout the commercial and residential areas of the city. “We have earned what I’d describe as a social license with the community, but we have to work hard to re-earn that social license every day by delivering on our commitments, by being environmentally friendly and neighbor friendly,” he said. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Brandon Richardson)

some of our chain clients and stores with multiple locations that are aggressively looking to expand and upgrade.”

One local company planning to expand is Encore Welding Supply, a distributor of gases and equipment necessary for welding projects. “We’re looking to expand to other locations, different cities, with brick-and-mortar, more retail-friendly facilities,” Ben Anderson, the company’s president, told the Business Journal. According to Anderson, the company is considering new locations in Riverside County, Orange County and East Los Angeles. “We’re investing in the company still, so we’re spending a substantial amount of money to grow our offerings and our capability,” he said.

In the past year, the company experienced a 35% growth that “exceeded expectations,” without making any acquisitions, Anderson noted. “It was all hard work and economy-driven.” Some of the company’s biggest projects include the construction of the Los Angeles Rams stadium in Inglewood and the widening of the 405 Freeway in Orange County. “The commodity we sell is always being used,” Anderson said. “We’re not worried about the economy when it comes to expansion.”

Signal Hill Offers ‘Extensive Network Of Health Care’

■ By **ALENA MASCHKE**
STAFF WRITER

With MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center located right outside the borders of Signal Hill, just across Atlantic Avenue, the city boasts a well-established network of health care providers. From pediatric to palliative care, small businesses to national insurance companies, Signal Hill residents have access to a variety of health services.

The city’s largest individual health care office, Kaiser Permanente’s 20,000-square-foot Signal Hill medical office, opened its doors in 2016. “[We’re] very excited to be part of that community. It’s a community

that is very close in proximity to our Long Beach medical building,” Sandy Miller, vice president of operations at Kaiser Permanente’s South Bay Medical Center, told the Business Journal. “However, it’s an area that is very dense and there’s a lot of population there that we needed to continue to serve.”

The center’s offerings include adult primary care, pediatrics, behavioral health, OBGYN, dermatology, allergy, nurse clinic, pharmacy and lab services. “A myriad of different needs are met there,” Miller noted.

Kaiser Permanente decided to expand its services to Signal Hill as a result of a continued growth in membership in the area, Miller explained. “When we place and build buildings, we look at what the community needs,” she said. “What we are trying to do as an organization is [find out]: how do we make that care much more convenient, much more timely for people, so they can go on with their day and live their lives.”

At the medical center, Kaiser Permanente relies on technology to improve the patient experience and make visits more convenient. “Signal Hill is an example where we have offered a lot of services to really augment the timeliness of care,” Miller said. Patients are able to check in ahead of time, a service aimed to reduce wait times. Once at the center, patients are able to monitor their expected wait time on screens in the waiting room. Still, Miller said, patients are greeted by staff in the lobby and picked up in the waiting room for appointments, in an effort to provide a warm, personal environment. “We want them to feel welcomed.”

For patients whose illness prevents them from visiting a practice or medical center to receive services, Haven Health provides “skilled health care in the home of the patient,” CEO Philip Sorley said. The company, which is focused on palliative and hospice care, serves patients in both Los Angeles and Orange counties. “Our office here sits directly in the middle of those two, allowing us to go out to the homes of these people in both directions,” Sorley pointed out.

Sorley said an outdated understanding of palliative and hospice care, two terms

that were once synonymous, presents a challenge for his business. “Over the past 10 years, palliative care has become a separate entity, meaning it is those patients who are not dying, but they’re so chronically ill that they are unlikely to ever improve,” he explained. “The treatment for those types of patients is scattered, there’s no set [insurance] benefit for them to get that care, yet that is one of the largest groups that are in need.”

While this makes it difficult for certain patients to access the care they need, Sorley said that overall Signal Hill hosts a robust health care industry capable of assisting patients with a variety of needs. “Signal Hill, like Southern California, has a very extensive network of health care,” Sorley said. “Most everyone has some sort of health care coverage they can access and most everyone has access to physicians to help them.”

Oil Still Pumping Strong In Signal Hill

■ By **PIERCE NAHIGYAN**
STAFF WRITER

While Signal Hill is no longer dominated by the petroleum industry, oil extraction remains a significant economic driver in the city. “There are oil derricks scattered all around the city, and they are not there for static art displays. They are still producing oil, and lots of it,” vice president of the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce, Frank McIlquham, told the Business Journal.

For the city’s Fiscal Year 2017-2018, which ended on June 30, 2018, oil production taxes totaled about \$580,000, according to Signal Hill Administrative Services Officer and Finance Director Scott Williams. This was less than 3% of the city’s \$21.8 million in General Fund revenue in 2018, Williams said. Still, the importance of the industry, both historically and presently, is “beyond question,” he noted.

In past fiscal years, oil tax revenue has exceeded \$1 million, a figure that varies

City Of Signal Hill

depending on the price of crude oil and the volume extracted. "There are still hundreds of active and inactive wells within the city," Williams went on. This has implications for future land use, he said, and the wells' value may increase or decrease depending on unpredictable market shocks or global events.

David Slater, executive vice president and chief operating officer at Signal Hill Petroleum (SHP), said the oil field beneath the city has at least 50 years of production life remaining. "I have a very credible study by the USGS [United States Geological Survey] that estimates those reserves at 200 million barrels remaining in the Long Beach/Signal Hill oil field," he said.

Stabler oil prices in 2019 have spurred increased activity for SHP, which currently employs about 105 people. The company controls about 95% of the producing oil field in Signal Hill, Slater said, and oversees approximately 450 wells in the area. The company's operating paradigm is unique in that its wells are scattered throughout the community, he explained. "We are in industrial areas, we are in parking lots and commercial retail centers, we're in residential neighborhoods," he said. "We have worked hard to adapt to this environment and to be a good neighbor, which means we're environmentally friendly . . . we're not irritating with noise and truck traffic and odors."

In Signal Hill, oil is a family business. SHP has been run by the Barto family since 1984, and oil servicing companies H&H Casing Service Incorporated and Ausburn Oilwell Cementing are both multi-generational enterprises. H&H Casing, which

provides casing and tubing in new and old wells, is owned by Richard Harr, whose father founded the company in 1965. The biggest change in the industry since that time has been the focus on safety, Harr said. "Safety is the number one priority now, where it used to be, 'Get it done at any cost.' It was not a good thing back then."

Now in its 98th year, Ausburn Oilwell Cementing is a fifth-generation business. "The company has gone through many decades of growth and shrinking, struggling years and very productive years," owner and President Steve Hodge said. Ausburn cements wells and pumps pipelines throughout the Los Angeles Basin. "Anywhere there's a developed oil field in Southern California, we service," Hodge said.

The industry's largest challenge over the past 40 years has been California's tightening environmental regulations, Hodge said. He cited a California Air Resources Board policy requiring all diesel trucks in the state to be upgraded or replaced to comply with new emissions standards. This puts a burden on smaller operators like Ausburn, which currently employs less than 10 people, Hodge said. "We have to replace a couple of trucks this year," he went on.

Despite the hardship, Hodge was sanguine on the industry and his company's future. "In the oil fields, it's feast or famine," he said. "The main reason we're still here is we've just been perseverant as the rest of the service industry has left Signal Hill and Long Beach. But we do good work, we know what we're doing. . . . If we were doing something wrong they wouldn't be calling us still."

(Please Continue To Next Page)

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PROUDLY HEADQUARTERED IN SIGNAL HILL, CA

Signal Hill Is A Haven For Automotive Dealers & Service

■ By **PIERCE NAHIGYAN**
STAFF WRITER

On a clear day, visitors to Signal Hill can see the sun gleaming on the hoods of hundreds of cars along East Spring Street and Cherry Avenue. That wasn't always the case. Until the 1990s, the land currently occupied by the city's auto dealers was bereft of a single dealership. Today, sales from car dealerships make up 20% of the tax revenues that go into Signal Hill's general fund, City Manager Charlie Honeycutt told the Business Journal. "It's one of our major economic drivers that helps us pay for a lot of the vital services that we're able to provide to the community," he said.

Signal Hill is historically known for being an oil town, Honeycutt continued, but its automotive culture is strong and continues to grow. In his office is a sign promoting the Model T hill climb on Hill Street, an annual event that was held by Signal Hill and its chamber of commerce from 1957 into the '70s. Now, in addition to six dealerships, Signal Hill is also home to a number of automotive repair, restoration and maintenance services.

"There is a lot of competition, quite a few body shops. Just within our vicinity there's at least half a dozen," Sean Swanson, general manager at the Caliber Collision on 2370 Walnut Ave., said. "There's a lot of choices a customer can go to."



Chad Charron is the general manager at the Boulevard Buick/GMC dealership in Signal Hill. "A majority of our sales at the Cadillac store are mid-size SUVs," he said. The most popular models, the Cadillac XT4 and XT5, along with the Escalade, account for about 75% of the dealership's volume. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

Some auto shops in the area, such as Caliber Collision, were established after the arrival of the auto dealers. Others, such as Mazdatrix on 2730 Gundry Ave., have been in business for decades. "I was one of the oldest ones around and served everything for everybody," owner David Lemon said. Originally founded on the other side of the street as Import Auto Cobbler in 1977, the repair shop transitioned from servicing British cars to Mazda rotary vehicles in 1988. Just a few



Partners Brian Yu, left, and Sal Lombardi own LB Walker Automotive. Since establishing their auto shop in Signal Hill four years ago, Lombardi said business has been "rock and rolling." The location at the border of Signal Hill and Long Beach offers a great flow of customers, he said. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Brandon Richardson)

years later, several automotive dealerships made a transition of their own — from their native Long Beach to the smaller community of Signal Hill.

Lemon gave a concise explanation why the dealers made the switch: "Long Beach was going down the tubes."

Why The Auto Dealers Chose Signal Hill

After a decade of negotiating with city staff to build a new auto mall, the car deal-

And, of course, people don't get on the Blue Line to buy a car."

Brad Willingham is the owner and chief financial officer at Boulevard Buick/GMC at 2800 Cherry Ave. in Signal Hill. His father, Jim Willingham, became a partner at Campbell Buick in 1961, which eventually became Boulevard Buick after American Avenue was rechristened Long Beach Boulevard. The area was a booming automotive row in the 1950s, the younger Willingham said. "At one point the Buick store that became Boulevard Buick had the largest service department west of the Mississippi. American Avenue was up there in like the top five in the country," he said. "That's how you did it back in those days: there's one street in the city and that's where all the car dealers were."

By the 1980s, Long Beach Boulevard had entered a period of economic stagnation, according to Willingham. "It just killed my dad that the city continued to let that part of town go south," he said. When a popular bowling alley next door to Boulevard Buick shut down, it was replaced by a welfare office. "When I was a kid and coming to work, there would be a huge line of people outside of the welfare office," Willingham said. "The line would get so long that it would cross over our service line early in the morning for people trying to get into the service tunnel."

People in the line could be disruptive to the work environment, Willingham went on. "It had gotten pretty rough down there. When I say they were stealing our coffee, I don't mean they were coming in and drinking it. I mean they would come in and grab a trash can and fill it up with all the creamers, all the coffee packets, and try to sell it to the restaurant next door to us. It was crazy down there at that time. Then the [Los Angeles] riots came slightly after."

During the same period, the Cerritos Auto Square began courting dealers from

other cities by asking relatively low prices for land leases. It would eventually become a major financial success for the city. This past year, the square generated \$4 million in sales tax, according to the Cerritos Spring 2018 Economic Profile. The dealers in Long Beach wanted something similar and in a less blighted location near a freeway, Willingham said.

Long Beach staff proposed several areas for potential auto malls, but were unable to find an acre price or location that satisfied the dealerships. That's when Signal Hill offered its own deal, Gray said. But complications with contaminated soil on the land that Signal Hill intended for the dealerships caused backpedaling by the dealers, followed by another attempt at a deal from Long Beach's new city manager, Jim Hankla. Brad Willingham called Hankla "a dear friend" and said that he tried his best to reach an equitable solution with the car dealers. "He was working his butt off and that's why we kept thinking that Long Beach would come through with something, but it just never materialized," he said.

Willingham said that Boulevard Buick was one of the last dealers to make the move to Signal Hill because his father didn't want to relocate. "He didn't want to leave Long Beach. All of his roots were there; he had served on every board for every charitable group and everything," Willingham said.

Eventually, Signal Hill was able to remediate the contaminated land and offer more attractive land prices than its larger neighbor. "Our redevelopment agency was very active at the time," City Manager Honeycutt said. "We were able to clean up some blighted properties along Cherry Avenue and Spring Street that created the opportunity for the dealerships to relocate."

Mazda and BMW dealer Bob Autrey was the first to break ranks with the Long Beach auto row. The others followed soon after, Willingham said. During the 1992 riots, Willingham watched Autrey's shut-

City Of Signal Hill

tered Mazda dealership on Long Beach Boulevard burn down.

After relocating to Signal Hill, the difference in attitude was “night and day,” Willingham went on. Signal Hill police regularly checked in at Boulevard’s office to make sure they were okay, and the city’s smaller municipal administration meant less bureaucracy to wade through. “When you’re dealing with the City of Signal Hill, you’re dealing with a maximum of 20 people. And most of the time it’s the same four guys that you dealt with right from the beginning. That was everything from the planning to doing all the building and business licenses and the city manager. It was terrific,” Willingham said.

Willingham also gave credit to Signal Hill for being business focused. “Signal Hill had much more interest in anything retail, and that’s how you wake up one day and [say], ‘Oh my God, here’s a Costco and a Home Depot and these beautiful dealerships and all this retail activity up on the hill.’ And Long Beach can’t even put a mall together,” Willingham said.

An Auto-Friendly City

After relocating to Signal Hill, Boulevard Buick joined the GMC and Cadillac dealerships to form what is today an eight-acre campus at 2850 Cherry Ave. It also includes a collision center for repairs. “We have a lot of good employees that have been here for a long time. Now we can utilize them between the three groups: the collision center, the GMC store and the Cadillac store,” Boulevard Buick/GMC General Manager Chad Charron said.

The campus is conveniently located off the 405 Freeway, he went on, and sales for the Cadillac dealership have placed it 50th in over 900 Cadillac dealers in the nation. Charron said putting the customer first has been their winning strategy. “We’re here to serve the community, to serve our clients. They have options, many options, and why choose Boulevard? Because we care.”

John Davis, general manager at Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep, said the City of Signal Hill has been “a great partner to work with” since the dealership relocated from Long Beach Boulevard to 2100 E. Spring St. “They definitely do a good job for businesses here,” Davis said. He agreed that the smaller size of Signal Hill makes it easier to communicate with city officials.

Glenn E. Thomas Dodge Chrysler Jeep currently employs about 125 full-time and part-time employees, which Davis said is more than any recent time period. He estimated that his dealership sells around 2,000 vehicles, new and used, and continues to see strong sales for its Jeep Grand Cherokee and Dodge Wrangler models.

Charlie Honeycutt said that Signal Hill is negotiating an exclusive agreement with Mercedes-Benz to turn its Signal Hill operation into a flagship dealership for executives to tour when they’re visiting from out of town. The western region headquarters of Mercedes-Benz USA is located nearby at Douglas Park. “Mercedes needs to expand their dealership, so we’re working with them,” Honeycutt said. “We’ve got some former redevelopment agency properties on Cherry Avenue, about three acres that they’re very interested in converting.”

On the service side of the auto industry, owner of EF1 Motorsports Fabrizio Aldrette is celebrating 20 years in business at

2675 Dawson Ave. Aldrette’s shop services German and Italian cars, handling everything from engines to suspension. “We are basically centralized between [Los Angeles] and Orange County, so we have customers from both areas,” he said. Like most business owners who spoke to the Business Journal, Aldrette added that being located off the freeway is a big plus for his company. Cars are a family business for the Aldrettes. Fabrizio’s family owns Jim’s Auto Repair in Long Beach, which has been operating there since 1968.

Sal Lombardi, owner of LB Walker Automotive, also has oil in his blood. He and his father ran a 76 gas station at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue and Carson Street for 27 years. “My father was the god of automotive,” Lombardi said. “He really taught me the right way, and customer service is always number one.”

LB Walker has been at its current location on the border of Signal Hill and Long Beach for four years. Recently, Lombardi said he’s been doing a lot of restoration work on older models of cars. He was pleasantly surprised to discover that local body shop owners were directing their customers his way. “There’s a lot of folks around here who say, ‘Go see Sal.’ I don’t even know them, and they’re sending me all kinds of work,” he said.

As Honeycutt mentioned, automobile service and retail continue to be one of Signal Hill’s best performing business sectors. “The auto center was a great decision by previous council and management here at Signal Hill,” he said.

(Please Continue To Next Page)

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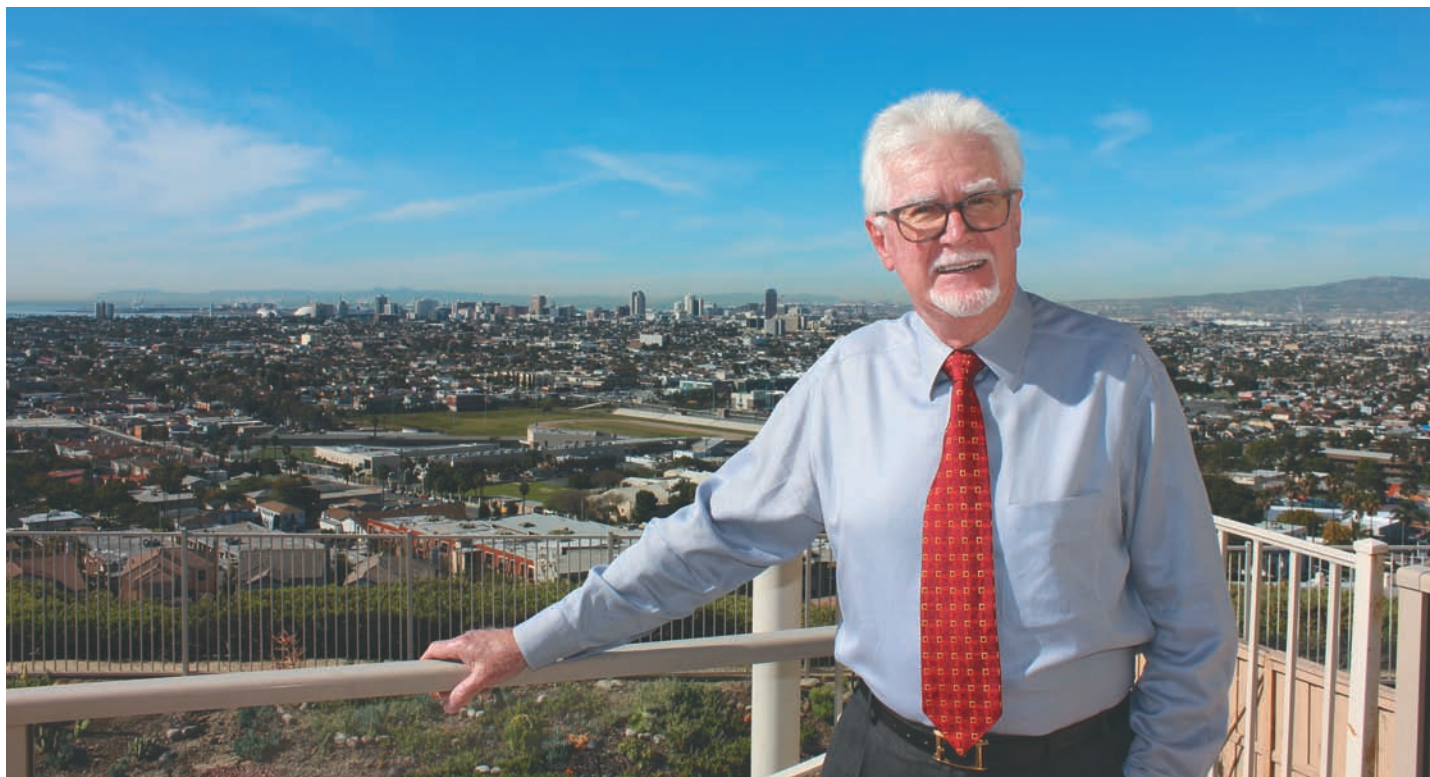
Signal Hill Real Estate: Demand Is Up, Vacancy Is Down

■ By **PIERCE NAHIGYAN**
STAFF WRITER

Demand is high for every real estate sector of Signal Hill, realtors that spoke to the Business Journal attested. “It just remains as strong a market as there is in this area, and certainly in the South Bay,” John Eddy, executive vice president at Coldwell Banker Commercial BLAIR WESTMAC, said. “With the small residential base and a large tax base, Signal Hill provides many services at a lower rate and more promptly than any other city around.”

Brandon Carrillo, a principal at Lee & Associates, said that his clients, especially those in West Long Beach, regularly ask if there are available industrial properties in Signal Hill. “Signal Hill industrial property is always in strong demand, even during downturns,” Carrillo said. For properties measuring 10,000 square feet and larger, he estimated that vacancy is below 1%. Many of the smaller, multi-tenant industrial properties that Lee & Associates manages are 100% occupied, he added.

The relatively small inventory in the 2.25-square-mile city, combined with a responsive police force and lower business taxes than Long Beach, have created a “tremendous” commercial market, Patrick O’Healy, president of O’Healy Commercial Real Estate Services, said. Overall, the vacancy rate at the Signal Hill Business Park, a mixed office and industrial property that O’Healy manages, is at about 4.5%. The second-floor offices have been converted into open-planned creative space, which has been a major selling point. “They’ve just gone down like dominoes,” O’Healy said. These of-



Atop Signal Hill, “The views are magnificent,” Coldwell Banker Coastal Alliance realtor Ian Hand told the Business Journal. From Hand’s home office in Signal Hill, he can see clear down to the Queen Mary. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Brandon Richardson)

fices have been selling for as much as \$1.85 per square foot.

Jordan Mannisto, a senior associate at Lee & Associates, said that Signal Hill offers a larger inventory of mixed office and warehouse space than Long Beach, which puts those types of properties at a premium. The retail market is also extremely tight, Lee & Associates’ Sean Lieppman reported. The vacancy rate is currently 1.5%, with asking rents averaging \$21 per square foot.

Median home prices in Signal Hill are higher than the surrounding City of Long Beach, Coldwell Banker Coastal Alliance (CBCA) realtor Ian Hand said. While home sales dipped 14.5% in February compared to the same month in 2018, the median sale price rose 5.1% to \$780,000. By comparison, the median price for a detached single-family home in Long Beach was \$605,000 in January, according to Phil Jones, broker and owner of CBCA.

Hand, who has been a Signal Hill resident for 28 years, said that the city’s residential market has a couple of positive factors influencing its value. A large portion of the single-family homes available are new, having been built on redeveloped oil land in the last 20 years or so, and many are located on the titular hilltop of Signal Hill, which stands about 110 feet above Long Beach, Hand said. “In some of the older parts of Signal Hill, prices are around \$400,000 to \$500,000, and then on top of the hill you’re getting a million and over,” Hand explained. “That’s why you’ve got a pretty high median price point.” Time on market for single-family homes decreased from 44 days in February 2018 to 32 days in February 2019.

Condominium sales are up 24%, from 120 to 149 over the same time period, according to Hand. Condo values have appreciated 6.6% year over year, he noted. There are fewer multi-family units avail-

able in Signal Hill compared to Long Beach, and very little in the newer residential areas, he added.

“It’s small, it’s very personal, it’s very friendly,” Hand said of Signal Hill. “People like to be here, it’s a small community, you get to know the people here and they get to know you.”

Signal Hill Development List

Completed

1500 E. Hill St.:

Zinnia is a fully leased multi-family rental residential development consisting of 72 workforce housing units. The units were developed by Meta Housing.

Northwest corner of Walnut Avenue and Crescent Heights Street:

Crescent Square features 25 detached,



Heritage Square, located west of Cherry Avenue and north of Burnett Street, is a mixed-use development proposed by Signal Hill Petroleum. (Rendering courtesy of Signal Hill Petroleum)

three-story single-family for-sale homes built by Far West Industries. There are two units remaining to be sold. Prices start at \$979,000.

Underway

2951 Cherry Ave.:

Big E Pizza owner, Jimmy Eleopoulos, is making tenant improvements to convert former Delius restaurant to Jimmy E's Sports Bar and Grill. Eleopoulos is adding an outdoor dining area. (See story in this issue.)

1600-1680 E. Hill St.:

American University of Health Sciences is making tenant improvements for its School of Pharmacy.

999 Willow St.:

Tenant improvements are underway for medical offices. The developer is 2H Construction LLC.

3225 E. Pacific Coast Hwy.:

Tenant improvements are underway for Naga Café which will feature Vietnamese food.

Conceptual Plans

West side of Cherry Avenue north of Burnett:

The Heritage Square proposal by developer Signal Hill Petroleum is a mixed-use development on 7.72 acres consisting of retail, restaurant, single- and multi-family homes, and community space adjacent Mother's Market. The buildings on the site were demolished.

700 E. Spring St.:

A mixed-use development on a 16-acre site on Spring Street between Atlantic Avenue and California Avenue to 29th



2020 Walnut Ave. is a 150,000-plus-square-foot industrial complex by Xebec Realty. (Rendering courtesy of the Xebec)

Street. The proposed project includes retail, hotels, multifamily residential and open space. The developer is Vestar, LLC.

2650 Cherry Ave.:

The Successor Agency is working with Signal Hill Properties LLC, also known as the Shelly Group, to develop the Cherry Avenue Corridor property for a new pre-owned automobile dealership facility and accessory uses. Two buildings on the site were demolished in anticipation of development.

2599 Pacific Coast Hwy.:

Seven single-family homes; 3 detached

and 4 attached. The developer is Mike Afiony.

1365-1387 E. 23rd St.:

Sixteen single-family homes – 1,650 square feet each with three bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms. The developer is Matt Hamilton, who represents Verve LLC.

2020 Walnut Ave.:

Xebec Realty, as the authorized agent for Signal Hill XC LLC, is finalizing plans for a 151,065-square-foot industrial development including nine buildings featuring up to 21 units. The property previously housed the ChemOil refinery, and consists of a six-

acre parcel on the west side of Walnut Avenue and a two-acre parcel on the east side of Walnut Avenue.

Public Investment

Southwest Corner of Burnett Street and Cherry Avenue:

Designs for a View Park is nearly complete. The park will include a new digital sign and reader board, as well as benches, a walking trail, and views of Long Beach and the Pacific Ocean.

1770 E. Hill St.:

The development of a new 12,000-square-foot public library is underway. ■



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