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THE WEATHER, BEVERLY HILLS CA

	Friday	64°   53°
	Saturday	64°   51°
	Sunday	65°   45°
	Monday	67°   46°
	Tuesday	68°   49°
	Wednesday	68°   50°
	Thursday	67°   50°

## State Rejects Beverly Hills' Housing Element for a Third Time



Rendering courtesy of developer Leo Pustilnikov

Rendering of a 210-unit development proposed at 211-217 S. Hamilton Drive, which was submitted under the builder's remedy law. Without a compliant Housing Element the city may be forced to approve all builder's remedy projects.

BY CLARA HARTER

The city of Beverly Hills remains at risk of losing local control over zoning as the state, once again, rejected its attempt to comply with Sacramento's ambitious housing goals.

Beverly Hills is required to demonstrate

its ability to make room for 3,104 new units, of which 1,688 must be affordable, by 2029. Its plan to do so, known as a Housing Element, was rejected by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) in a Dec. 15 letter.

See HOUSING ELEMENT, page 11

## Planning Commission Approves Rooftop Expansion at L'Ermitage Hotel

BY JOEY WALDINGER

After roughly two hours of deliberation and public comment, the Beverly Hills Planning Commission on Dec. 14 unanimously approved a suite of operational changes at the L'Ermitage Hotel, 9291 Burton Way, including increased hours of the ground-floor restaurant and the construction of rooftop bar and dining areas.

Much of the discussion centered around the zone text amendment that allows for the increased hours and rooftop dining but does not apply to any other hotels in the city, including the three other hotels also located in multiple residential zones. The L'Ermitage rooftop already includes a pool and hosts live events.

The commission also approved a conditional use permit that amended existing restrictions on dining and other operations,

See PLANNING COMMISSION, page 13

## From a "Ball of Rags," a Message of Harmony

BY ANA FIGUEROA

As a child growing up in the Flores neighborhood of Argentina, Jorge Mario Bergoglio loved to play soccer in a square by his home. Many times, he and his friends would have use of only a ball of tied-up rags, known as a "pelota de trapo." But that didn't dampen his enthusiasm for the game, the national sport of his own country and beloved around the world.

The ball of rags—and what it stood for—would inspire Bergoglio to advocate for youth of all backgrounds throughout his life's journey.

In 2013, that journey took him from Buenos Aires to Rome, where the world now knows him as His Holiness Pope Francis. The spiritual leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, and a revered figure on the



All photos courtesy of Scholas Talei Fernández presented Pope Francis with a painting last November.

world stage, he has never lost his devotion to young people.

In fact, while still serving as Archbishop of Rome, he created an educational foundation dedicated to that purpose. The nonprofit

See BALL OF RAGS, page 10

## Amanda Stern Appointed New BHUSD School Board President

BY ERIC LICAS

Educators, elected officials, friends and family congratulated outgoing Beverly Hills Unified School District Board of Education President Noah Margo while welcoming his colleague and successor, Dr. Amanda Stern, as head of the board on Dec. 19.

Margo has held a seat on the board for three terms for a total of 12 years so far and has been its president for the past year. He was appointed to serve as its clerk until his

See AMANDA STERN, page 13



# Courier Calendar

**DEC. 22**  
**OPEN FIST THEATRE COMPANY:**  
**“BOTH: A HARD DAY’S SILENT NIGHT”**  
4 P.M., 8 P.M.

“Both” combines The Beatles and the Christmas story. Audiences can celebrate the holidays with “Both: A Hard Day’s Silent Night,” Open Fist Theatre Company’s annual holiday charity concert spectacular. A choir and a live band spread peace and joy, telling the Christmas story through effervescent Gospel arrangements of Beatles songs. Proceeds benefit Heart of Los Angeles, giving underserved kids an equal chance to succeed through a comprehensive array of after-school academic, arts, athletics and wellness programs. Performances are held at the Eli and Edyth Broad Stage at 1310 11th St., Santa Monica. Tickets are \$25, \$35 or \$50. [openfist.org](http://openfist.org)

**NOW - DEC. 23**  
**CENTER THEATRE GROUP:**  
**ALEX EDELMAN’S “JUST FOR US”**  
3 P.M., 8 P.M.

This theatrical experience, written and performed by Alex Edelman and directed by Adam Brace, is an exploration of identity and our collective capacity for empathy. In the wake of a string of antisemitic rhetoric pointed in his direction online, stand-up comic Edelman decides to go straight to the source; specifically, Queens, where he covertly attends a meeting of white nationalists and comes face-to-face with the people behind the keyboards. What happens next forms the backbone of the shockingly relevant, hilarious, and only moderately perspirant stories that comprise “Just For Us.” Ticket prices begin at \$65.

Performances take place at the Mark Taper Forum at 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles. [centertheatregroup.org](http://centertheatregroup.org)

**NOW - DEC. 30**  
**THE WALLIS: “LOVE ACTUALLY LIVE”**  
7:30 P.M.

The Wallis presents the 20th anniversary of “Love Actually Live.” The show transports friends and families into a three-dimensional world where the film and live action seamlessly blend, immersing audiences in the heartwarming London setting. Iconic scenes from the movie are displayed on screens that move throughout the set, complemented by an all-star cast of singers and a live orchestra, delivering a reimagined soundtrack featuring beloved songs such as “Christmas is All Around,” “Trouble with Love” and Joni Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now.” Tickets range from \$79-\$139. The Wallis is located at 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills. [thewallis.org](http://thewallis.org)

**NOW - JAN. 7, 2024**  
**THE HOLIDAY ICE RINK**  
**PERSHING SQUARE**

The Holiday Ice Rink at Pershing Square reopens with performances this year as part of the annual tree lighting. At 7,200 square feet, it is the city’s largest outdoor rink and offers visitors professional-quality ice for skating and entertainment. Wednesday nights are DJ Spotlight Nights, featuring performances from local DJs. Located at 532 South Olive St., Los Angeles, this landmark destination is easily accessible by car, bus, Metro (Pershing Square stop) or Metrolink. General admission to the rink, including

skate rental, is \$20, locker rental is \$5 and skate helpers are \$6. Tickets can be purchased in advance online. [holidayicerinkdowntownla.com](http://holidayicerinkdowntownla.com)

**NOW - JAN. 13, 2024**  
**ACADEMY MUSEUM OF MOTION**  
**PICTURES: “SONG KANG-HO”**

The Academy Museum presents the first retrospective series of Song Kang-ho, which celebrates his dynamic career and his genuine love for cinema. Born in 1967, Song aspired to become an actor as young as age 15, realizing his dream by joining a theatre company in his early 20s. Song made his film debut in 1996 at the dawn of the Renaissance of Korean cinema and has remained incredibly prolific, crafting a remarkable array of work. A master of versatility, Song employs negative space in his artistry, resisting the urge to convey his characters in linear, conventional ways. His insight transcends the boundaries of acting, resembling that of a director, with extensive knowledge of filmmaking elements and the importance of their harmony as the collective force to create good cinema. The next installment of this series includes “Thirst” in 35mm on Dec. 23 at 7:30 p.m. The showing is at the Academy Museum, and tickets are available online. The Academy Museum is located at 6067 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles. [academymuseum.org](http://academymuseum.org)

**NOW - JAN. 31, 2024**  
**THE DR. SEUSS EXPERIENCE**  
The Dr. Seuss Experience is an interactive immersion into the world of Dr. Seuss. Inside, guests of all ages will be transported through a sensory spectacle including nine different Dr. Seuss worlds,

with the opportunity to meet iconic characters, live the classic stories and experience Dr. Seuss like never before. Guests can experience a journey featuring themes and installations that bring Dr. Seuss’ beloved works to life. Guests can meet the Grinch this holiday season, join the Circus McGurkus, swing from Truffula Trees from “The Lorax,” navigate the Stars Upon Thars Sneetches Mirror Maze from “The Sneetches,” and explore the towering clovers while listening closely for a Who from “Horton Hears a Who!” Offerings include a mirror maze to a carousel ride to photo opportunities and exclusive, bespoke merchandise. The experience will also feature a Dr. Seuss perspective art sculpture by Michael Murphy, a nostalgic Dr. Seuss Museum with original artwork and books along with a reading theater for guests to listen to their Dr. Seuss favorites. The experience is hosted at Santa Monica Place at 395 Santa Monica Place, Santa Monica. Ticket prices vary by time slot and arrival flexibility and are available online. [losangeles.experiencesseuss.com](http://losangeles.experiencesseuss.com)

**DEC. 24**  
**THE MUSIC CENTER: 64TH ANNUAL**  
**L.A. COUNTY HOLIDAY CELEBRATION**  
3-6 P.M.

The 64th annual L.A. County Holiday Celebration offers Angelenos of all ages the opportunity to experience and honor the dynamic, rich cultures of the county. Attendees can enjoy a diverse lineup of L.A.-based artists including many past favorites and some exciting new talent. The show features performances by choral groups, dance troupes and local artists, the Holiday Celebration brings holiday cheer into the homes and hearts of all who tune in. Viewers may see the L.A. County Holiday Celebration live at The Music Center’s Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (135 N. Grand Ave.), watch it on PBS SoCal or stream online. It is free to attend this event and RSVP is available online. [musiccenter.org](http://musiccenter.org)

**JAN. 1, 2024**  
**LITTLE TOKYO: JAPANESE NEW YEAR**  
**CELEBRATION**  
10 A.M.-3 P.M.

Little Tokyo presents a celebration of the beginning of the Year of the Dragon at Weller Court and the Japanese Village Plaza. Known as Oshogatsu, the Japanese New Year is one of the most significant holidays in Japanese culture. Guests can experience all the excitement of a traditional Japanese New Year with a full day of cultural events. The whole family can enjoy an energetic day in Little Tokyo filled with live entertainment and cultural activities including mochimaki, a kimono fashion show, shamisen show, Kompo and more. The events take place in Little Tokyo, Downtown Los Angeles. [littletokyola.org](http://littletokyola.org)



Photo by Matthew Murphy

Alex Edelman in his Center Theatre Group show, “Just for Us,” at the Mark Taper Forum until Dec. 23



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## Russell Stuart Declares 2024 City Council Candidacy



Photo courtesy of Russell Stuart

Russel Stuart

BY CLARA HARTER

Local businessman and security professional Russell Stuart has declared his candidacy for Beverly Hills City Council and is one of 10 candidates vying for two open seats in

the March 5 Election.

Stuart is the owner of local business Force Protection Agency, which provides private security, firearms, private investigators and security consulting services. He lives in the city with his wife Lisa and his daughter Arabelle who is a third-grade student in the BHUSD.

He believes his singular blend of professional and personal experiences will set him apart in a crowded field of candidates.

“I think a big part of my uniqueness is that I’m an outsider; I’m not someone who has come up through the system,” he told the Courier. “I’m a taxpayer, I’m a home renter, I’m someone who sees things much more from a blue-collar, middle-class perspective than a lot of the other candidates who come from a bit more of a position of privilege.”

This privilege is not only in a financial sense, he said, but also in terms of connections within the city that increase one’s chances of being appointed to a commission or other positions of influence.

Stuart has not served on a commission but does not view this as a weak spot.

See **RUSSELL STUART**, page 11

## Architectural Commission Approves New Graphics Displays



Photo by Alexander Gilberman Architects

Michael Kors is opening on Rodeo Drive.

BY JIMY TALLAL

On Dec. 20, the Beverly Hills Architectural Commission met to review signage and graphics proposals from four different retail applicants located on North Rodeo Drive. All of the applicants are in the process of remodeling or rebuilding their retail locations. Each retailer requested construction barricades that would display “lifestyle graphics” (which can be defined as “any image depicting people in a life-related activity”).

The Michael Kors Collection will be a new tenant at 242 North Rodeo Drive, next to Jimmy Choo. The applicant requested an architectural review for sign accommodations that would include temporary window graphics with business identification signs during construction, and a temporary construction barricade that displays lifestyle graphics.

The Kors architects also requested a second permanent “business identification sign” adjacent to the entrance at pedestrian level that would match the original sign’s stainless-steel letters with brass finish.

“This is a very handsome project,” commented Commissioner James Matson.

Several commissioners said they thought the Michael Kors project fit in well with the Jimmy Choo store next door.

Four members of the commission voted to approve the Kors requests with the following conditions: make sure the awning doesn’t block the street address numbers, enlarge the signage on the construction barricade, and make sure the various signs don’t block one another. (The fifth commission member, Evan Meyer, recused himself due to having financial interests in nearby properties.)

The Bulgari (Bvlgari) building located at 401 North Rodeo Drive was approved for complete demolition and the building of a new three-story retail structure at the site

with an outdoor rooftop back on Aug. 17 of last year. At the Dec. 20 meeting, Bulgari asked the commission to allow them to replace their existing solid color vinyl construction barricade with one that displays lifestyle and seasonal graphics that reflect their brand identity.

The new double-walled construction barricade would also include a pedestrian enclosure and walkway painted white with the graphics projecting above it. The barricade would be 24 feet tall, while the building is 28 feet high. So, until demolition begins, the top 4 feet of the old building would be visible.

While commissioners liked the construction barricade design, there were concerns that the exposed 4 feet during demolition would cause too much dirt and debris to fall to the street.

Therefore, the commission unanimously voted to approve the request under the following conditions: the signage size would need to be reduced to conform to city code, the applicant would have to ensure strict safety measures for workers with proper scaffolding and netting, screen the entire building during the demolition phase, and make sure the walkway is accessible to pedestrians, baby strollers, etc.

In other business, at the 337 North Rodeo Drive retail space, tenant Loro Piana also requested an architectural review in order to replace an existing solid-color vinyl construction barricade with one that displays lifestyle graphics. The request passed the Architectural Commission with almost no discussion.

At 366 North Rodeo Drive, the Tory Burch retail space requested the exact same thing: asking to replace an existing solid-color vinyl construction barricade with one that displays lifestyle graphics. The request passed the Architectural Commission with almost no discussion. ●



## Warm Holiday Wishes

We wish you peace, joy, and comfort this holiday season.

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# Campaign Kickoff Season Begins



Alissa Roston

BY ANA FIGUEROA

Campaign kickoff season has begun in Beverly Hills, with City Council candidates Myra

Demeter and Alissa Roston holding events on Dec. 17. As is customary, the kickoffs attracted enthusiastic supporters to balloon-festooned homes for the chance to mingle with fellow



Myra Demeter

residents, city officeholders (current and former), grab a cup of coffee and listen to the candidate. This year, 10 candidates have entered the City Council race for the two

seats being vacated by Mayor Dr. Julian Gold and Councilmember Lili Bosse. ●



Greg Ito  
*Tunnel Vision*, 2021  
Acrylic on canvas over panel  
88 x 64 inches

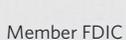
Collection of East West Bank.  
Image courtesy of the Artist and Anat Ebgi.

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## The Las Vegas Scene



Photo by Vivien Killilea/Getty Images for Fontainebleau Las Vegas

Paul Anka

BY CAROLE DIXON

The iconic Fontainebleau Miami opened its West Coast sister property in Las Vegas on Dec. 13, bringing a sleek new glamour and plenty of stars to the Strip.

The 67-story elegant resort holds a staggering 3,644 rooms and suites, 150,000

square feet of gaming space, an Urs Fischer art gallery, luxury retail shops, a vitality-enhancing spa, beach club and LIV nightclub.

During the black-tie opening night, the lobby was overflowing with red roses by celebrity florist Jeff Leatham (Four Seasons Beverly Hills) and buzzing with “Bleau Carpet” arrivals of A-list celebrities from

Lenny Kravitz, Jessica Biel, Eva Longoria and Sylvester Stallone.

Cher walked hand-in-hand across the casino floor with boyfriend music executive Alexander Edwards while Aaron Paul and Bryan Cranston sipped tequila, and 15-time Academy of Country Music Awards winner Keith Urban performed for the crowd.

While thousands of guests mingled amid some of the 36 first-to-market culinary concepts from acclaimed chefs, many of the high-profile attendees were crowding into booths at the Rome-inspired Mother Wolf by Evan Funke (of Funke in Beverly Hills) for pizza, pasta dishes and negroni cocktails.

Other celebrities, dignitaries, and VIPs checking out the vast offerings included Alice Cooper, Axel Rose, Tyga, Las Vegas Raiders owner Mark Davis, Las Vegas Golden Knights owner Bill Foley, fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger, Food Network’s Gail Simmons, Gigi Gorgeous (Getty), and the onsite LIV club resident DJ John Summit.

While the hotel ushered in a new wave of sophistication - there are no neon signs on the property exterior - 10-time Grammy Award winner Justin Timberlake brought “Sexy Back” by opening the Bleaulive Theater with a surprise performance around 10:30 p.m. In the crowd were Kim

Kardashian and Kendall Jenner who jetted in for the opening night performance, which included the pop stars repertoire from “Suite & Tie” to “Cry Me a River,” and plenty of smooth dance moves which sparked rumors of an upcoming residency.

Legendary Paul Anka opened for Timberlake with a set that included a rendition of his hit song “My Way,” along with nostalgic tales of performing at the original Miami location, his time working with Frank Sinatra and hanging out with the “Rat Pack” back in the day, bringing this new legacy full circle.

Following the performance, Timberlake was joined by football icon Tom Brady, Fontainebleau Development Chairman and CEO Jeffrey Soffer and President Brett Mufson in the high-limit salon to make history by rolling the first dice, signifying the official opening to the public.

“The Fontainebleau era in Las Vegas begins now,” says Soffer. “This magnificent resort is a testament to our 70-year commitment to excellence, a catalyst that will change the way the world views luxury hospitality and design on the Strip.” [fontainebleaulasvegas.com](http://fontainebleaulasvegas.com)

A "Save the Date" poster for Craig Corman's campaign kickoff. The top half has a dark blue background with a red brushstroke graphic containing the text "SAVE THE DATE" in white. Below that, in white text, it says "CORMAN FOR BEVERLY HILLS CITY COUNCIL CAMPAIGN KICKOFF". The bottom half features a photograph of Craig Corman, a man with glasses wearing a white shirt, sitting and holding a small brown dog. To the left of the photo is a red box with white text: "SUNDAY, JANUARY 7 12:30 - 2:30 PM", "RSVP: WWW.CRAIGCORMAN.COM", and "ADDRESS PROVIDED UPON RSVP". Below the red box is a paragraph of text: "Join our family, friends, neighbors, and community members as we ring in the New Year and the start of the campaign season. I look forward to discussing the campaign and answering questions about my platform and the future of our great city." At the bottom left are social media icons for Facebook, X, and Instagram, followed by "@CORMAN4BH" and "CRAIG CORMAN FOR BEVERLY HILLS CITY COUNCIL 2024 FPPC # 1462515".



Photo by Alejandro Chavarria

Eva Longoria and José Bastón



Photo by Vivien Killilea/Getty Images for Fontainebleau Las Vegas

Tommy Hilfiger, Lenny Kravitz and Sylvester Stallone

## BH Fire Department Dinner

A group of Beverly Hills residents hosted a multi-course Mediterranean dinner on Dec. 19 for 30 employees of the Beverly Hills Fire Department, including Fire Chief Greg Barton.



Pictured (from left): Lisa Korbatov, Janis Black Warner, Barton and Randi Bandman

## Cookie Celebration



Beverly Hills Cookie celebrated the opening of its new Beverly Drive store with a ribbon cutting and party on Dec. 15. Pictured (from left): Vice Mayor Lester Friedman, Mayor Dr. Julian Gold and Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Todd Johnson

*Holidays*  
**BH**

*Holidays*  
**Lights & Decorations**

Discover the magic of Beverly Hills with its incredible displays and festive décor including the "Unwrap the Magic" projection shows at Beverly Hills City Hall until January 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2024!

For more information, visit  
[BEVERLYHILLS.ORG/HOLIDAYSBH](http://BEVERLYHILLS.ORG/HOLIDAYSBH)

<b>CH</b> City Hall- Unwrap the Magic Projection Show	<b>GG</b> Glowing Gardens at Beverly Cañon Gardens	<b>RD</b> Rodeo Drive Up, Up & Away Holiday!
<b>CT</b> Christmas Tree Display	<b>HL</b> Holiday Lights	<b>S</b> Santa with Reindeer & Sleigh
<b>LL</b> Lights on the Lily Pond	<b>M</b> Menorah Display	<b>VC</b> Visitor Center
<b>W</b> The Wallis: Love Actually Live	<b>JT</b> Jolly Trolley	<b>P</b> Parking

## ‘American Fiction’ - Too True



Photos by Claire Folger courtesy of Orion Pictures

Erika Alexander and Jeffrey Wright

BY NEELY SWANSON

Cord Jefferson, an Emmy Award-winning television writer, has made a stunning feature debut as the writer/director of “American Fiction.” Adapted from Percival Everett’s novel “Erasure,” “American Fiction” tells a story of Black identity from many different, and always ironically funny, points of view. Couched as the story of Thelonious (“Monk”) Ellison, it is, most broadly, a tale of expectations.

We first meet Monk, a Black literature professor, no doubt the only one, at a small Los Angeles private college where he’s fruitlessly teaching a seminar to an elite, primarily white (obviously) group of students, well-versed in the woke politics of today. The topic? Flannery O’Connor and her controversial short story entitled “The Artificial N\*\*\*\*r.” A white student in the class objects strenuously to the topic and especially the title of the book. It is a trigger for her. She sees no reasonable explanation for why she should have to look at or say that word. As the Black Professor Ellison expresses it, “If I can get over it, so can you.” Out of class she storms and into the frying pan goes Ellison, called on the carpet by his chair and two other members of his department. Their reasoning for making him take a forced leave of absence ranged from political correctness to jealousy over his national reputation as a novelist (who hasn’t published in years). Go to the Boston Festival of Books, the chair says, participate, visit family and

think over the ways to repent for sins, real and imagined. The Festival is a disaster. His panel is sparsely attended because everyone else is at Sintara Golden’s talk about her current bestseller, “We’s Lives in Da Ghetto.” Particularly galling is the fact that one of the reasons his agent is having such a hard time selling his books is because they aren’t “black enough.” Not black enough? It’s a book written by a Black man. Why doesn’t that make it a Black book? But hearing Sintara Golden read from her “Black” book, his blood starts to boil. Is that how people see the Black experience? Ghetto, drugs, poverty, violence, hopelessness, and, worst of all, really bad conversational speech and grammar?

Black experience? He’ll show them the Black experience! And he sits down to write a Black book to end all Black books with every stereotype known (and some that aren’t) written as poorly as an entry to the Bad Hemingway Contest (aka the International Imitation Hemingway Competition) whose motto followed Hemingway’s own assessment “The step up from writing parodies is writing on the wall above the urinal.” Satisfied with the level of irredeemable rotten prose that he’s composed about a drug dealer wanted by the FBI for a murder he may or may not have committed, he submits it to his agent who is appalled. If publishers rejected his last, well-written and thoughtful tome, then they should love this one Ellison posits sarcastically. Send it off pseudonymously, he insists to the agent.

This book is the antithesis of true Black life and it will be rejected post haste, or at least that’s what he and his agent believe. And that’s the point. Surely someone will see this for the stereotypic, poorly conceived, badly written schlock that it is. The title? “My Pafology.” The submitted author? Stagg R. Leigh. How will anyone miss the horrendous spelling and hilariously undisguised name? (If you don’t know the ballad of Stagger Lee, look it up, but to give you an idea of this barroom brawl: “Stagger Lee went to the barroom and he stood across the barroom door. He said, nobody move and he pulled his Forty-four.”)

As the book is making its way to publishers’ desks, he’s on his way for a reunion with his family, something almost as painful as writing trash. Monk has been conspicuously absent from all things Ellison for years. The Ellisons are an accomplished lot, a stereotype in their own way. Father was a gynecologist, sister Lisa followed in his footsteps and brother Clifford is a plastic surgeon living in Phoenix. The American dream visible on the surface covers a more than typical family drama. Mother, Agnes, is in the early stages of dementia and her care has fallen on Lisa, the only one living in town. She’s recently divorced and had to sacrifice half her assets and half her practice in the settlement. Resources are slim and Monk’s arrival is propitious. Clifford’s life has recently blown up as well. His wife caught him in bed with another man and has taken everything including the kids and left him

broke. He’ll not be donating anything to the cause. Of course, there are the longstanding resentments. Monk was their father’s favorite; their father was a philanderer who neglected his wife; Agnes is in denial; and Clifford dabbles in any drug he can sniff up his nose, and the rent boys at his beck and call. In a telling exchange, Clifford wishes that he had come out to his father. Surprised, Monk states that their father would never have approved. Yes, he knows that, but at least his father would have rejected him for who he really was rather than just rejecting him for who he thought he was.

And then the news arrives that really upends Monk’s life. A top publisher is offering an obscene amount of money as an advance for this book of “The True Black Experience” and they’d really like to meet Mr. Leigh. Horrified, Monk’s first reaction is to refuse the money and bury the book. His agent, however, sees all the advantages—the money far outweighs the lie. Besides, won’t he accomplish his purpose by pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes; and then there’s the money. Money, a refrain that bears repeating. Ellison, a more than principled man, something that he has always taken to extremes, is horrified; but then there’s the money and his mother’s care will be expensive. Perhaps there’s a way to moralize this immoral situation. And he does, but always looking for the way out.

As is always the case, Hollywood comes calling in the form of exploitation producer Wiley, he of the lowest common

denominator, offering an even more obscene amount of money. Bit by bit, piece by piece, Monk's life becomes more complicated by the obvious hypocrisy of accepting money for something that was meant as a thumb to the nose. Never a man open with his feelings, he begins to close in on himself ever so much more, something that doesn't bode well for a new romantic relationship. And as the book, rushed to print, becomes a bestseller he is positively despondent. But more complications are yet to come and that is for me to know and you to find out.

Everything in this movie, a parody, even if so many things weren't true, relies on the real to make the phantasmagorical plausible. So much of the exaggeration is just that—a stretching of what can and does happen every day. Wouldn't a publisher see beyond the hyperbole? Not if they smell money. And there it is again...Money. Hollywood does offer obscene sums for options, perhaps not that much but again, this is all hyperbole. And all is grounded on the background of a normal family, normal that is if the kids were all M.D.s or Ph.D.s with a beautiful home in Boston and a summer "cottage" along the Massachusetts shore. Sibling rivalry, dementia, academics, professional rivalry, they happen to everyone, so it is to Jefferson's credit that he is able to present his thesis of invisibility or, more precisely, offensive expectation within a family drama with characters far more fleshed out than the media types he satirizes. Everyone, down to the publisher's assistant, is pitch-perfect and contributes to the belly laughs and the sadness that will be felt almost simultaneously when watching this film. Yes, it's all very exaggerated, but I warrant if you asked any person of color, much of this will ring true. I hope you can see the truth in it as well. Although I haven't read the underlying work, it is a world that Percival Everett, a Distinguished Professor at USC in the English department, would have known quite well.

In what are called small but pivotal roles you have the formidable Keith David, a figure of Monk's imagination who embodies one of the characters in his horrible novel. Issa Rae plays Sintara Golden with the serious demeanor of someone who has rationalized her exploitative writing as having been well-researched, as though that is enough of an excuse to sell one's soul for market profits. Adam Brody is the Hollywood producer who is a true aficionado of schlock and knows a winner when he sees one. In many ways, he is the link between what is real in

Monk's eyes and what is not. John Ortiz plays Monk's agent with a mix of indignation and horror that shows that there may not be such a wide gulf between art and selling out as he had previously convinced himself. The always terrific and too underused Miriam Shor has a field day as the publisher who, with a straight face, extols the virtues of "My Pafology" as a work of art, while blinded by the color green (of money). She is nothing short of hilarious as she interacts on the phone with a horrified Monk, disguising himself poorly as Ghetto.

Members of the family play like the royalty they are. Tracee Ellis Ross is sister Lisa, compassionate and angry at the same time. She, like everyone else in the family, hears what she wants to hear and it's never what Monk is saying. Leslie Uggams, bringing star power from a different generation, is mother Agnes, slipping in and out of cognition so realistically I sometimes thought I was seeing my own mother. And lucky is the film that is graced with the presence of Sterling K. Brown, who can envelop any role he's given. Here he is the complicated brother, Clifford, who is lost to the abandon of what he thinks is his true self, a gay man who needs no boundaries. But he does, and it is this confusion that brings life to Brown's performance.

Jeffrey Wright! His name should be in lights because he is a true star, both a Tony and Emmy winner. His Thelonious "Monk" Ellison is a fully developed, complex individual who holds himself apart, thinks he knows the answers (most of which he does), and is an island. Wright's Monk is prickly, hypocritical and real. He's tired of not being seen but hides himself so that he can't be. He works on a hypothetical planet where he doesn't have to be the one who's always trying harder than everyone else. He is the Black man who is always accused of not being Black enough when he knows that there is no such thing. He is a man; he is Black. That is not his definition. I could watch Jeffrey Wright read the phone book and he could do it soundlessly and still enrapture me. The mere fact that his character displays no sense of humor is humorous in itself. Whether the role is large or small, your attention will always be drawn to him. Here, finally, he is the lead of an ensemble with a script that is worthy of his talents.

Now playing at the AMC Century City 15, the AMC Broadway 4, Santa Monica 7 and Marina 6. ●



Neely Swanson spent most of her professional career in the television industry, almost all of it working for David E. Kelley. In her last full-time position as Executive Vice President of Development, she reviewed writer submissions and targeted content for adaptation. As she has often said, she did book reports for a living. For several years she was a freelance writer for "Written By," the magazine of the WGA West, and was adjunct faculty at USC in the writing division of the School of

Cinematic Arts. Neely has been writing film and television reviews for the "Easy Reader" for more than 10 years. Her past reviews can be read on Rotten Tomatoes where she is a tomato-approved critic.



Tracee Ellis Ross and Leslie Uggams

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Supervisor Lindsey Horvath during one of her meetings with the Holy Father

#### BALL OF RAGS, from page 1

Scholas Occurrentes (Latin for “schools for the encounter”) serves a mission to provide young people of every background with critical leadership and citizenship tools to help them thrive.

This year, a new initiative under the Scholas umbrella carried that vision into the sports realm. Launched successfully in Argentina, Italy, Mozambique and Spain, the program has now made its U.S. debut in Los Angeles. Its name: Pelota de Trapo, after the makeshift soccer balls of the Pope’s youth, still used by young people around the world.

“The Holy Father as an international religious leader is concerned about isolation that students experienced after the pandemic. Scholas and the Pelota de Trapo program, through sports and civic engagement programs, are designed to help students get out of their shell and relate to each other to improve their well-being and mental health. It is an interfaith, free program to help all youth,” María Martha Barreneche, Executive Director of Scholas Occurrentes USA, told the Courier.

Los Angeles was chosen for a number of reasons, said Barreneche.

For one thing, the city will find itself at the forefront of the sports world in the next few years. It will host the Copa America in 2024, the FIFA World Cup in 2026, the 2027 Super Bowl and the 2028 Summer Olympics.

Additionally, Los Angeles is home to a tailor-made collaborative partner in the LA84 Foundation. Formed with surplus funds from the 1984 Summer Olympics, that organization is a leader in supporting youth sports programs that empower young people from diverse communities.

“We didn’t want to reinvent the wheel, and with the LA84 Foundation, we found a partner with lots of experience on the ground. We have coordinated our curriculum with them, and it is a good match,” said Barreneche.

She added that perhaps the biggest appeal of Los Angeles—a factor specifically acknowledged by the Pope—is its diversity. The notion that students from all backgrounds and faiths could come together in dialog and action held a special resonance.

Producer Bonnie Abaunza was tapped early on to help facilitate the program’s launch in Los Angeles. Abaunza got to know the Pope while serving as one of the executive producers of the Discovery+ documentary “Francesco.”

“When I was asked to help launch Pelota de Trapo, I said, ‘Of course I would be happy to help.’ What I started to do was to make introductions to various people in LA that I felt would be very interested in supporting the program. There was a very positive response, so we worked very closely and strategically to bring together the right mix of people,” Abaunza told the Courier.

That “right mix” included political, media and philanthropic elite, including Los Angeles County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath, Spectrum News 1 Anchor Giselle Fernández (who is a member of the Courier Advisory Board) and philanthropist Jessica Sarowitz.

“I don’t know who says ‘no’ to the Pope, but it certainly wouldn’t be me. It’s not just that he is the Pope and not just because I’m Catholic,” Horvath told the Courier.

Horvath said that the message of Pelota de Trapo spoke to her from the outset.

“The very first slide I looked at during their presentation said that ‘Young people are not our future; they are our present.’ This is exactly the message I’ve tried to convey, and it continues to be my message. That is, we need to do whatever we can to listen to and empower the younger generation.”

Horvath has taken the time to travel to the Vatican twice this past year to meet Pope Francis.

“I had a private audience with him, and we spoke for about 30 minutes. We talked about climate change, immigration, the importance of the arts and so much more. He is such an intelligent and humble human being. To be in his presence is beyond words,” said Horvath.

Like Horvath, the program’s exceptional Youth Ambassador for Scholas USA, Talei Fernández, has also met twice this year with the Pope. The daughter of Giselle Fernández, Talei impressed representatives from Scholas and the Vatican with her intelligence, poise and willingness to speak

up about issues confronting her age group, ranging from cyberbullying to racism.

When asked if she would like to be the country’s first Youth Ambassador, Talei admitted she was a little surprised.

“I said, ‘You do understand that I’m Jewish, right?’ But it didn’t matter to them, because it is an interfaith program. So here I am, an adopted kid from Guatemala who is Jewish, but I told them I would love to take this on,” she told the Courier.

Talei has also met twice with the Pope in connection with Pelota de Trapo. The first opportunity took place last August, during the World Youth Day conference in Portugal attended by thousands of young people. There, she met with and exchanged ideas with other youth ambassadors from around the world.

When it came time to meet the Pope in person, Talei found herself in tears.

“I was crying when he came into the room. You can feel the holiness and kindness that radiates from him. I was so nervous. I introduced myself and said I was so honored to be given this position,” she recounted.

Talei was picked to present the Pope with an actual pelota de trapo for him to sign. She then brought the ball back and delivered it to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors on Aug. 13. That day, thanks to a motion by Horvath, was declared Pelota de Trapo Day in Los Angeles County.

Pelota de Trapo programming began in earnest in November, when some 80 students from nine Los Angeles schools took part in a pilot program. The young people came together to discuss issues of importance to them, including mental health, addiction and immigration. They also shared ideas about how they can make a difference in tackling those tough issues in their communities.

Horvath, who attended, was impressed with the manner in which the young people jumped right in to pose solutions for “adult problems” that policymakers consistently find challenging. Talei, too, came away with strong impressions.

“I’m an immigrant, and I know that I have been given the world. Listening to these kids, I think that my life could easily have been like theirs. If there is one thing I’d like people to know, it’s that this program has the power to change lives. I will do anything for this organization. I’m so honored to be able to play a role,” she said.

That role continued during Thanksgiving week. Talei and her mom were part of a delegation of Pelota de Trapo supporters invited to visit Rome and Vatican City. The group also included Horvath, the Mayor Pro Tem of West Hollywood John Erickson, LA City Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, Sarowitz, as well as representatives from LA84.

In Rome, the visitors were invited to the Scholas Headquarters, where they learned about the organization’s global work. The next day, they met at the Vatican with the Pope. During the hour-long meeting, the Pope shared his vision of bringing together

young people from different communities. He also answered questions on a range of topics that included climate change, the conflict in Gaza, to LGBTQ rights.

Talei presented the Holy Father with a painting created at the San Fernando Valley Refugee Children’s Center, where she volunteers.

“I brought a painting that the kids at the Center made because it represents what Pelota de Trapo is all about, connecting everyone of all colors and backgrounds. It said, ‘Somos Familia,’ which means ‘We’re all family.’ It doesn’t matter where we’re from,” said Talei.

The Pope’s face lit up upon receiving it.

Abaunza, who put the Thanksgiving delegation together, recalled many of its special moments.

“I think really what everyone experienced was the fact that he’s very concerned about youth and what they’re going through now. We know sports is a great equalizer and that is why he started this program.”

She added, “We actually all got a chuckle because we asked the Pope what position he played in soccer as a young man. He said he was only good as a goalie,” said Abaunza.

Goalies, of course, must be adept at facing challenges from every angle.

At the moment, Pelota de Trapo is meeting the challenges that come with the launch of any new charitable program. Raising awareness—and funds—are primary concerns at the moment, said Barreneche.

She has followed the Pope from Buenos Aires to Rome and has now relocated to Los Angeles to introduce Scholas and Pelota de Trapo here. Already, she laid some important groundwork, holding ZOOM meetings with LA County mayors, including Mayor Dr. Julian Gold. She has also met with representatives from the Church of the Good Shepherd High School in Beverly Hills.

“We would love to involve more schools in Beverly Hills,” said Barreneche.

In the meantime, the next county-wide Pelota de Trapo program is expected to take place in April. Horvath is excited about future opportunities in tandem with the LA Unified School District, county and city parks and recreation departments and other agencies.

She recalled in particular that the Pope kept repeating the Spanish word “harmonía,” or harmony during their meetings.

“He said that the goal is not to erase our differences and try to make everyone the same. The goal is to try to find ways for all these diverse communities to build bridges together. That was profound, and it is what this program of encounter embodies. If we’re doing our jobs right, that’s what we should be doing throughout Los Angeles.

She added, “The holidays are a time to reflect on this message. Every faith has a path toward harmony. In this moment, there are things that can unite us.”

For more information on Scholas and Pelota de Trapo, visit [www.scholasusa.org](http://www.scholasusa.org) or email [info@scholasusa.org](mailto:info@scholasusa.org).

**HOUSING ELEMENT, from page 1**

This is the third time that the state has deemed the city's Housing Element insufficient. The deadline for all cities in the state, including Beverly Hills, to have their Housing Element approved was October 2022.

"The city of Beverly Hills has adopted a sixth cycle Housing Element that is substantially compliant with state law, and we are disappointed that HCD has not yet certified the document," Director of Community Development Michael Forbes told the Courier. "The city has been working with HCD in order to attain HCD certification of the document. The city will have a better sense of next steps after it further studies HCD's recent letter."

The Community Development department, members of the Planning Commission and City Council members have worked diligently to develop and repeatedly revise the city's Housing Element in line with HCD's demands over the past three years. The city had hoped that this latest version, which was submitted on Oct. 10, would be approved.

"I thought that this response (from HCD) was a minus three on a 10-point scale and was very disappointing," Planning Commissioner Peter Ostroff told the Courier.

Without a compliant Housing Element, the city is at risk of being forced to approve proposed housing developments that meet

certain affordability requirements under a law known as the "builder's remedy".

As of Dec. 19, there were 13 builder's remedy project applications with 1,262 total units pending city approval, according to a list provided by Public Information Officer Lauren Santillana.

Several of these applications are for mammoth buildings including a 210-unit development at 211-217 S. Hamilton Drive, a 199-unit development at 8844 Burton Way, a 165-unit development at 125-129 S. Linden Drive and a 116-unit project at 8800 Wilshire Blvd.

Beverly Hills is not alone in failing to meet the state's rigorous housing requirements, but it is in the minority. Currently, 65% of all California municipalities—or 349 of 539—have compliant Housing Elements, according to HCD's database.

HCD informed the city of its continued noncompliance in a Dec. 15 letter signed by Senior Program Manager Paul McDougall.

In this letter McDougall highlights four broad areas in which the state would like to see further revisions. These are promoting fair housing opportunities, identifying an inventory of sites suitable for housing development, removing restraints to housing production and preserving existing low-income housing. ●

**RUSSELL STUART, from page 4**

Instead, he has learned a great deal about the city through running a local business and participating in TEAM Beverly Hills and the BHFD's Community Emergency Response Team program, he said.

"As someone who handles my own regulatory permits, my own business taxes, my own water bill, my own business permits—in one of the most highly regulated industries that you could possibly be in—I deal with City Hall constantly," he told the Courier.

Ensuring top-notch public safety is Stuart's number one priority, as it is for many of the other candidates. However, unlike most other candidates Stuart has 20 years of professional experience in the security industry.

"I believe that makes me uniquely qualified on the public safety side, because I understand safety, I understand security, we work with police, we work with federal agents on investigations," he told the Courier. "I understand so many different aspects of this industry."

When it comes to bolstering safety, Stuart wants the city to not only focus on investing in the best technology, but also in the best people.

Conversations with public safety personnel have given him many insights into what the city could do to improve working conditions. This includes more mental health support for officers, intentional scheduling to alleviate the strain created by long commutes, financial hiring incentives, school enrollment incentives for their children, and the creation of more affordable housing.

"That is how you're going to get the best quality people to not only come here, but to

stay here," he told the Courier.

Stuart would like the city to focus on providing housing that is affordable to its employees and also explore the possibility of offering workforce housing subsidies.

"I recognize that it's an honor and a privilege to live here, but we need to have moderate-income housing for the men and women who work here in the city, in fire, in administration, in law enforcement, so they don't have to drive 60 miles home every day," he said.

In addition, Stuart wants more transparency between the police department, the city and the public. He believes that residents should be able to easily access detailed, accurate, and up-to-date information about when and where public safety incidents occur."

"We need to inform the public better," he said. "My gun store is packed on a daily basis. I hear what the community is saying, fear is massive, and that fear can be at least minimized with information."

Stuart's other top priorities include maintaining top-quality and safe schools and fostering a supportive environment for local businesses.

"I truly care about Beverly Hills. It was a dream of mine to live here, and it remains a privilege to raise my family and create roots in this place I love," he said in his campaign announcement. "Beverly Hills needs someone to speak on behalf of the working people of the city."

"If given the opportunity to serve, I promise to do everything in my power to make real change happen." ●

*Felicisima P. David*

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**Next stop: more subway.**

**METRO D LINE SUBWAY EXTENSION PROJECT**  
Section 2 – Beverly Hills Update

**WILSHIRE/RODEO STATION WORK**  
Construction activities for the Wilshire/Rodeo Station will resume on January 2, 2024.

Excavation for the appendage located on S Beverly Dr will take place on weekdays from 8:15pm to 7am.

S Canon Dr at Wilshire Bl will be fully closed 24/7 to support appendage construction at that location. Work includes decking, excavation and concrete pours.

Join us for a virtual community meeting to discuss construction activities:  
Wednesday, January 10, 2024, at 12pm  
Webinar Link: [zoom.us/j/96626476708](https://zoom.us/j/96626476708)  
Webinar ID: 966 2647 6708  
Call-in: 213.338.8477

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## Is It Atrial Fibrillation, a Heart Attack or Sudden Cardiac Arrest?



BY CHRISTINE M. ALBERT, M.D., M.P.H.  
AND SUMEET CHUGH, M.D.

You wake from a deep sleep because your heart suddenly starts racing. Your chest feels tight. Seemingly out of nowhere, your left arm begins to tingle.

Could it be a passing episode? A heart attack? Or worse?

Cardiac conditions—like atrial fibrillation, heart attack and sudden cardiac arrest—can leave you feeling breathless and frightened. At worst, a heart attack or an abnormal heart rhythm can lead to sudden cardiac arrest and have deadly consequences.

By learning to recognize the warning signs for these conditions—including how they manifest differently in women and men—you potentially can save your life or the life of a loved one.

With New Year's resolutions around the corner, this critical information can also serve as an opportunity to be more mindful of heart-healthy choices in 2024.

### What is atrial fibrillation, and who does it affect?

Atrial fibrillation, also known as AFib, is the most common type of abnormal heart rhythm, affecting more than 2.7 million in the U.S. alone. The number of AFib patients is expected to continue increasing as the nation's population ages. Approximately 2% of people younger than 65 have AFib, and 9% of those older than 65 have it.

Sometimes AFib has no symptoms, but in most instances, it is characterized by shortness of breath, racing heartbeat, chest pain, fatigue, dizziness or fainting.

A number of factors can increase the risk, including aging, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, heart failure, congenital heart defects, obesity, alcohol intake and diabetes. Sometimes the cause is unknown, but the condition can develop from any type of problem that changes the

way the heart handles electricity.

AFib can lead to a host of potential health problems, including stroke and heart failure.

If you experience these symptoms, consult a doctor.

### What are the telltale symptoms of a heart attack?

Men tend to feel more “traditional” symptoms of a heart attack, including pain in the middle of the chest that can spread to the back, jaw or arms. Heart attack symptoms in women tend to be more subtle and include indigestion, shortness of breath and extreme fatigue. Often, these symptoms will be attributed incorrectly to heartburn, overeating, stress or musculoskeletal pain.

Heart attack symptoms that affect both men and women include faintness, sudden sweating, nausea, heavy pounding of the heart, abnormal heart rhythms, loss of consciousness, restlessness, anxiety, and bluish lips, hands or feet.

Symptoms may start slowly and persist for hours, days or weeks before a heart attack. Not everyone has the same symptoms.

Research on heart health has largely focused on men, leaving women as an understudied population. In fact, every year, about 435,000 women in the U.S. have heart attacks, which kill six times more women than breast cancer. Of these women, 71% experience early warning signs like extreme fatigue, but many women do not recognize their symptoms as signs of a heart attack.

During a heart attack—whether in men or women—blood flow to the heart is blocked, often by a blood clot or by a buildup of plaque in the arteries. Because the heart muscle needs oxygen to survive, it begins to die when blood flow is blocked. Every second counts. This is why heart attack patients need to be rushed to an emergency department as quickly as possible.

If you believe someone is experiencing

the symptoms of a heart attack, call 911 immediately.

### How do these conditions differ from sudden cardiac arrest?

While a heart attack is a circulation problem, akin to a clogged pipe, sudden cardiac arrest is an electrical problem triggered by a disruption of the heart's rhythm often due to ventricular tachycardia. Because cardiac arrest stops the heart from beating, the brain, lungs, and other organs do not get the blood and oxygen they need. Cardiac arrest can lead to death within minutes if not treated.

Symptoms include dizziness, loss of consciousness and shortness of breath. Within seconds of cardiac arrest, a person will become unresponsive and have trouble breathing. Sudden cardiac arrest is not necessarily preceded by heart disease, but many patients experience warning symptoms in the days, weeks and months leading up to an episode.

Someone experiencing a sudden cardiac arrest could drop to the ground and stop breathing. Bystanders who can provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)—especially chest compressions—can save a life.

Many recent studies, summarized in a 2023 consensus in the journal *Circulation*, suggest that out-of-hospital sudden cardiac arrest survival increases when both CPR and an automated external defibrillator (AED) are utilized. CPR is intended to pump the heart to get blood flowing and circulating to organs. The AED sends an electric shock to the heart in an attempt to restore its normal rhythm.

Call 911 immediately if you think someone has gone into sudden cardiac arrest.

### How can I protect my heart from heart rhythm disorders?

While genetics may play a role in many heart conditions—including heart rhythm disorders—there are proactive steps you can take to protect your heart.

These include eating a nutritious diet complete with leafy green vegetables; staying physically active with 30-minutes of moderate exercise each day; maintaining a healthy weight; avoiding smoking; managing stress effectively; and keeping your blood pressure at a healthy level.

We also recommend seeking care from a cardiologist annually, who can monitor your heart health and flag issues as they arise. ●



Dr. Christine M. Albert is chair of the Department of Cardiology in the Smidt Heart Institute at Cedars-Sinai. A cardiac electrophysiologist and epidemiologist, Albert focuses her research on epidemiology, risk stratification and prevention of sudden cardiac death and atrial fibrillation in multicenter clinical studies. Albert's research on the impacts of diet, supplements, lifestyle, and genetics on heart rhythm disorders has resulted in multiple publications in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Nature Genetics*, *Lancet* and *Circulation*.



Dr. Sumeet Chugh is the Pauline and Harold Price Professor and director of the Center for Cardiac Arrest Prevention in the Smidt Heart Institute. An expert in the diagnosis and treatment of heart rhythm abnormalities, Chugh leads groundbreaking research on sudden cardiac arrest and has published more than 300 research studies on heart rhythm disorders.



Rendering courtesy of WATG/city of Beverly Hills

The Planning Commission's approval is a long-sought win in the L'Ermitage Hotel's years-long effort to construct a rooftop bar and restaurant.

**PLANNING COMMISSION, from page 1** and renewed existing entitlements including a conditional use permit, a development plan review and extended hours permit.

"I believe that this is the right project at the right place at the right time," Commission Chair Gary Ross said. "I think that this project is wholly consistent with our general plan [and] land use policy ... Coupled with the fact that this property is pretty much on brand for our city, I will vote for it enthusiastically."

Most public commenters shared Ross's enthusiasm, saying the amendments and additions would modernize and improve services at an already world-class hotel that supports the local community. Resident Steve Mayer, however, said he and other neighbors had lodged complaints at successive public meetings that the changes would increase congestion and noise pollution in nearby residential areas.

Trying to allay these concerns, hotel representatives said they would construct a glass sound wall surrounding the rooftop areas and had commissioned a series of studies showing that parking impacts would also be negated.

"As you're aware, our team was actively engaged with over 400 members of the Beverly Hills community through door-to-door outreach, community meetings and site visits," representative Spencer Kallick said. "At the last hearing [on Oct. 26], we all observed the outcome of that outreach. We heard from 74 members of this community expressing very strong support for what is proposed, the majority of which live within two blocks of the hotel."

Some commissioners still had worries. Commissioner Peter Ostroff said he had "some discomfort" with plans to leave open the entrance door to the downstairs indoor dining room. After a back and forth with hotel staff, he said he would let them decide whether it made sense to keep the door open or closed.

Commissioner Myra Demeter asked to clarify language in the draft resolution restricting rooftop uses to hotel guests, and said she was worried that hotel staff hadn't

done enough to satisfy residents' concerns and was initially reluctant to approve the resolution.

"It will pass with or without my vote," Demeter said. "The only comfort I take is that Mr. Kallick did explain that there were various overtures to the dissenters ... and that would propel me to think about this in a different way."

The commission also directed city staff to amend the language on who can access rooftop amenities before approving the resolution.

The Dec. 14 decision represents a long-sought win for the L'Ermitage staff, which has been working for almost three years to gain approval for the changes and additions, Kallick said. In 2021, the hotel was acquired by real estate firm EOS Investors and put under new management.

"The zone text amendments and modifications to the existing entitlements will allow L'Ermitage to remain competitive in today's hospitality landscape," General Manager Scott Berger said. "These updates will allow the hotel to take full advantage of its existing facilities by creating additional dining options that our clients expect, and our competitors already offer."

The zone text amendment approved on Dec. 14 allows the restaurant to convert ground floor meeting rooms into additional dining and kitchen areas and to replace existing rooftop storage facilities with an outdoor cabana, bar and dining seating and a kitchen, according to a staff report.

The amended conditions of approval further allow the hotel to increase the number of tables and chairs in the outdoor dining area from seven tables and 20 chairs to 10 tables and 26 chairs. The amended conditions also allow for "amplified sound to project from the inside of the restaurant to the outdoor dining area," and increase the outdoor dining area's closing time from 10:30 p.m.-11 p.m.

Following the council's decision, the ZTA will go before the City Council for final approval, and the public can file an appeal of the decision within 14 days. ●



Photo courtesy of KBEV

Incoming Beverly Hills Unified School District Board of Education President Dr. Amanda Stern raises her hand to be sworn in by City Council Member Lili Bosse on Tuesday, Dec. 19.

**AMANDA STERN, from page 1** current term expires in December 2024.

His colleagues complimented him for keeping the district's focus on quality instruction and student wellness while overseeing the growth of its facilities. As president, he saw the debut of the Bulldog Wellness Center at Beverly Vista Middle School and guided the tail end of work on El Rodeo Elementary School, which is set to reopen next summer after closing for major renovations in 2019.

"You have lived construction for the last 12 years, first at Horace Mann (Elementary School), then Beverly Hills High School and then El Rodeo (Elementary School)," Beverly Hills Education Foundation Board President Tina Wiener said during the meeting. "We were so fortunate to have had you as a constant through the whole process, someone who has been there from the beginning and who was able to share what worked, what didn't, what to watch out for and to keep us on track. After all this time, you continue to put students first."

Members of the community said his leadership was characterized by "...dignity, style, and a sense of humor that will be missed," in a proclamation issued by the board. He often took a hands-on approach to his role, bringing families into the classroom by producing and starring in "Now Noah Knows!", a recurring series on KBEV highlighting a wide variety of people and programs in the district.

Stern is four years into her first term on the board and described her predecessor as a "mentor." She is a school psychologist with over 10 years of experience, a background that makes her uniquely qualified to lead the district as it places greater emphasis

on students' mental health, her colleagues said during the meeting.

"You're taking over this presidency at an exciting time, with El Rodeo coming online and the High School following close behind," Wiener said. "So as a school community, we have so much to look forward to in the upcoming school year, and we look forward to working closely with you and the board to continue to bring innovative programming and projects to students and the district."

Stern was sworn in by Councilmember Lili Bosse, and the incoming board president thanked city and district staff, local educational organizations as well as her wife, Lisa Rubel, and their two sons for their support. She went on to list improvement in students' math scores, better implementation of online education tools and further development of mental health services in the district as her priorities. She also pledged to combat antisemitism and divisiveness while building up the public's trust in their educators.

"With more access to information than ever before, it becomes untenable to know who or what to trust anymore, and I get that," Stern said. "I would like to ask you as parents, as residents, however, for your trust in us and the confidence that all of us in the Beverly Hills Unified School district and the city at large are working hard to ensure the well-being, safety and academic success of our youngest residents. And with that, I give a final thank you to our students."

In addition to Margo as the board's clerk, she will also have the support of longtime colleague on the educational body and its recently appointed Vice-President, Rachelle Marcus. ●

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# Birthdays



Happy Belated Birthday  
**JR DZUBAK**  
December 16



Happy Belated Birthday  
**LINDA IMMEDIATO**  
December 18



**MARY LEVIN CUTLER**  
December 24



**RAYNI WILLIAMS**  
December 24



**SARAH NOELLE SILVA**  
December 25



**DANNY FAR**  
December 26



**JERRY JOLTON**  
December 26



**JODI GALEN**  
December 27



## Astrology

BY HOLIDAY MATIS

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19). You'll mingle and mix. You'll find out quickly who will be a help to you in the weeks to come. Because you're so aware of how you feel around people, social life is a kind of lab to learn more about yourself and the world.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20). There's no reason you should settle for being the sole responsible person in your group. Let everyone contribute. And if they are not forthcoming with a plan, request what you think is fair. This will apply to cleaning, feeding and financing.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21). How much should you let your emotions guide decisions? It depends on the decision. If it's an issue that will affect what you experience daily, it's only wise to push your feelings into it and get a sense of what you're in for.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22). You're agreeable, empathetic and quick to forgive. You are apt to take note of the mental state of others and try to accommodate. Your patience is a small but meaningful contribution

to world peace.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22). No single eye is the end-all-be-all point of reference. Since you're aware that one point of view is not enough on many situations, you'll assemble a team. Fellow fire signs (Aries and Sagittarius) definitely have a place on it.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). People come in a host of flavors, and you'll get a sense of what would pair nicely, complement or clash. You will not regret your time spent in observation. You'll try to know people. In doing so, you set up your next right move.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Rebellion is not a mood you experience often, but the current changes have stirred something in you. A strict system of living will prompt you to act out, if only to prove that you can.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). As long as you're making improvements, why not make drastic ones? Think big and beautiful, wild and fantastic... because these unreal ideas may be just as easily applied as the reasonable ones.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Do what it takes to explore your ideas in your own way because your

instincts are dead-on. Even though well-intentioned teachers are around, you would be wise to listen to their advice today.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Open your arms and receive. There are all kinds of luck. Dumb luck is rare, fun and ultimately not as satisfying as the kind that requires your effort to drum up. The harder you work, the luckier you get.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Some

relationships grow naturally on their own, and others require constant care. High-maintenance connections will be worth their effort now, as they will be highly rewarding in the future.

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20). Each achievement is a culmination of numerous smaller successes. It's normal to feel uncertain about the details involved; it's the type of challenge that you gradually navigate and understand as you progress.



Meet Mombo, this week's eligible pup for adoption. He's a 2-year-old, 15-pound beagle mix and needs a new home. If interested in this very affectionate and loving boy, please contact Shelter of Hope at 805-379-3538.

[shelterhopepetshop.org](http://shelterhopepetshop.org)

# Fun and Games

SUDOKU AND PUZZLE ANSWERS FOR 12/15/23 ISSUE on page 16

SUDOKU 12/22/23 ISSUE								
5		8		7			4	
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## COURIER WEEK 16 NFL Schedule & Odds

**THURSDAY, DEC. 21**  
NEW ORLEANS @ L.A. RAMS  
5:15 PM PRIME VIDEO (LAR -3)

**SAUTURDAY, DEC. 23**  
CINCINNATI @ PITTSBURGH  
1:30 PM NBC (CIN -2)

**BUFFALO @ L.A. CHARGERS**  
5:00 PM PEACOCK (BUF -11)

**SUNDAY, DEC. 24**  
CLEVELAND @ HOUSTON  
10:00 AM CBS (CLE -2 1/2)

**WASHINGTON @ N.Y. JETS**  
10:00 AM CBS (NJ -3)

**SEATTLE @ TENNESSEE**  
10:00 AM CBS (SEA -3)

**INDIANAPOLIS @ ATLANTA**  
10:00 AM FOX (ATL -1)

**GREEN BAY @ CAROLINA**  
10:00 AM FOX (GB -5)

**SUNDAY, DEC. 24**  
DETROIT @ MINNESOTA  
10:00 AM FOX (DET -3)

**JACKSONVILLE @ TAMPA BAY**  
1:05 PM CBS (TB -1)

**DALLAS @ MIAMI**  
1:25 PM FOX (MIA -2)

**ARIZONA @ CHICAGO**  
1:25 PM FOX (CHI -4)

**NEW ENGLAND @ DENVER**  
5:15 NFL NET (DEN -6 1/2)

**MONDAY, DEC 25**  
LAS VEGAS @ KANSAS CITY  
10:00 AM CBS (KC -10)

**N.Y. GIANTS @ PHILADEPHIA**  
1:30 PM FOX (PHI -12)

**BALTIMORE @ SAN FRANCISCO**  
5:15 PM ABC/ESPN+ (SF -5)

Week 16 Spread by: Danny Sheridan

\*Check your local listings for games schedules. All times PST.

### THE NEW YORK TIMES SUNDAY MAGAZINE CROSSWORD PUZZLE 12/22/23 ISSUE

#### POLITICAL PUN-DITRY

BY ZACHARY DAVID LEVY AND JEFF CHEN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Zachary David Levy is an assistant professor of neurosurgery and emergency medicine at Hofstra's Zucker School of Medicine on Long Island. This is his sixth crossword for The Times and his first Sunday. Jeff Chen, of Seattle, is a writer and longtime crossword contributor. Zachary initially submitted a smaller version of this puzzle with three theme entries for the daily paper — but the theme felt better suited for a Sunday, with more examples. He enlisted Jeff to help. — W.S.

##### ACROSS

- 1 Whiskered bottom-dweller
- 7 Workout focus, informally
- 13 Tube traveler?
- 17 BOGO or YOLO
- 19 Ten-spot
- 20 Like Jabba the Hutt
- 21 The club's bouncer earned a living ...
- 23 Subjects of some cautionary tales
- 24 Things with keys
- 25 Org. overseeing workers' well-being
- 26 Treatment site
- 27 Insurance giant acquired by CVS in 2018
- 28 Bump on a log, say
- 30 The fashion magazine's editor focused on fasteners in her ...
- 35 Hubbub
- 38 The Coyotes, on N.H.L. scoreboards
- 39 Leader of a flock
- 40 The veterinarian specialized in mending ...
- 45 Most wan
- 48 Wrath
- 49 Obnoxious sort
- 50 Seaside retreat?
- 53 Event that might have "mutton busting"

- 54 Japanese maker of watches and mobile phones
- 57 "Little ol' me?"
- 58 Online command denoted by an arrow inside a cloud
- 61 "\_\_\_ Day Will Come" (1963 No. 1 hit)
- 62 The sound engineer was obsessed with the ...
- 67 Big name in filters
- 69 Unagi or anago
- 70 Family on TV's "Smallville"
- 71 The groundskeeper spent years studying ...
- 78 Besson who directed "The Fifth Element"
- 79 Food critic's asset
- 80 Ex-Giant Manning
- 81 Extreme lethargy
- 85 Inner self, in Jungian philosophy
- 88 Business-card abbr.
- 89 Instrument heard at the conclusion of "Bohemian Rhapsody"
- 91 Courtroom affirmation
- 92 French term of endearment
- 94 The weary general sat in his ...
- 100 Orange sources
- 103 Item of clothing patented by Mary Phelps Jacob in 1914
- 104 Niche
- 105 The carpenter measured twice for the ideal ...
- 111 Emmy winner Aduba
- 112 It's done in barrels

- 113 Salted \_\_\_ (margarita option)
- 114 Natural hairstyles, informally
- 116 Green region on a Risk board
- 119 Swelters
- 120 The paid escort was fined for ...
- 125 Stave off
- 126 How subway cars are packed during rush hour
- 127 Place of birth, education, work history, etc.
- 128 What a haggler hopes to pay
- 129 Exchanged words?
- 130 Like some rehab

##### DOWN

- 1 Polite term of address
- 2 Where Carol Burnett studied theater arts, for short
- 3 "Just happen to" mention some famous people
- 4 Eat
- 5 Director Lee
- 6 An eye for an eye, say?
- 7 Low island
- 8 Hole puncher
- 9 19-Down for a clean-up hitter
- 10 Kirsten of 1995's "Jumanji"
- 11 Summer cooler
- 12 \_\_\_ Baiul, Olympic figure-skating gold medalist
- 13 Musical feature in "Swan Lake" and "Peter and the Wolf"

- 14 Went trekking, say
- 15 Hwy. that runs from Key West to Maine
- 16 Flat earth?
- 18 Whiskey ingredient
- 19 See 9-Down
- 20 One way to wish
- 22 P, to Plato
- 29 Physique, slangily
- 31 Beverage brand with antioxidants
- 32 Something with a preview in a social media post
- 33 Up to
- 34 AOL, e.g.
- 35 \_\_\_ Stic (pen brand)
- 36 Name hidden in "I smell a rat"
- 37 Coat for a cookout
- 41 Plot device for many a soap opera
- 42 Eccentric
- 43 Relative of Camembert
- 44 Lead-in to service or sacrifice
- 46 Dr. who wrote: "I like nonsense. It wakes up the brain cells"
- 47 Rent
- 51 Customer-service "assistant," at times
- 52 Cry of frustration
- 55 Goddess depicted at the foot of King Tut's coffin
- 56 Goes (for)
- 58 "I'm at your disposal"
- 59 Game divided into periods called chukkers
- 60 Hockey fake
- 63 Virgil at the O.K. Corral

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- 64 Kick back
- 65 Brooding bunch
- 66 Strongly suspecting
- 67 Singer Mars
- 68 Velodrome vehicles
- 71 \_\_\_ rock, genre for T. Rex
- 72 Kind of milk
- 73 Encouraging shout
- 74 Soft powder
- 75 Fifth-brightest star in the night sky
- 76 Race in H.G. Wells's "The Time Machine"
- 77 Chinese dynasty
- 82 Where one might store sheet music
- 83 So-called "All-Father" of myth
- 84 Golf champ McIlroy
- 86 Salts
- 87 In and between
- 90 The Vitamin Shoppe competitor
- 93 "\_\_\_ had it!"
- 95 Obliques, e.g.
- 96 Reason to remove metal accessories
- 97 Butter bit
- 98 Grand finale?
- 99 Things indicated by yellow signage
- 101 Company acquired by Morgan Stanley in 2020
- 102 Having needles, as a cactus
- 105 Secret clique
- 106 Southwestern syrup source
- 107 Muscat native
- 108 Dicey
- 109 Foe in the Elder Scrolls video games
- 110 Neophyte, informally
- 115 Small cut
- 117 Analogy words
- 118 "Pronto!"
- 121 Winter hrs. in Chi-Town
- 122 Undershirt, maybe
- 123 Tired
- 124 Melted mess

ANSWERS FOUND  
IN NEXT WEEK'S  
PAPER...



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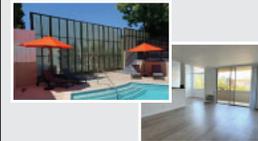
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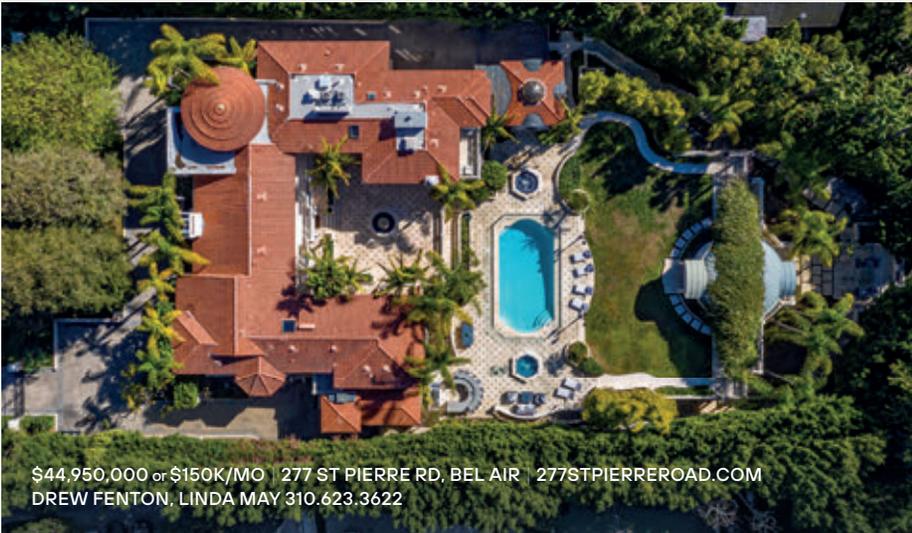
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