

# PRESS-TELEGRAM

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## TORRANCE

# Mental health clinic open for vets

The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic is backed by billionaire New York Mets owner

By Teresa Liu  
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A clinic that provides mental health services to Los Angeles-area veterans, active duty service members and their families has officially opened its doors in Torrance.

The 7,000-square-foot facility boasts 13 clinical offices, a com-

munity room, two family rooms and a large waiting area. It's currently run by a 10-member staff that includes five clinicians, a psychiatrist and a case manager. The clinic offers both in-person and telehealth services, the latter of which is accessible by veterans statewide.

Torrance Mayor George Chen and representatives from the lo-

cal chamber of commerce were among those who attended the Thursday grand opening.

The Torrance facility is the 23rd to open nationwide as part of a chain of mental health clinics that's backed by a \$275 million grant provided by Steve Cohen, a hedge fund billionaire and philanthropist who also owns the New York Mets.

The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic, 20800 Madrona



Veterans Village of San Diego President and CEO Akilah Templeton is joined by fellow officials as she cuts the ribbon for the Steven Cohen Military Family Clinic on Thursday.

PHOTO BY AXEL KOESTER

CLINIC » PAGE 4

## SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS

# A SNOW SURVIVAL LEARNING CURVE



PHOTOS BY JEFF GITCHEN — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Spencer Samuelian unloads some of the 600 pounds of food he delivered with his helicopter in the parking lot of The Church of Latter-day Saints in Lake Arrowhead on Monday. Samuelian is a bishop at the Laguna Beach Ward.



Angie Hnyan, left, Ben Reeves and Chris Reeves help unload 600 pounds of food, which were distributed to church members and those in need.

**Preparation:** Some residents were well-stocked; others have absorbed valuable lessons about supplies

By Joe Nelson  
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They stocked up on firewood, gasoline for generators, food and water, and even ice melt. But nothing could prepare residents of the San Bernardino

Mountains for the unprecedented wallop that inundated their homes and roads with snow and paralyzed their communities for two weeks.

In the end, much of what followed was beyond their control. Mail

SURVIVAL » PAGE 6

**Weather:** Snow is forecast for higher elevations; light rain for rest of the region

By Josh Cain  
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Southern California will see wet and cold weather return today and over this weekend, forecasters said, which could lead to more hazards for the region's mountain towns already hit hard with historic amounts of snow.

The National Weather Service in San Diego said the snowfall will not be nearly as intense as last week, when some communities were, quite literally, buried under feet of powder.

But the fact that any amount of precipitation will return to these areas could lead to complications for the ongoing rescue efforts of those residents still trapped or assessing the

WEATHER » PAGE 6

**INSIDE:** The San Bernardino County coroner blames 1 mountain death on storm; Others are probed. PAGE A8

## PORT OF LONG BEACH

# Addition to Pier G extension complete

Wharf, expanded by 240 feet, will allow larger and cleaner container ships to be offloaded

By Donna Littlejohn  
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The Port of Long Beach's \$55 million Pier G wharf expansion is finished and officials hailing it as a major step in increasing business at the nation's second largest seaport during a Thursday celebration.

The expanded wharf will allow bigger — and cleaner — ships to call at the improved facility. The celebration at the port headquarters included a ribbon-cutting ceremony and the signing of a labor pact with unions for future construction projects at the port.

The port's Pier G Wharf Improvements Project adds 240 feet of wharf, allowing terminal operator International Transportation Service to accommodate container ships capable of carrying up to 16,000 twenty-foot-equivalent units of cargo.

The project, funded by the port, also adds back-

PIER G » PAGE 4

## GRANNY FLATS

# Huntington Beach sued by state over housing decisions

By Kaitlyn Schallhorn  
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California is suing Huntington Beach, accusing the city of knowingly violating state housing laws.

In a clear warning to other cities, Gov. Gavin Newsom and Attorney General Rob Bonta, along with other state officials, lambasted Huntington Beach's recent housing decisions.

California is suing Huntington Beach, they said Thursday, over not processing applications for property owners to build accessory dwelling units, ADUs, commonly called granny flats. And officials warned more action could occur should the City Council continue with its plan to oppose

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## Housing

FROM PAGE 1

the builder's remedy process. "Huntington Beach has decided to slam the door in homeowners' faces," Bonta said. "No one gets to pick and choose the laws they want to follow."

"The laws are clear, as is Huntington Beach's willful, intentional refusal to follow them. That's why we're in court," Bonta said.

Starting in 2017, state laws lifted barriers to building secondary units in single lot. Housing advocates and state officials argue ADUs will help meet housing goals, offering living space for multiple generations of families or much-needed rentals by making use of larger lots that were traditional in many communities.

But Huntington Beach officials said Thursday the city will accept new ADU applications and is processing 100 or so already in the pipeline.

The process for ADUs will be streamlined and reviewed by the council on March 21, along with other housing issues, but Huntington Beach is at present "following the state housing laws despite the fact that we believe the state has overreached," said City Attorney Michael Gates.

"But in the meantime, we're following the state housing laws."

As housing goals were handed out to cities throughout California for the num-

ber of homes — including mandates at various levels of affordability — they have to plan for over the next decade, the pushback was quick and loud. But most also got to work identifying in their required local planning where developers could build what the state figured is needed to meet housing needs.

As of Thursday, 242 California cities, including 103 in Southern California, were without a state-approved housing plan. That opens them up to the builder's remedy process, where developers can propound housing projects with cities having less say in what's planned.

State officials said Thursday they sent Huntington Beach councilmembers letters warning of the ramifications of their housing decisions prior to the lawsuit. The city has argued that as a charter city, Huntington Beach has great autonomy and isn't subject to state housing laws.

"At the end of the day, the state's vision as it relates to housing cannot be realized anywhere else except locally," Newsom said.

Huntington Beach, Newsom said, is not serving its community well with these housing policies and will "waste time, energy and taxpayer dollars."

Earlier in the week, Councilmember Pat Burns called for resistance to state housing mandates, arguing that the relaxed state provisions on ADU constructions can

harm the quality of life in single-family home neighborhoods.

"Sacramento thinks they can tell us how to zone our properties," Burns said. "And we need to resist it in any way we can."

Mayor Tony Strickland called the state's lawsuit filed on Thursday "a bunch of bluster." Officials said the city is "midstride" in its housing planning and more decisions will be made on March 21, so at this stage, they say the state's allegations are a "nonissue."

Strickland called the state's press conference "nothing but grandstanding."

"I feel like I don't need to hear a lecture from Gov. Newsom," Strickland said. "As mayor of San Francisco, he left the city in shambles. He should focus on his job as governor."

Huntington Beach filed its own lawsuit against California on Thursday afternoon in federal court, challenging the state-mandated goal of planning for the construction of 13,368 new homes by 2030.

Newsom's "goal is to urbanize quiet, private property-owning communities," Strickland said. "This lawsuit filed by our city attorney today is the first major step in taking the governor and the state to task over their faulty narratives about housing and their unconstitutional legislative and administrative means of stripping charter cities of their

ability to make their own decisions."

Regional Housing Needs Allocation, or RHNA, laws, Strickland said, would cause Huntington Beach to double in size.

"If Huntington Beach's City Council majority wants to change the laws, they are welcome to reach out to their state legislators, but to date my office and I have not heard from them on this issue, making clear that this is political theater of the worst kind, and a huge waste of Huntington Beach taxpayer dollars to boot," Sen. Dave Min, a Democrat who represents Huntington Beach, said in a statement.

Assemblymember Diane Dixon, a Republican, said she had not read the lawsuit as of Thursday morning, but said she is "familiar with this issue and am sympathetic to the cities in my district that are wrestling with similar mandates."

California has sued Huntington Beach over housing plans before. A 2019 lawsuit ended with Huntington Beach settling out of court, a point state officials harped on when announcing the new legal battle.

"They tested us in 2019," Newsom said. "They're testing us again."

While Huntington Beach is taking one of the more extreme stances against state housing policies, municipalities across the state are struggling with huge increases in state homebuilding mandates and stricter

planning requirements.

Redondo Beach hasn't outright banned builder's remedy projects but has been slow to update its housing plans to accommodate its allocation, with Mayor Bill Brand a vocal opponent to the state's housing mandates. Redondo Beach has two prominent builder's remedy projects in the works, but both are on track for denials by the City Council, developer Leo Pustilnikov said.

Prior to Senate Bill 9's enactment, about 240 cities and the League of California Cities presented Newsom with a letter urging him to veto the bill. Shortly after it became law, four charter cities — Redondo Beach, Torrance, Carson and Whittier — signed on to a lawsuit against the state, asking L.A. Superior Courts to find the law in violation of the California Constitution and ban its enforcement. (Court records show a hearing is scheduled in late April.)

Those four cities said they were in support of building more housing within their bounds — but categorized Senate Bill 9, the now state law that allows duplexes and lot splits in single-family neighborhoods, as a "one size fits all" approach that doesn't adequately ensure

the development of affordable places to live. Huntington Beach officials say they, too, support reasonable, locally controlled housing development.

"It is flawed legislation that strips our city of local control and residents of their ability to provide input," Torrance Mayor George Chen said Thursday. "What we need instead is for the state to work with us in providing the needed tools and resources to allow cities to streamline local housing approvals in a responsible manner and fund affordable housing."

In Manhattan Beach, where the City Council earlier this year reluctantly approved the development of an apartment complex that fell under the builders' remedy, Mayor Steve Napolitano said he isn't surprised by the lawsuit — as plenty of other cities are with Huntington Beach in spirit on maintaining local control.

And while the state's intentions with these housing laws are good, Napolitano added, legislators don't consider what it takes for cities to abide by them. Cities don't need total control, he said, but they do want balance.

"Huntington is doing what other cities have been thinking, but didn't want to risk themselves," Napolitano said. "We've all been lobbying on local control for years, but that's now falling on deaf ears; the courts are the only thing left for cities as far as local control goes."

Staff writers Jeff Collins, Tyler Shawn Evans, Kristy Hutchings, Lisa Jacobs and Erika I. Ritchie contributed to this report.

## Pier G

FROM PAGE 1

land area and mooring infrastructure at Pier G.

Several unions also were on hand to celebrate the portwide project labor agreement between the port and the Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council.

The Long Beach harbor commission recently approved a 10-year labor agreement that ensures major infrastructure projects in the port will be completed without any work stoppages, strikes or lockouts. Workers also will receive prevailing wages under the agreement, which requires 40% of the work to be performed by local residents. Training and apprenticeship opportunities also are included in the agreement, which covers projects worth at least \$5 million.

"Here in Long Beach, we have some of the best-skilled workers," Long Beach Mayor Rex Richard-

son said. "They're working nonstop to get things done on time. With this new project labor agreement, it means countless great-paying jobs will stay right here in Long Beach."

"I remember when things like project labor agreements were controversial in Long Beach."

The new agreement also includes a process for resolving any differences between contractors and workers and sets hiring goals with a focus on skilled laborers and apprentices, as well as veterans, single parents and other transitional workers.

International Transportation Service CEO Kim Holtzman said the berth extension "amounts to less than a 1% area increase to our terminal, but it has boosted berth capabilities from being able to serve 11,000 TEU vessels to 16,000 TEU vessels."

That, Holtzman said, "will complement the five ship-to-shore cranes that ITS has already ordered for the berth and will be delivered later in 2023."



Officials sign a proclamation marking the completion of the wharf expansion at Pier G, on Thursday in Long Beach. From left, Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero, Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson, Long Beach Harbor Commission President Sharon Weissman and building and construction trades council Executive Secretary Chris Hannan.

## Clinic

FROM PAGE 1

Ave., Suite C-100, marks the third such facility in California. The first clinic opened in a San Diego home in 2019, followed by another in Oceanside last year.

Dr. Anthony Hassan, president and CEO of Co-ben Veterans Network, noted that veterans often have trouble getting timely treatment.

"Somebody asked me yesterday, 'What keeps me up at night?'" Hassan said. "What keeps me up is that when we have people who finally ask for help and then they call and they're told, 'I can't see you for six months, I can't see you for four months.'"

"Granted, we're not perfect," he added, "but we can see you a lot sooner than that."

There are roughly 18 million veterans and 2.1 million active-duty and reserve service members nationwide, according to the U.S. census. And since 9/11, there have been 2.8 million active-duty American military personnel deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond, leading to increasing numbers of combat veterans among the population. The most publicized mental health challenges facing veterans service members are post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. At some point in their life, seven out of every 100 Veterans (or 7%) will have PTSD, according to an estimate by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

More than 52,000 post-9/11 veterans, 6,000 active-duty service members and 10,000 military family members in Los Angeles



County are eligible for the services offered by trained clinicians at the Torrance facility, the CVN estimates.

The clinic will provide mental health services in the form of individual therapy, family therapy, couples sessions and group sessions. It takes all major forms of health insurance. If a patient doesn't have insurance, the case manager will step in to provide connection to financial services, said clinic Director John Balancio.

The key difference between the Cohen clinics and others that serve veterans, Hassan said, is that they also treat family members of veterans or active duty members. This includes parents, siblings, spouses or partners, children, caretakers and other who might also deal with mental health challenges.

The catalyst for the network was Cohen's son, Robert, who joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 2009 and served in Afghanistan from August 2010 to February 2011, Hassan said. When the younger Cohen returned to the U.S., he urged his father to start the network — because he saw the need for mental health care in the military population.



Since its inception in 2016, the CVN clinics have seen 50,000 clients, out of which 53% were veterans or active duty, and 47% were family members.

Sgt. Ryan Pitts, a Medal of Honor recipient and an ambassador for CVN, said during the grand opening that it's a "hard lifestyle" for people who've ever worn the uniform, as well as for those who are connected to people who have worn the uniform.

In 2003, the then-17-year-old Pitts joined the Army under the delayed entry program. During his time in service, Pitts was deployed twice to Afghanistan, in 2005 for 15 months. In 2014, he received the Medal of Honor for his heroic act during the Battle of Mazar in 2008.

Pitts recalled getting to the medical clinic after he was wounded and looking across the room for his battle buddies, noticing who wasn't there.

"I can tell you, the invisible wounds have taken a far greater toll on me than the physical ones," he said. "You know, there's a lot of things, even without the stress of your own mental health challenges, (such as)

Staff Sergeant Ryan Pitts, Medal of Honor recipient and CVN Ambassador, speaks before ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the Steven Cohen Military Family Clinic, a new clinic providing mental health services to L.A. area veterans, active-duty service members and their families, in Torrance on Thursday.

PHOTO BY AXEL ROESTER

worrying about other people and service members in uniform, you know, just being in that community."

The transition from military service to college wasn't difficult, Pitts said, but he started to experience challenges when he joined the corporate world.

"As time went on, I could see that there were impacts at home," he said. "I was distant, I was distracted. I was never present. Even with my wife and kids, I wasn't happy to come home. I didn't enjoy being a Dad. And I saw that (having an effect) in my family."

It wasn't until nine months after Pitts told his family about his mental health challenges — about five or six years after leaving the military — that he decided to seek treatment, he said.

Mental health care, especially among the veteran population, can often be stigmatized, Balancio said.

"We can be apprehensive to receive treatment and get care," he said "so by being available and open for services, we're hoping that it can make getting care a lot easier and help break barriers down and make care more accessible."

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