L.A.'s new COVID-19 infection records • Mina Caputo's latest solo effort • New LED cannabis mandate
NEWS RECAP: L.A. COUNTY SETS COVID-19 INFECTION RECORDS

In this week’s news recap, Southern California triggered a state mandated lockdown, while the beginning phases of COVID-19 vaccine distribution draws near.

BY ISAÍ ROCHA AND EVAN LANCASTER

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ON LOCKDOWN

Southern California triggered a state mandated stay-at-home order Sunday, as Intensive Care Units in the region filled to more than 90 percent of their maximum capacity.

The three-week order will expire on Dec. 27, affecting not only L.A. County, but Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Imperial, Inyo, Mono, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura, as well.

The L.A. County Department of Public Health modified its health order to reflect the state orders, although many of the restrictions were already implemented by previous county orders.

"[T]he Los Angeles County Health Officer Order will be modified to fully align with additional safety measures across sectors and the required effective date," Public Health said in a news release, Saturday. "The State Regional Stay at Home Order is similar to the existing County Safer at Home Health Order with additional sector closings."

Some of the sectors that will now be asked to close completely are hair salons, barbershops, personal care services, museums, zoos and aquariums. Under the previous L.A. County order, those sectors were allowed to be partially open with specific COVID-19 guidelines in place.

The order also asks that the Southern California region shut down bars, breweries, indoor movie theaters, cardrooms, amusement parks, non-essential travel and sporting events with an audience, although those were already restricted under L.A. County’s previous order.

Gatherings will still not be allowed with people outside of their own household, except for church services and protests, which L.A. Public Health noted were protected by the constitution.

Both shopping centers and retail locations will operate at 20 percent of their maximum capacity, with customer access being regulated at the entrance.

As was the case with a previous order, restaurants cannot provide indoor or outdoor dining, leaving them with the option to operate through takeout, delivery or drive-thru when applicable.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the ICU threshold on Thursday, Dec. 3, as the state was split into five regions for the order: Southern California, Northern California, the Bay Area, Greater Sacramento and the San Joaquin Valley.

Secretary for the California Health and Human Services Agency, Dr. Mark Ghaly, noted that ICU capacity is the primary focus for the state, as projections for the second half of December show that ICU beds in California will be at 112 percent of their maximum capacity at the current rate of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations.

"Bottom line is, we are looking at Intensive Care Unit capacity as the primary trigger for
10,000 POSITIVE COVID-19 CASES IN ONE DAY

L.A. County saw its highest number of single-day positive COVID-19 cases, tallying 10,528 on Sunday, Dec. 6.

As of this writing, more than 3,900,000 people have been tested for the virus in L.A. County, and of those, 11 percent have yielded positive test results. The hospitalizations have also gradually increased to all-time highs in the county, with 2,988 currently hospitalized with the virus.

As positive cases have increased since Thanksgiving, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti noted that L.A. County saw 43,601 COVID-19 cases in one week’s time, a number higher than the positive cases recorded in the entire month of October.

“Today the numbers were stark again and record-setting in a bad way,” Garcetti said. “Get-deeper, more restrictive actions,” Ghaly said. “Because when that capacity goes away … the quality of care sometimes takes a dip and we see outcomes we don’t want to see.”

AAA Travel Alert: Many travel destinations have implemented COVID-related restrictions. Before making travel plans, check to see if hotels, attractions, cruise lines, tour operators, restaurants and local authorities have issued health and safety-related restrictions or entry requirements. The local tourist board is a good resource for updated information.

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ting this virus under control is mission critical for Los Angeles and I know that we can do this.”

The mayor added that at the current rate of infections, the county could see an additional 3,000 deaths by year’s end, bringing the overall total to more than 11,000.

HOW FIRST VACCINES WILL BE DISTRIBUTED IN CALIFORNIA

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that California secured more than 327,000 COVID-19 vaccines, with a possibility of acquiring 2.15 million doses by the end of December.

Newsom detailed the plans for the vaccine, saying they will be distributed in three phases, with doses being prioritized by groups such as critical healthcare workers and long-term care residents.

While this initial test run will be distributed to roughly 163,000 people, when considering the 327,000 vaccines must be given in two doses, Newsom said that there will be more coming to California in January, February and March.

“There is light at the end of this tunnel. We are not in a permanent state — this is a temporary state,” Newsom said. “This is the third wave of a pandemic … with a vaccine that is now being distributed, not by one distributor, but by many different distributors … that we have been monitoring through our scientific safety review. Help is on the way.”

As of this writing, the FDA has not approved the acquired Pfizer vaccine, but Gov. Newsom said it is anticipated to be approved by Thursday, Dec. 10, with the first doses coming in by Tuesday, Dec. 15.

RESTAURANTS FIGHT AGAINST SHUTDOWN ORDERS

The decision to shut down outdoor dining has not sat well with restaurants owners in L.A. County and a group of restaurateurs have decided to protest the order.

A video of Pineapple Hill Saloon owner Angela Marsden received more than 9 million views over the weekend as she filmed what appeared to be a film set filled with catering tables and chairs, set up in close proximity to her closed down Sherman Oaks bar.

“Everything I own is being taken away from me and they set up a movie company right next to my outdoor patio,” Marsden said in the video. “I have had enough. They have not given us money and they have shut us down. We cannot survive. My staff cannot survive.”

Marsden was part of a protest outside of L.A. County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl’s Santa Monica home, as multiple restaurant owners opposed Kuehl and the Board of Supervisors’ decision to eliminate in-person dining.

On the same day that the Board of Supervisors voted to ban outdoor dining, and Supervisor Sheila Kuehl called outdoor dining “dangerous,” Kuehl was spotted dining at Santa Monica’s Il Forno, an incident that Kuehl’s office confirmed.

The weekend after Kuehl’s dining experience, a group of protesters stood outside her home with signs that read “Open L.A.” and “All businesses are essential.” Social media video shows one protester knocking on Kuehl’s door after a Santa Monica Police Department officer instructed him not to go on her property.

Marsden has created a GoFundMe campaign for her bar, in hopes to keep its doors open. As of this writing, the crowdfunding campaign has raised more than $164,000, after setting a goal of $10,000.
MINA CAPUTO AND HER TERRIFYING, ENLIGHTENING LIFE

Life of Agony Singer Unleashes Latest Solo Effort

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

We’re speaking with Life of Agony frontwoman Mina Caputo as she celebrates both her birthday, and the release of new album The Mones. In a reversal of roles, Caputo has gifted the record to her fans, asking only that people donate what they can but gladly offering it for free to those unable to pay during the current economic crisis.

It’s one hell of a gift; the album is both dark and hopeful, honest and raw. It’s blessed with a rare lyrical depth, with a few twists of thought. Caputo doesn’t think like everybody else – she’s a free thinker. She’s lived a rare life, fronting New York hardcore/metal crossover band Life of Agony since 1989 (with a break in-between). Mina came out as transgender in 2011, and the title of her new album is a reference to the hormones she takes.

“One minute I can be extremely happy and the next I wanna jump out the window and I’m always like, the fucking ‘mones, man!” she says. “The hormones. I don’t know if I should call it the neurological power or cosmic power to allow you rise and then just fall.”

It would be tempting to think that the same themes, of transition, carry through the record. In fact, it’s not as straightforward as that.

“There isn’t a conceptual destination on the album and there is no straight journey to some arrival point,” she says. “I don’t look at life like that, I don’t write music like that. It’s just very open ended. It’s like life. It’s very bizarre and mysterious. It’s wonderful and amazing. It’s terrifying. It’s enlightening. It’s a miracle. But we still don’t know who we are, why we are where we are. What this life is, what it’s supposed to represent, where we’ve come from, everything. That’s how I write my music – there’s no plan, there’s no destination. If I can evoke some kind of emotion from you, and if you can relate – whether you’re trans or not has nothing to do with anything, we’re all human here.”

The Mones is Caputo’s seventh solo studio album (not including acoustic, live, demo albums and EPs) and her first since 2016’s Love Hard. Caputo says that she’s grown in a positive musical direction in those four years.

“Weird every album, I’m carving some deeper niche into my work,” she says. “I think it’s quite brilliant. I’ve used digital and I finished it all analog. We have Space Oddity Bowie outboard gear from the ’69 sessions, we have Pink Floyd Dark Side of the Moon outboard gear that we bought.

“More than ever, we’re enjoying each other and we’re enjoying being a band again,” she says. “We couldn’t for a long time, there was so much bad blood. Every band goes through it with members. Now we’re back to being a band again, being in the same room, loving and enjoying each other’s company. Rebuilding relationships. A lot of shit went down behind closed doors that people really don’t know and it’s not worth glorifying that negativity because it’s yesterday’s news and it doesn’t matter. We’ve started writing a new record.”

It’s clear that Caputo is in a rich vein of creative form, as she aims to put out a record every year. She enjoys working with talented people and offering them creative freedom in the studio, as she strives to grow as a person and an artist.

“People are free to surprise me,” she says. “And that’s how I live my life. My only requirement is honesty. If you want to fuck another girl, go ahead but just be honest. Either invite me for a threesome, or just be honest. It’s all cool. No regulations, we’re here to be free. We’re here to discover our deepest insatiable desires. That’s how I like to work, and that’s how I like to play. My work is play anyway.”

In the hyper-masculine worlds of metal and hardcore punk, a trans singer still raised eyebrows nine years ago, and she continues to do so. We ask her if she’s seen any progression in attitudes within the community, and she replies “yes and no.”

“There’s a duality, there’s still a yin and yang, and I think that’s necessary,” she says. “You’re free to think how you want. Let’s talk, maybe you give me a new idea or I see something in a different way. I still think it’s a very masculine, testosterone-fueled world. The males still dominate in the industry. I segregate myself from all of these puny, tiny, human ideologies. When I was living as a guy, all the radio DJs used to play us. As soon as I came out, the same radio DJs are nowhere to be found. We had meetings with people. People say, ‘There’s no transphobia or homophobia in metal or hard rock’ and it’s like, ‘shut the fuck up, you have no idea what you’re talking about.’ That shit is rampant, every fucking day.”

Moving forward, into an uncertain 2021, Caputo says that she’s planning a video and a vinyl release of the album. Touring is on hold of course, but she’s staying busy.

“I play classical piano so I’m studying 40-50 hours a week,” she says. “I have about 2,000 books in my library – I’m obsessed with reading philosophy and poetry. Anything deep. Stoicism. Music biographies. Books on consciousness, the creative spark, shamanism. A part of me just wants to go back into the jungle and live with the indigenous people, never return to western culture. Those are the true successes. We’re not making progress. When an asteroid hits the planet, western men will be illuminated. The people in the forest will survive. This world will be in a hellscape if food is off the shelf for a few days.”

Mina Caputo’s The Mones is out now.
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As a result of last week's L.A. County shutdown of outdoor dining, the Cloverfield's General Manager Mary Thompson spent the Wednesday before and Friday after Thanksgiving calling 80 percent of her staff, tearfully letting them go. If it wasn't for a last minute partnership with the Rooftop Cinema Club at the Santa Monica Airport, the popular neighborhood spot may have closed until restrictions are relaxed again.

"To be completely honest, this last shutdown was devastating for us," Thompson tells L.A. Weekly from the restaurant's large patio at the Santa Monica Airport that has seen steady traffic during the pandemic. "As a new business, opening during Covid and having never really used any of these to-go platforms or ways and means to sell the business, we were relying strictly on people coming in to support us. Without this theater we would have had to shut down completely until things officially open back up whenever that ends up being. For us, this is a lifeline and we were able to save some jobs."

The process for dinner and a movie is seamless and contactless. There's a QR code when you book your ticket that links directly to the food menu that can be ordered and paid for ahead of time. The kitchen cooks everything from scratch to order. It gets boxed up and sent over hot in warming bags on scooters to a kiosk at the drive-in.

They text you when the food is ready and you scoop it up at the kiosk where there are additional condiments, napkins and eating utensils. The menu is updated weekly and currently includes Blockbuster barbecoa tacos, the Drama chicken sandwich, the Take One Cloverfield hamburger as well as the Plot Twist market chicken sandwich, pizzas and salads. If the city of Santa Monica allows, there will be beer and wine to follow. The special drive-in menu will also be available for regular pickup and delivery through Postmates this weekend.

"We sat down and said, what would we crave at a movie theater as a foodie?" says Thompson. "What would you want to eat in your car? This is our initial menu that we will use as a jumping off point. This menu is by no means done. Next we're launching churros and chocolate and other dessert items. We're going to come up with more and more until the wheels fall off the bus."

In other Cloverfield news, Santa Monica's prodigal chef Luigi Fineo returns after a four-month sabbatical, eager to get his fingers back into the organic semolina. A good friend and neighbor of the restaurant, he will launch Pasta To Go with Luigi Fineo tonight. It's a sustainable program that requires a bit of heating up at home that can be picked up at the restaurant after 5 p.m. To start, Fineo is making the fettuccine daily which just needs to be dropped into hot water for a few minutes with a choice of pesto, tomato and beef Bolognese sauces and focaccia made in the Cloverfield kitchen.

The Rooftop Cinema's We Love L.A. series kicks off with a holiday program this month with 100% of community screening proceeds going to Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. For now, and pending any other looming shutdowns, the drive-in will continue through the end of January.

“Our on-site partnership with the Cloverfield is a wonderful way for us to work with local businesses, especially as they opened in 2020 and have had to navigate operating a new restaurant during Covid-19,” says Gerry Cottele Jr., Rooftop Cinema Club Founder. “We always aim to support local food partners at our venues, so with their restaurant also on the airport grounds and a contact-free order and pickup system that fits perfectly into our contactless cinema experience, it was a no-brainer.”
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ESTHER PEARL WATSON’S PAINTS THE PANDEMIC’S DAILY STRANGENESS

Hundreds of small scenes chronicle months of mundane surrealism

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

In a sense this project is a straightforward documentary. One person, a painter living in Los Angeles, spends the better part of a year making daily observations on life in her sphere, with details of any particularly memorable experiences, and notes on current events for context. In the world of art, and especially American folk art, sustained mindfulness and this energy of the small-town diary is a whole genre. But in the studio and community of Esther Pearl Watson in the midst of 2020, it’s anything but commonplace. It’s Covid.

Watson started the body of work that became Safer at Home: Pandemic Paintings in March in the early days of the shelter in place orders in Los Angeles, and the series spans the timeline of the pandemic right through to the days before the show opened at Vielmetter Los Angeles in late November. In a still ongoing series of nearly 200 paintings, each no bigger than a laptop, Watson processes the subtle and cataclysmic changes wrought by a season of public health crises, civil unrest, and political volatility. But she does this through a lens as intimate as the work’s scale, with street views of urban and suburban blocks, one frame at a time.

In her beguiling style of flatness, folksy almost childlike rendering of figures and buildings, expressive foliage and eccentric palette,
coupled with blocky text and prosaic captions, Watson uses a motif of repetition to highlight changes to the landscape. Sidewalk, building, sky, people. We see more and more people out walking, more stores boarding up, oddly empty streets, long lines at testing sites, repeated visits to senior living facilities, a wave of new political murals, empty streets newly flooded with BLM protests, the sudden almost universal appearance of masks, the occasional lone figure unmasked, the unexpected attention paid to variations in the weather, and the epic fire season that made life in her Glassell Park area even more unbearable. As time goes on, we see yard signs, ubiquitous Amazon delivery trucks, and a proliferation of detail from the artist’s private life and public experiences.

Each work features the date, the most salient observation or experience as depicted in the scene and maybe some Covid fact, or grim milestone. At the gallery, the paintings are arranged in groupings by month and are interspersed with drooping black banners arranged among them, in white characters presenting starkly just the numbers of the climbing total US death count from the virus: 1, 250, 10,000, 150,000, 200,000, and so on. These numerical shrouds get bigger as the tally increases, while the paintings remain small, so that the presence of death physically comes to overshadow the entire sequence.

But as stark as the context and as unsettling are the milestones she highlights, within each one of these immaculate, vernacular mini masterpieces exists a depth of fine detail, a love of off-kilter pattern and intuitive color, a jauntiness in the figures’ postures, and a clear spirit of resilience, adaptation, cooperation, and an honoring of small empathetic gestures in the actions of the people, and in the actions of the painter as well.

Vielmetter Los Angeles, 1700 S. Santa Fe, downtown. On view online and in person by appointment through January 16; vielmetter.com.
NEW LED MANDATE WOULD DEVASTATE CALIFORNIA CANNABIS QUALITY

In addition to costing the cannabis industry $255 million by 2022, LED pot isn’t that great yet

BY JIMI DEVINE

The cannabis industry has a limited time to weigh in on a California Energy Commission proposal to force new energy efficiency standards for indoor lighting used in horticulture.

While LEDs are certainly the future, so is a Mars colony. We have a lot of the hardware we would need to get there right now, sure, but those final steps are clearly at least a little bit in the future. The same can be said for the promise of LED. Yes, everyone is hopeful those final quality hurdles will be jumped in the not-too-distant future, but in the meantime, fixtures that use high pressure sodium lights are what the best pot in the world is being grown under.

If people aren’t allowed to use HPS lights to grow their weed, the quality potential of cannabis in the California legal marketplace will be artificially capped by the five utility companies that bankrolled the report proposing the new change.

What is the actual change? Proposed changes to the energy code, which historically only covered commercial and industrial buildings, would expand the code to include indoor and greenhouse horticultural operations over 1,000 square feet in size. This move would impact conventional agriculture, cannabis and hemp.

One of the people attempting to rally the industry to take action against the proposal is Bob Gunn. After working for 13 years in the utility sector, Gunn founded Seinergy in 2015 to help the cannabis industry deal with utility regulators.

“I started hearing about the California Energy Commission looking at energy code for horticulture lighting last year,” Gunn told L.A. Weekly. “The first time it really came up was at a utility conference – you know, utility people talking about cannabis energy use.”

Gunn argues one of the things pushing California to take action is watching other states make moves to regulate the industry’s total power load on the grid. “So, I started to hear about Massachusetts starting to regulate. They put in 36 watts per square foot, which is annoying. Illinois did something very similar. And then California saying, well we need to kind of, you know, whack down the energy use somehow,” he said.

Then the confusion started. Gunn explained how when people in cannabis talk about lighting it is very different from when the rest of the world says lighting. “We think, you know, two watts per square foot for an office building or one and a half watts per square foot for a restaurant like that’s the energy code called title 24.”

Gunn said right now when people use an HPS, or any type of lighting source within the manufacturing process that takes place
utilities companies determining the fate of California cultivators and consumers can do in this moment to prevent the change is submit comments to the CEC docket. The meeting concerning the Title 24 modification is on December 9.

Gunn said if the industry doesn’t act, the 75 percent increase in what the new lights cost will hit California’s legal cannabis cultivators to the amount of $255 million in the coming years without any of the subsidies or rebates normally available to ease such transitions. Most importantly, that number does not include the potential impact of lighting changes on the efficiency of a grow room or the quality of flower produced.

Some California cannabis companies who grabbed their chunk of the market growing under HPS lights now prep for the future. Among those with LED test rooms is the award winners at Alien Labs. Now on their fifth LED run, Alien Labs founder Ted Lidie broke down their experience with the future tech. And the longtime presumption LEDs would eventually take over somewhere down the line.

“It always looked enticing,” Lidie told L.A. Weekly. “But the tech just wasn’t there. The price wasn’t there. When you’re coming up, R&D is so elective. We focus a lot on seeds. That’s why we didn’t get in on it early.”

So how is the LED experiment going for a company growing some of the most coveted weed on the legal market? It’s getting there. “And it’s not to say that it isn’t good quality, it’s just that it looks so much different from HPS and we still kind of prefer the look of HPS. Maybe preference isn’t the right thing, but we have been delivering a product that looks a certain way. It can be jarring to come out with a product that looks differently, even if the quality is the same. Or even better, you know,” Lidie said.

Lidie said one of the biggest issues for LED weed at the moment is bag appeal. He claimed from what he’s seen that you could give him 10 pieces of LED weed and 10 pieces of HPS weed and he could pick it out easily. He explained the main structural difference is that it’s way denser with shorter trichome stalks. But he argued in a blind tasting, where it’s already rolled up, he wouldn’t be surprised if people leaned more towards the LED weed.

We asked Lidie if it felt weird that the power companies were going to be able to dictate the way he produced his product. “Yeah, it feels weird, but not in a conspiracy way,” he replied.

Lidie said he wasn’t surprised in the slightest at cannabis taking the blame on power issues despite wider problems that have plagued the utility sector since before the industry even existed. He said this wasn’t the first thing the industry would be scapegoated for and it won’t be the last.

We asked Lidie if he were doing a grow room buildout right now, given the circumstances, would he toss up a couple hundred LEDs or HPS lights and just switch them out later? “We’re about to drop 800 new lights, we’re going HPS all the way,” he replied.

in a controlled environment, it’s generally not regulated. “It’s like they don’t say how much energy per gram of steel smelting you can use or how many kilowatt hours per donut you can make, but that’s what they’re starting to do with cannabis. But they’ve zoomed in on horticulture lighting.”

While there are other regulations that cultivators would have to jump through with the new energy code, dehumidifier and greenhouse efficiency being a couple, Gunn believes the lighting regulations are positioned to cut the industry off at its knees. This led to him getting involved in the stakeholder process around the decision in the early goings. He was not impressed with how it played out.

At the time, the Energy Commission was saying it wasn’t their proposal. It was funded by the Codes and Standards Enhancement (CASE) Initiative completely bankrolled by Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas & Electric Company, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District. Right off the bat the five utilities companies determining the fate of the quality of California’s cannabis noted they don’t take any responsibility for the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of any data, information, method, product, policy or process disclosed in this document.

Gunn explained anybody could take a proposal to the CEC as a stakeholder. Essentially, the CASE team hired consultants to write the report they are taking to the CEC. But Gunn argues they fell short on talking to actual farmers.

He would have expected the supply chain actors, who are selling equipment into the market, to be spoken with about the level of efficiency people are buying and what the technical viability is of pushing the bar to a higher level, and then the actual growers themselves. Gunn argues the reality has been input from out-of-state growers and regulators.

“And don’t get me wrong, I help people sell LEDs. I’m a fan of LEDs. But not as a mandate for people. Want to opt in and make the commitment and do the R&D? Make that investment? Absolutely. Let’s help them do it,” Gunn said.

Gunn notes there is a chance that HPS could be worked in, if just the light is graded. The bulb itself is the most efficient part of the process, but once you get the other components of the light involved the efficiency drops quickly. However as it stands, only LED would be efficient enough to meet the 2022 standards.

Gunn said the most important thing California cultivators and consumers can do in this moment is submit comments to the CEC docket. The meeting concerning the Title 24 modification is on December 9.

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*Summons Notice to Defendant: PORSCHE PATRISS WILSON a/k/a PORSCHE P. WILSON a/k/a PORSCHE WILSON, an individual, DELORES GROUND, an individual, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES, an Agency of the State of California; and DOES 1 through 30 inclusive, YOU ARE BEING SUED BY PLAINTIFF: Veros Credit, LLC.*

**LEGAL NOTICES**

*Self-Help Center of the Los Angeles Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles, Central Division, 330 West Broadway, Suite 400, Santa Ana, CA 92101*

*WARNING: Making a false or fraudulent claim is a felony subject up to 5 years in prison or a fine up to $50,000 or double the value of the fraud whichever is greater, or by both imprisonment or fine.*

**LA WEEKLY Bulletin**

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