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Union Kitchen & Tap opens

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PBMS students' projects

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 SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER GROUP

Pacific Beach man gets long delay for COVID fraud sentence

By NEAL PUTNAM

A Pacific Beach man who pleaded guilty to committing fraud over misuse of COVID-19 funds got a long sentencing delay until Nov. 18.

Thomas H. Zolezzi, 61, operated a business known as Casamar Clean Oceans Inc. from his home address in Pacific Beach when he applied for three loans to cover payroll costs, according to the U.S. Attorney's office.

Zolezzi has agreed to pay \$700,884 back to the Small Business Administration and \$2,238,910 to Capital Plus Financial, according to the U.S. Attorney's office.

Zolezzi has waived his right for a speedy sentencing before U.S. District Court Judge Anthony Battaglia, who set it for Nov. 19. He remains free on \$50,000 bond.

Court documents filed by his attorneys say he has a major family event in July and attorneys are out of the country in August. The prosecution did not object to the long sentencing delay.

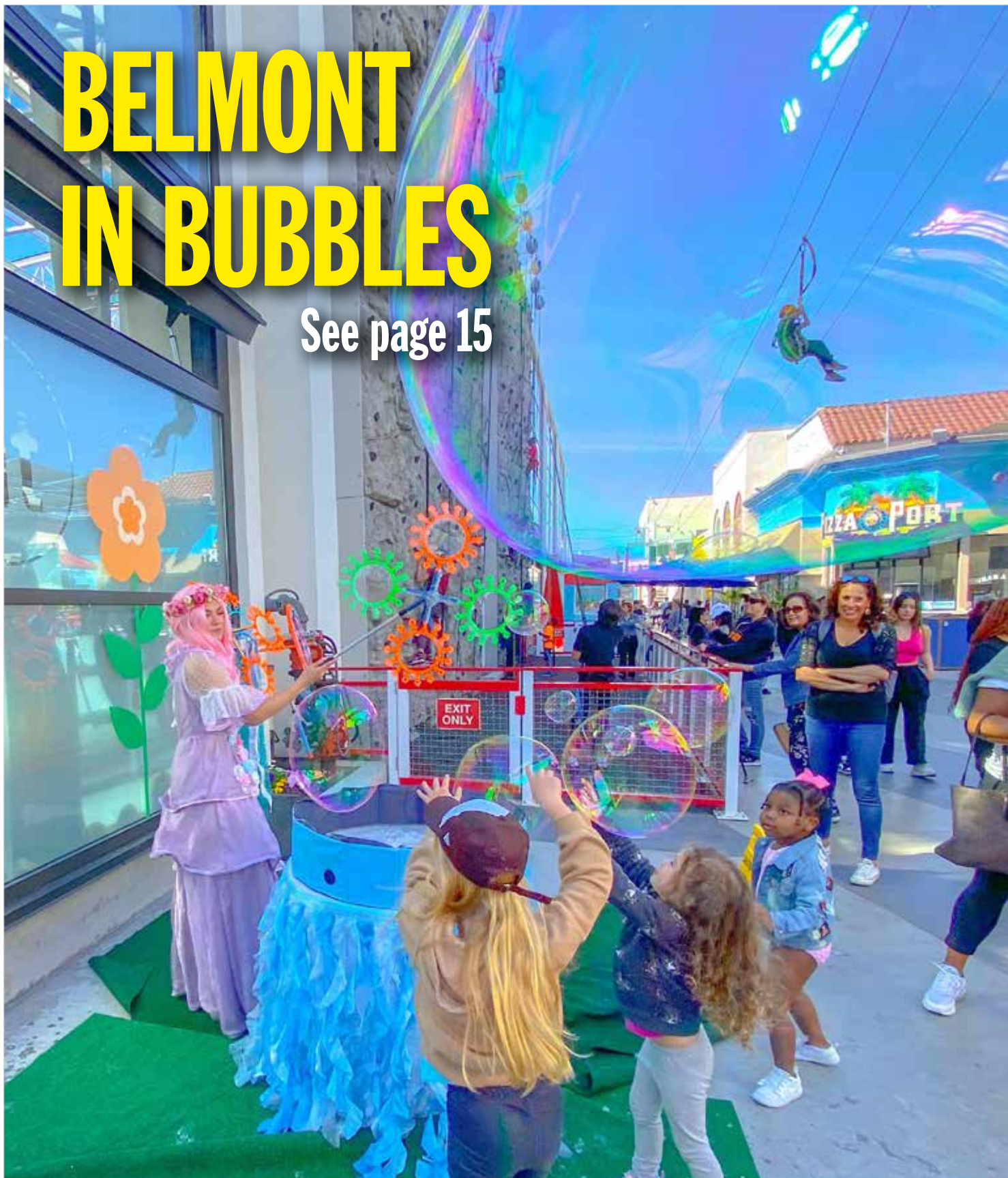
He could receive a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison, but if he pays restitution back, he would likely get a reduced sentence.

Zolezzi pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud in which he "knowingly transmitted" an application in interstate commerce for a Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan on May 14, 2020.

The charge says he used the funds "to pay for his personal expenses instead of paying the salary of his employees." The U.S. Attorney's office said Zolezzi falsely overstated the number of his employees, the payroll amount, and his annual revenue to obtain the loans.

In his plea agreement, Zolezzi admitted he submitted five loan applications containing false statements to trick lenders into providing the relief funds, according to the U.S. Attorney's office.

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BELMONT IN BUBBLES

See page 15

The Bubble Princess floats bubbles for youngsters to pop as one big bubble almost encases a zipliner (upper right) at Belmont Park on Sunday during its Belmont in Bloom festival. PHOTO BY THOMAS MELVILLE

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City Tacos celebrates 10 years as a palate-expanding taqueria

By DREW SITTON

Much has changed in the San Diego culinary scene since Gerry Torres opened City Tacos in North Park 10 years ago. Some of that change is thanks to his work educating the public about what authentic Mexican food should taste like through his affordable gourmet tacos.

Torres and executive chef Eduardo Baeza are both from Mexico City. A decade ago, Torres felt like Mexican cuisine in San Diego consisted of the same menu at every taco shop with the same five ingredients in each dish plated in 25 different ways. In 2014, he opened an authentic taqueria with flavorful offerings foreign to San Diego palates.

The original menu had five tacos: Borrego (lamb), Chile Relleno, Chorizo, Pollo City, and Portobello. Customers vote on new tacos every month, building an ever-evolving menu with some favorites that have never been voted off.

"You do have to educate your client base. You do have to make them think outside of the norm," Torres said of his time helping the public embrace his philosophy of tacos.

He believes tacos must always be eaten fresh at a taqueria, remembering his time in Mexico where tacos were made to order one at a time so none went cold. It was only during the demands of the



Gerry Torres at the Ocean Beach location of City Tacos where its anniversary celebration will take place on Saturday, May 4. PHOTO BY ALT STRATEGIES

pandemic that City Tacos grudgingly began offering takeout and delivery.

Consistency is maintained throughout all locations thanks to his commissary kitchen. Making everything from tortillas to sauces from scratch and handling delivery to the shops also keeps costs down while guaranteeing quality ingredients.

"You can't mask food. It will find a way of shining through whether it's good or bad," Torres said. "It's about quality."

The growth of City Tacos has been careful and methodical. The eatery has never been in debt and

CITY TACOS

Where: 4516 Mission Blvd.
Hours: 11 a.m.-10 p.m. daily.
Info: citytacossd.com/
locations-pacific-beach.

all locations are solvent. When finding a new location, Torres walks the neighborhood to see if it is a place he would enjoy visiting. This has led him to La Mesa, Ocean Beach, Encinitas, Petco Park, Pacific Beach, Sorrento Valley, and Los Angeles. His next steps are to open a northern commissary kitchen and another location in Los Angeles with eventual plans to make it to San Francisco.

Through the growth of the business, Torres' wife of over 20 years Cristina Benavente is the unsung hero of City Tacos. He describes her as an excellent, experimental cook whose culinary endeavors are often the inspiration for tacos of the month.

"She is a foodie just like me... and she likes to excite my palate by doing creative things," Torres said.

She also took on extra childcare duties in the early years of City Tacos. Now, Torres limits himself to eight-hour days and takes one day off per week. His two adult children returned from northern California and Florida respectively, of their own volition, to help with the family business.

"It brings tremendous joy because the family has enjoyed the ride along with me. We are a very

close-knit family," Torres said.

His son Hector Aguirre is a regional manager and his daughter started the company's Instagram account in addition to being a shift manager.

"They made me hip, or tried to make me hip. The kids have been instrumental in moving the process along," he said.

His youngest son, now 13 years old, may not be old enough to officially work for City Tacos but is still an inspiration for City Tacos' most ambitious endeavor, the taco playground in Ocean Beach. Torres found his teenage son glued to his computer and had trouble relating.

"We wanted to be out and

about and enjoying life. The OB Playground is about that. It's about, turning off the devices, socializing with your kids, playing with them," Torres said. The open-air location is decorated with murals made by local elementary students and filled with giant games like Jenga and checkers.

"I've seen that flourish. I haven't seen any tablets or phones within the space, which nowadays, that's pretty much [impossible]," he said.

OB Playground at 4896 Voltaire St. will be the location of the biggest anniversary celebration as well on Saturday, May 4.

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