



FREE
GRATIS

www.lanuevavoz.net

La Nueva Voz

The New Voice, a Bilingual (English/Spanish) Publication
Pomona's *only* community newspaper!



Issue No. 138
Thursday, January 28, 2021

COVID-19 numbers in Pomona again reach new record levels . . .

Pomona's 244-room Sheraton Fairplex Hotel, now Pomona's "COVID" hotel, set a new all-time record again last month, for the first time maxing out with 254 patients on Dec. 24 making it necessary to "double up" in some of the hotel rooms – all amid claims reported to La Nueva Voz of alleged improprieties and mishandling of patients under cover of darkness.

"Patients who do not know each other are being assigned to share rooms for 14 days and many are homeless and not used to being in a room at all," according to the source who apparently worked inside the facility and mailed "hard copies" of his information to La Nueva Voz.

He also claimed that patients are being moved in the middle of the night from Pomona to Compton (Los Angeles County health officials use the Willow Tree Inn in Compton to house COVID-related patients) "so that when the local census is provided the next day, the numbers look very high and the funding keeps coming."

See vaccine photo page 11.

The source claimed complaints have been filed with the county's chain of command regarding allegations of improper use of funds, fraud and abuse of authority.

Los Angeles County Board of

Supervisors Chair Hilda Solis, who announced in a news conference last March that the hotel would be used to house COVID-related patients either for quarantine purposes or because they had only mild symptoms and were not in need of actual hospitalization, responded to an e-mail request from La Nueva Voz for comment, commending the hotel for stepping up for the past 10 months "to address this humanitarian crisis."

"We are in the middle of a horrific surge and it is critical that we meet the moment to reduce transmission and exposure," Solis said. "ICU (intensive care unit) adjusted capacity for the South-

ern California region remains at zero percent. This reality is impacting not just those with COVID-19 but others who need urgent hospital care."

She added that medical sheltering sites, such as the Fairplex



Photos courtesy of Los Angeles County Los Angeles County Internal Services Division employee Florida Hernandez, above, sprays disinfectant in outdoor common areas outside Pomona's Sheraton Fairplex Hotel, now used by the county as a COVID-19 medical shelter, in areas where patients are allowed twice a day. At right, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Nurse Practitioner Kenisha Thomas, sporting one of several "Hotel COVID" t-shirts observed in the hotel, adjusts her face shield over her mask while making her rounds visiting patients.



Sheraton Hotel, have been a critical resource during this unprecedented pandemic.

"Many of our residents, especially those from low-income

COVID-19 numbers... pg. 2

(please scroll down)

COVID-19 numbers... from pg. 1

and communities of color like the San Gabriel Valley, are essential workers who live in multi-generational households," Solis said. "Several of them do not have the space or comfort to safely isolate and quarantine in their own living situations."

"I thank the Fairplex, Sheraton

New photos just released show a 'first look' inside Pomona's 'COVID' hotel!

and the City of Pomona for responding to this crisis with courage and compassion," she said. Solis' comments did not address the allegations of improprieties at the hotel.

Meanwhile, the county's Department of Health Services' Office of Communications responded to an e-mailed request from La Nueva Voz asking where the "extra" patients are being housed when the number reaches a level above the 244-room mark.

The answer is complicated, but

the short version is that patients are not being housed in meeting rooms or the grand ballroom of the hotel. (There were reports last month that Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital in South Los Angeles converted its gift shop and chapel into areas to treat patients due to COVID.)

(Actually, the Sheraton Fairplex Hotel grand ballroom – in happier times used for wedding receptions, galas and business meetings – has been converted to a huge warehouse and is being used to store food supplies, medical supplies and clothing and scrubs, according to just-released first-time photos of the operations inside the hotel. Some of the 102 official county photos taken



Marlena Douglas, RN, reaches out to a patient isolating at the Sheraton Fairplex Hotel.



The main ballroom at Pomona's Sheraton Fairplex Hotel, normally used for wedding receptions, galas and business meetings but now used exclusively as Pomona's "COVID hotel," is now a huge warehouse used to store food supplies, medical supplies and clothing. Pictured is a Los Angeles County Department of Health Services worker "sizing up" the situation as he decides what stack donated clothing goes in. Workers use the room to prepare food, snacks and other essentials for delivery to patients isolating in the hotel.



Medical assistant Seth Alvarez gowns up to conduct a blood glucose check for a patient isolating in a room upstairs at the Sheraton Fairplex Hotel.

been using the facility for COVID-related purposes.)

"The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services is currently operating eight medical shelter sites with just over 800 beds available," the county said in its statement. "These sites serve individuals, couples and families

with the goal of providing those in need with a safe place to isolate and quarantine if they have been exposed to COVID-19, if they are experiencing symptoms or if they have tested positive for the virus."

"The number of clients typically exceeds the number of occupied rooms because often families or couples are quarantined or isolated in the same room," the statement continued. "Many of the hotel rooms have two beds and if demand for space is high, then two clients may share a room as approved by the onsite clinician."

If a site is nearing capacity, then clients will be referred to other sites (although La Nueva Voz has noted for the past 10 months that the Pomona facility routinely houses far more patients than any of the other county COVID facilities).



Andrew Rios, LVN, checks the temperature of a patient isolating at Pomona's Fairplex Sheraton Hotel.



Andrew Rios, LVN, takes vital signs while Marlena Douglas, RN, connects with a patient isolating at the Fairplex Sheraton Hotel medical shelter.



Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Charge Nurse Richard Sombillo, RN, at right, discusses patients with the medical team in the main lobby of Pomona's Sheraton Fairplex Hotel.

"The Department of Health Services is committed to preventing the spread of this deadly virus by offering this critical service to those in need," the county statement said.

In a response to a follow-up question from La Nueva Voz, the county reported that the 244-room Sheraton Fairplex Hotel has 144 rooms with two beds in each room.

"Counting the number of beds doesn't

always equal the number of people in each site," a spokesperson told La Nueva Voz in an e-mail.

While the county's statement indicated the county is operating eight medical shelter sites at this time, that number has fluctuated over the past 10 months. The Pomona hotel became the first in the county's network of sheltering facilities – under a contract between the county and Fairplex – when it began accepting COVID patients on March 25.

Guests or patients at the facility have included everything from first responders to members of the region's homeless population.

La Nueva Voz has used the occupancy rate at the hotel as an index of how COVID is really

(please scroll down)

COVID-19 numbers... from pg. 2

doing in Pomona based on the assumption months ago that the hotel occupancy rate is as good as any other available figures.

Since the La Nueva Voz Dec. 24 issue, that Dec. 24 peak of 254 patients – above the hotel’s capacity that would allow one per room in a 244-room hotel – remained the highest for the month.

However, the hotel logged five additional days during the month with occupancy levels above 200, including a day with 232 patients on Dec. 29.

All other reporting days in January (weekend totals are not provided by the county) were in the 160s, 170s, 180s and 190s with the exception of a “leveling off” period between Jan. 19 and deadline day for this month’s issue, Jan. 22, with numbers last week ranging from 109 to 123.

As a point of comparison, during the previous month’s report-



Los Angeles County Internal Services Department employee Florida Hernandez sprays disinfectant in the hallways of the Fairplex Sheraton Hotel and outside along a walkway in outdoor common areas where patients can get some fresh air twice a day while staying at the hotel. New patients arriving at the hotel are dropped off by ambulance behind that blue and white striped screen to keep them out of public view and protect their privacy.

ing period in this newspaper – from the end of November to the fourth Thursday in December – the hotel logged eight days above the 200-patient level, representing the first time numbers got above the 200 mark since COVID began.

The previous high had been 173 on Nov. 19.

Each month, the “COVID hotel index” has consistently mirrored countywide data as the numbers continue to climb.

According to official Los Angeles County update figures, Pomo-

na has reported a total of 21,475 confirmed cases of COVID-19, up from last month’s cumulative figure of 13,243 in this newspaper’s monthly report. As a refer-

ence point, Pomona’s total population is roughly 157,000. To date, Pomona has recorded 283 COVID-related deaths, up from last month’s level of 187.

**Need to advertise in La Nueva Voz?
(909) 629-2292 • www.lanuevavoz.net**