



Castro Nail Salon is facing displacement to make room for a box office in the Castro Theatre's renovations.

Photos by Brontë Wittpenn/S.F. Chronicle

Upgrades at theater include a downside

Two small, longtime businesses pushed out by remodel in Castro

By Laura Waxmann

Gregg Perloff is confident that the massive on-going renovation of the historic Castro Theatre, one of San Francisco's cultural icons, will revive a beloved neighborhood that has struggled in recent years.

The CEO of Another Planet Entertainment pointed at the exposed concrete floor in the theater's auditorium during a tour earlier this month, where new seats, a flash point in the intense debate over the future of the theater, will soon create more space to hold more spectators for films and concerts once the venue reopens early next year.



Riyad Khoury, owner of the Castro Nail Salon, says he initially supported the theater project.

"We thought, maybe it will help all of us. I did not know that we were going to be the victims."

Riyad Khoury, owner of the Castro Nail Salon

"There used to be 250 days of film here, but they averaged 200 people a show. We plan to triple that," said Perloff, as shrouds of construction dust swirled around him.

Despite skyrocketing costs, his team is executing its vision to restore the century-old venue as a nightlife destination for the city's famed Castro neighborhood, he said.

"There's over 20% (retail) vacancy in the Castro, depending on who you talk to," Perloff said. "We'll be bringing in over 200,000 people a year, and that is extremely important to the restaurants, the bars, the coffee shops."

Castro continues on A9

Footage shows Palisades Fire start

Experts say video supports idea that Jan. 1 blaze had reignited

By Matthias Gafni and Julie Johnson

A newly released video that captures the ignition of the Palisades Fire on Jan. 7 provides further evidence the disastrous Los Angeles County blaze was possibly the rekindling of a fire from days earlier, according to four wildfire investigation experts who reviewed the footage.

The footage, obtained by the Chronicle and made public here for the first time, shows that the two wildfires broke out in very close proximity: the small Lachman Fire on New Year's Day and, six days later, the Palisades, which killed a dozen people and destroyed more than 6,800 structures in Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles, Malibu and Topanga.

"You could see from the terrain it was in the same area," said Tom Pierce, a certified fire investigator who has conducted more than 2,000 fire investigations.

Palisades continues on A8

Gov. candidate: Harris, Becerra hid Biden's health

By Joe Garofoli

Recent reports of a "cover-up" by former President Joe Biden's closest advisers about the severity of his mental and physical limitations are now affecting California's 2026 governor's race.

Former Los Angeles Mayor and Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, 72, could face two Biden Cabinet members in the race — former Vice President Kamala Harris and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra — and he accused both of being among those who were "intentionally complicit or told outright lies in a systematic cover up to keep Joe Biden's mental decline from the public."

He was referring to revelations in a book published Tuesday, "Original Sin: President Biden's Decline, Its Cover-Up, and His Disastrous Choice to Run Again," that alleges that Biden's closest advisers and family members were part of "aggressive efforts to hide his cognitive diminishment."

Biden continues on A8

Oakland's Lee declares 'new era' during oath

By Sarah Ravani

Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee took her oath of office Tuesday and spoke of a "new era" for the city, marking an end to a chapter marred by the recall and federal indictment of her predecessor.

"I know that we have been through a lot and we will continue to go through our share of challenges, but what I know about Oakland is we are a community that punches above our weight," Lee said to a packed room of supporters and politicians in her first speech since her election last month. "We are a city of doers, of dreamers, of entrepreneurs, of artists, of inno-

vators. And together we're going to do the hard work. It's hard work to put Oakland back on the right track."

Lee promised to "address the moral disgrace" of homelessness, to support senior citizens and artists, and to come up with solutions to boost the city's economy. She said she intends to bring people "from all walks of life" to come up with action plans with short-term and long-term solutions that will be posted online — generating cheers from the crowd at City Hall.

The former congresswoman takes over the term of ex-Mayor Sheng Thao, who was removed in November.

Lee continues on A9



Brontë Wittpenn/S.F. Chronicle

Barbara Lee waves to supporters before she is sworn in as Oakland's 52nd mayor on Tuesday at Oakland's City Hall. Lee takes over after former Mayor Sheng Thao was removed in November.