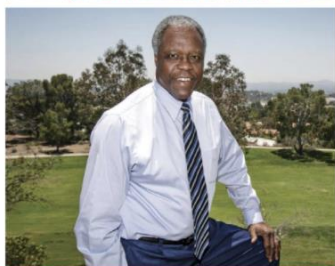
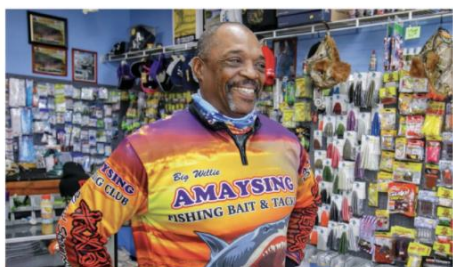


SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL



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BLACK ENTREPRENEURS MONTH

In this special section, local Black business owners explain why they started a business, how they overcame challenges and whether their race helped them or set them back. Pictured clockwise from top left: Wilton E. Mays III of Lancaster, Mika Hilaire of Sherman Oaks, Laurent "Lou" Correa of Burbank and Mel Wilson of San Fernando.

BEGINNING ON PAGE 11

Max Stress at Valley Hospitals

HEALTH CARE: CEOs talk about pressures of the pandemic.

By **AMY STULICK** Staff Reporter

For a solid month at the height of the coronavirus surge, **Precious Mayes** recalled standing on the ICU floor and hearing "Code Blue" every 15 to 20 minutes. In medical lingo, that's a life-threatening emergency.

"It just didn't seem to stop," said the chief executive at **Pacifica Hospital of the Valley**. "That is emotionally impacting, psychologically impacting to all staff and to anybody."

Please see **HEALTH CARE** page 4

Market Pushes CPA Combos

LIST: Firm consolidation trend moves ahead despite pandemic.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter



The hunt for new business and geographical markets drives accounting firms to merge and acquire, as shown by last year's combination of Squar Milner with **Baker Tilly US LLP**.

Please see **LIST** page 21

Restaurants Take Another Bite at Profitability

RETAIL: Owners balance costs versus limited capacity.

By **ANDREW FOERCH** Staff Reporter

To open or not to open — for restaurant owners, that's the question.

California has lifted its most controversial pandemic restriction, namely the ban on commercial outdoor dining. But Valley restaurateurs, including **The Stand** in Encino and

Casa Vega in Sherman Oaks, must balance the costs of reopening versus the revenue potential of operating at limited capacity.

Gov. **Gavin Newsom** last month ended his statewide emergency order that in early December banned restaurants from serving patrons at outdoor dining areas, freeing up L.A. County to roll back its own such restriction. Patios and al fresco zones are now allowed to operate at 50 percent capacity, with

Please see **RETAIL** page 37



Sherman Oaks: Tent at Casa Vega.

Hotel Projects Dot the Region

REAL ESTATE: Developments add rooms despite tourism woes.

By **MICHAEL AUSHENKER** Staff Reporter

In total, 49 hotels are in development in the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys, with the largest projects by room count displayed on a regional map from the Business Journal.

Please see **RE FOCUS** page 28

MAIL TO:

THE LIST

ACCOUNTING FIRMS
Ranked by number of CPAs in Valley-area offices
See page 22



BioSolar Switches to NewHydrogen
Name change as company has evolved from solar panels to batteries to clean fuel. **p. 3**

Making Music Safer
WaveBlock, a tech startup, sells stickers, right, that deflect earbud radiation away from brain. **p. 6**



The San Fernando Valley Business Journal is proud to announce the **2021 Commercial Real Estate Awards**.

Live Virtual Awards Reception **Wednesday, March 3** To register, visit sfvb.com/bizevents

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL

BLACK ENTREPRENEURS MONTH**MIKA HILAIRE**
EQUAL RIGHTS LAW GROUP

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 Website: equalrightslawgroup.com

Mika Hilaire, a civil rights lawyer and founder of Equal Rights Law Group in Sherman Oaks, practices all areas of employment law and litigation, including workplace investigations and claims of harassment, discrimination, retaliation and wrongful termination.

Hilaire has made *Los Angeles Magazine's* Southern California Super Lawyers - Rising Stars list since 2007; she currently serves on the *Los Angeles County Bar Association Executive Committee* as an employment law representative.

Question: How did Equal Rights get its start?

Answer: After I graduated from law school, I was hired by one of the oldest law firms in Los Angeles, **Hill Farrer & Burrill**. I worked

there for two years and then went to work for **Silver & Freedman** in Century City. I received great training at both of these defense firms. However, my heart was always in line with helping the little guy and I always envisioned myself "hanging my own shingle," so to speak. As a mother of three small boys, I also wanted the flexibility to do both important jobs — be a mother and attorney. Starting my own firm allowed me to attend field trips and be present in ways that did not work for me in a firm.

Do you like being your own boss? Do you ever think about trading it all in for a steady paycheck?

I absolutely love being my own boss. Despite the pressure of everything riding on me, I love the autonomy and ability to work with the clients I want to work with and not those

assigned to me. I come from a family where business ownership is encouraged and taught as the only way to go. My father's side of my family immigrated here from Antigua in the West Indies and like most immigrant families starting a business is normal as it is often the quickest way to provide for your family while you aspire to become the "American Dream."

What's the biggest challenge your business has faced? And how did you deal with it?

The biggest issue thus far for my business has been managing cash flow, especially during this global pandemic. As a contingency lawyer, I only receive payment when my cases settle. With the courts being closed this has meant a stretch of time with no settlements. I have had to get a bit more creative with bringing different streams of revenue in the door.

What advice would you give someone who's about to start their own business?

From a fiscal standpoint, being conservative with cash flow and overhead is critical. Also, spending adequate time researching the legal requirements and licensing laws is paramount. Finally, have plans and goals clearly written out and articulated as to how your business will grow. Make sure you have a mentor within your field so you can bounce ideas or ask questions.

Has being Black affected your business?



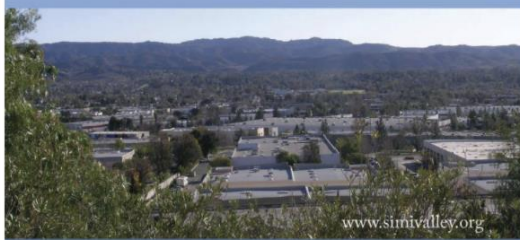
There is no way to separate my race from my being a business owner. But I do not always think being recognized as a black owned business is a negative. My experience as a black woman fuels my passion for civil rights advocacy and particularly in light of the recent civil unrest it strengthens my resolve in fighting for justice.

Do you think you'll ever start another business?

Absolutely, I am in the process of starting a retail business. I enjoy entrepreneurship and am proud to be an American — where citizens of every color, race, gender or background can create an idea and bring it into fruition.

— Amy Stulick

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 welcomed, where the traffic
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