

BALBOA



ISLAND LIVING

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COVID-19



history

By **Pete Weitzner** – Producer, Balboa Island Museum’s “Legacy Videos” and the coming virtual tour/film, “Tim Mang’s Harbor Tour: Newport’s Golden Age”

Posed An Existential Threat

Museum’s Curators Solved The Puzzle



When the history of spring 2020 is written, we’ll be reminded of many sad stories – businesses that had prospered or teetered, quickly keeled over. Residents doing what they could and beyond, mindful of the import of a vibrant, local business community.

Here, even the Starbucks at Marine and Diamond is slated to shutter – a small-store victim of corporate-guidelines, maybe economies of scale, that all Balboa businesses battle.

Shirley and Tiffany Pepys determined their 18-month-old, relocated Museum, wouldn’t become another COVID victim.

Shirley Pepys is a two-time entrepreneurial success, the big score, her inspiration to fill barren baby cribs with quilts and other accessories. She grew NOJO over 30 years, selling to public company Crown Crafts, Inc.

Shirley duplicated the feat on a smaller scale with Marine Avenue’s Teddy Bears & Teacups – retail front half, young girls’ parties in the rear.

Daughter, Tiffany Pepys, ran her own design studio in Costa Mesa for ten years, spent 20 years prior with Irvine-HQ’d St. John Knits, Inc. as VP of design and merchandising.

Both highly successful. They’d ridden out storms.

When the closure edict came in mid-March, the co-curators of the Museum – which fairly ‘blew up’ once it landed its prime, new locale at 210 Marine Avenue – knew it was no time for sheltering in complacency.

“Brittany Webb, our collections manager, and Tiffany deserve all the credit, Shirley said. They put in the hard work, created a safe environment for our customers.”

They expanded curbside and online retailing of their signature children’s puzzles and books, top sellers for the Museum. Same-store sales vs. year one were perfectly unchanged, only a Netflix or Amazon could boast better in the COVID era.

“We had to change strategy ASAP,” Tiffany said. Puzzles were the first thing we started stocking up on. The minute they came in, we sold out. Our customers love the local-scene puzzles.”

There’s a new train exhibit sponsored by Don Abrams, owner, Abrams Coastal Properties.

“Ben and his dad spent all of May putting it together,” Tiffany said.

More History

The Museum added a slew of 10-minute-history talks to its YouTube channel, featuring unofficial NB historian Celeste Dennerline – nine and counting, the most recent on the Santa Ana River.

What Harbor history Dennerline doesn’t know, Tim Mang does – his accounts very much personal and unpublished. The Hall of Fame high school tennis coach is a Newport lifer – his uncles helped build sidewalks and laid Newport’s first underground utilities on Lido Peninsula.

Today, Mang runs Duffy boat tours and land tours in his Rolls Royce Corniche, spinning tales of Newport Harbor’s Hollywood

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