

MICROSOFT ACTIVISION BLIZZARD • FIVEPOINT AMPHITHEATER CLOSES • OC SOCCER CLUB

IRVINE

WEEKLY

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HOW BODY ELECTRIC'S
BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON
TOOK PIERCING TO THE
NEXT LEVEL.

NEEDLING THROUGH

BY LINA LECARO

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FBI STATISTICS RANK IRVINE AS 'SAFEST CITY' FOR 18TH YEAR

THE STATISTICS REPRESENT MORE THAN 93% OF THE NATIONAL POPULATION.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Irvine will maintain its moniker as America's safest city for the 18th consecutive year, according to newly released statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The data was reported in the FBI's annual 2022 Crime in the Nation Statistics report, which analyzed more than 11 million criminal offenses reported to the FBI's crime collection databases last year.

With a population of approximately 311,000, Irvine's 2022 crime per capita of 100,000 was 85.02 – the lowest among the nation's top 25 cities with a population of at least 250,000. In 2022, Irvine reported a total of 265 violent crimes – four crimes within the murder and non-negligent manslaughter category, 27 incidents of rape, 58 robberies and 176 cases of aggravated assault.

Speaking on the recognition, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan thanked the Irvine Police Department for its efforts to innovate in local enforcement.

"The dedicated men and women of the Irvine Police Department not only stand as a beacon of professionalism but also as a testament to their relentless pursuit of excellence in ensuring public safety," she said. "Every officer and staff member contributes to Irvine's exceptional quality of life, fostering their commitment to this City. IPD's partnership with its community is a collective effort that positions Irvine as a premier destination where people can live, work, and enjoy life with a sense of unmatched security and belonging."

In a statement, Irvine Police Chief Michael Kent said he is proud of the efforts his law enforcement staff put forward in the community.

"Our dedicated personnel work in partnership with our diverse community daily to provide the highest level of service and prevent, investigate, and solve crimes. They also work tirelessly to identify and arrest criminal offenders, which makes our community safer," he said. "We appreciate the support of our City leaders, who ensure we have the resources needed to maintain public safety in the City of Irvine."

This year, more than 13,000 law enforcement agencies submitted annual crime data to the FBI via the National Incident Based Reporting System and the Summary Reporting System. Through the use of these comprehensive reporting tools, the FBI estimates that the 2022 Crime in the Nation report covered nearly 94% of the total national population.

"SRS data was accepted from 2,431 non-transitioned agencies representing 55,441,278 inhabitants. These agencies added an additional 16.6% population coverage, [from 2021] bringing the total national population coverage for Crime in the Nation, 2022 to 93.5%," an announcement for the annual crime report read.

As for other cities, Virginia Beach, VA ranked second, with a crime rate of 85.45 per 100,000. With a population of just over 457,000, the city reported a total of 457 violent crimes in 2022. Newark, New Jersey ranked the highest in terms of violent crime per capita, with a population of 304,000 and a crime rate of 512.65 per 100,000.

Comparatively, data from the FBI's crime statistics point to a 1.7% decrease in violent crime from 2021 to 2022, per the annual report.



\$69 BILLION MICROSOFT ACTIVISION BLIZZARD ACQUISITION REACHES COMPLETION

FOLLOWING OVER 20 MONTHS OF LEGAL SCRUTINIZATION OVER MICROSOFT'S ATTEMPT TO BUY ACTIVISION BLIZZARD, THE DEAL RECEIVED REGULATORY APPROVAL ON OCT. 13.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

After nearly two years of antitrust lawsuits, international investigations and gaming industry scrutiny surrounding Microsoft's \$69 billion mission to acquire Activision Blizzard, the historic deal was finalized on Friday, Oct. 13.

With a closing price tag of \$68.7 billion, the deal is now Microsoft's largest to-date purchase, eclipsing the Windows software developer's 2016 purchase of the professional social networking platform LinkedIn for \$26.2 billion.

The manufacturer of the Xbox gaming console announced the completion of the blockbuster merger following final approval from the U.K.-based Competitions and Markets Authority.

Brad Smith, Vice Chair and President of Microsoft, addressed the CMA's decision in a tweet adding that the final regulatory hurdle of the proposed merger had been crossed.

"We're grateful for the CMA's thorough review and decision today," Smith wrote. "We have now crossed the final regulatory hurdle to close this acquisition, which we believe will benefit players and the gaming industry worldwide."

Phil Spencer, CEO of Microsoft Gaming, echoed Smith's excitement in an announcement he wrote on Xbox Wire.

"Together, we'll create new worlds and stories, bring your favorite games to more places so more players can join in, and we'll engage with and delight players in new, innovative ways in the places they love to play including mobile, cloud streaming and more," Spencer wrote.



DAWIT/UNSPLASH

With the deal, Microsoft assumes ownership of Blizzard's popular gaming catalog that includes many titles that have accumulated a cult-like following including the *Diablo* series, *Warcraft*, the *Call of Duty* franchise and all of the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* games.

As part of the contingencies to satisfy worries of regulators in the United Kingdom, Microsoft agreed to enter into a 15-year cloud gaming agreement with Ubisoft in August that would give Ubisoft complete cloud gaming rights to *Call of Duty* and all other Activision titles. Speaking on developments with Ubisoft, Smith said it would bring innovation and allow Ubisoft to have full control to commercialize the distribution of games on a global scale.

"The agreement provides Ubisoft with

a unique opportunity to commercialize the distribution of games via cloud streaming. The agreement will enable Ubisoft to innovate and encourage different business models in the licensing and pricing of these games on cloud streaming services worldwide," Smith said.

Microsoft announced similar partnerships in March, finalizing licensing agreements with gaming giants Nintendo, NVIDIA and Ubitus.

On the Activision Blizzard blog, CEO Bobby Kotick wrote a similar letter to employees addressing a significant "milestone" in Activision Blizzard history, adding that this deal will connect more players around the world "than ever before."

"When Brian Kelly and I began this

journey in 1991, we intended to build a company that would have great impact and lasting value. Your tireless work and unwavering commitment to excellence enabled us to do just that," Kotick wrote.

"In the 1980s, we pioneered independent, third-party game development with *Pitfall*, *River Raid*, and *Kaboom*. In the 1990s, we united the world with online multiplayer games like *MechWarrior*, *Warcraft*, and *StarCraft*. In the 2000s, we introduced *Call of Duty*, which became one of the most successful entertainment franchises in history. We also introduced *Guitar Hero* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, which entered popular culture in ways few videogames ever have. In the 2010s, we debuted *Candy Crush Saga*, which to date has been downloaded more than five billion times and contributed to our total worldwide players being fifty percent female."

Kotick noted that as 2023 comes to a close, so will his role as CEO at Activision Blizzard. Until then he will report to Spencer.

Originally announced on Jan. 18, 2022, the Microsoft-Activision Blizzard merger took a total of 20 months and six days. In the coming months, Xbox will begin populating its Xbox Game Pass service with titles it acquired in the merger.

"Today we start the work to bring beloved Activision, Blizzard, and King franchises to Game Pass and other platforms," Spencer said. "We'll share more about when you can expect to play in the coming months. We know you're excited – and we are too."

CULTURE

NEEDLING THROUGH

HOW BODY ELECTRIC'S BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON TOOK PIERCING TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

BY LINA LECARO

Like all forms of body modification, the art of piercing has evolved. Getting one's ears pierced is common no matter your gender or age, and nobody blinks an eye at the site of a nostril, a bellybutton, an eyebrow or even a lip ring these days, though the latter three might seem a bit dated to older folk, visually tied to the early '90s punk and metal heyday when they became most popular and were seen all over album covers and MTV.

A new generation has discovered body jewelry and adornment, and it's not even a retro thing. Fans of goth aesthetics and fashion hubs like Dolls Kill, Killstar, and the like, have re-ignited a new piercing culture. With celebrities like Demi Lovato and Miley Cyrus rocking them, they're practically mainstream. The hashtag "piercings" has 14.7 billion views on TikTok.

Recently, this writer's own teenager requested to move beyond earlobes to the cartilage between their nostrils – the septum – and our reaction wasn't exactly that of a "cool mom," despite the fact that we happen to be tattooed and have multiple holes in our own ears. For many, facial piercings go too far, even today. They may not exactly be job killers anymore, but faces are focal points and, depending on the size of the jewelry, it can still be distracting. For others, especially in South Asian cultures, it's commonplace and represents social status and a coming-of-age, signifying womanhood. In India, nose piercing is simply tradition.

We came to a compromise – two piercings: one nostril, and an upper ear – and we had to decide where to go. Piercing parlors aren't as prevalent as they once were in Los Angeles, and mall piercing stations at places like Claire's Accessories are extremely risky and more painful than the alternatives.

For safety and quality, a little research

was in order. Google "best in piercers in L.A." right now and one name comes up again and again: Brian Keith Thompson at Body Electric on Melrose Ave. Thompson is the proprietor and "chief piercing officer" at the second-story shop, which for many years was best known just for its tattoo work. We got our first piece of ink there in fact, so coming back would be a full-circle experience. While Thompson and Body Electric have gained attention for a consistent celebrity clientele (he is touted as "Beyonce's piercer" by name-driven publications and tabloids), the longtime Angeleno also is known for his soulful, communicative approach to the art of piercing, which is anything but pretentious or celebrity-seeking.

When we arrived at the Melrose studio, Thompson was talking with a mother and her two young daughters, both of whom wanted to get "constellation piercings" – the term coined for his artful stars-in-the-sky-like ear designs, which usually feature clusters of tiny studs, gems and delicate hoops running from the bottom of the lobe all the way up to the top of the ear, each section with a different name: the daith, the helix, and the orbital, being just three of them.

We opted for an "industrial" ear piercing, which runs through two points of cartilage on top of the ear, and the aforementioned nostril. Thompson talked about what he was doing as he took a large needle and pushed through the skin and flesh in a calm, relaxed manner that made everyone feel comfortable. It was over quickly, with minimum wincing, flinching or blood.

Next comes the healing stage, and if you're thinking of getting pierced, please note: It takes attention, a lot of daily care and can involve swelling and irritation, as the body adjusts to the wound. Even so, as is often the case after one's first body

modification, our kid is already itching for more.

BARS AND BARBELLS

Brian Keith Thompson came to Los Angeles from Texas at the age of 12, after his parents divorced in 1984. "I was always just different. I looked different, I thought differently," he recalls. "So I moved here with my dad I finally felt free to be who I wanted. But then I got here and I was bullied. The problems didn't go away. I had long hair back then, listened to metal, and I was called heshier. In eighth grade, the kids picked me up at lunch and threw

me in a trash can in front of the whole school. It just sucked, constantly getting messed with and beat up. So I just kind of retracted. I always said that one day, I'm gonna make these people see what I'm made of."

Thompson was suicidal as a teen, until he met a new friend at a local Target. The guy he called his mentor ultimately introduced him to cholo culture and gangs, which gave him the sense of belonging he craved. It was both a good and a bad thing. He started hanging with the mostly Latino Canoga Park Alabama Street gang, who referred to him as "gaba," short for "gaba-cho," a term often used for white people.



BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON / BODY ELECTRIC TATTOO

"These people were like brothers and it was like being in the military, too – there was a rank structure and a respect level. I was a part of something that had a functional base to it. And it made me feel powerful," he says.

But eventually, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and it got him pinned with a murder charge. He was at the scene of a shooting, though he didn't pull the trigger. In 1998 he went to jail for two years, but ultimately fought the case and got out.

Thompson had worked at his father's tech company and been in the Marines prior. He was smart and determined. Once he focused on getting out of jail, he made it happen. Though he says it was hard to be white in L.A. county at that time, he made friends. Forced to choose an allegiance, as most inmates are, he joined the white gang, "the Woods," out of sheer self-preservation. He got a job serving food to the inmates in super-maximum and would sneak extras for everyone, forging connections and earning respect.

"When I got out, I heard, 'see you assholes next month,' and it's a guy in the tower looking down (at me). And I said, 'no, sir, you will never see me again.'"

Though he says, in some ways, prison was "the best thing that ever happened to me," he was focused on moving on once released. He started getting the gang and prison ink he'd acquired covered up with new art, which led him to the famed Body Electric tattoo on Melrose. He "became obsessed" with getting work done even as he was still working at his dad's company, making money and saving it, as he hid his tattoos under his business suits.

Before the stock market crash of 2008, Thompson cashed out his 401k and bought the shop, set on connecting with people in new ways and revitalizing tattoo and piercing culture in Los Angeles. He's done just that. Body Electric is now known globally for both its ink work and piercing services, and Thompson hopes the place will remain a local landmark once he's gone. He's been renovating and remodeling the building for the past few years, putting in new Deco and vintage touches like marble and fixtures from historic L.A. landmarks. The shop is gleamingly beautiful, clean and classy. You walk in and you just know you're in a quality spot.

"I wanted to make it a friendly place, more customer-oriented, so that no matter



who you are, you don't have to feel intimidated to walk in," Thompson says. "I also wanted to show a finer side of it. I didn't want all that tribal stuff anymore. I like diamonds and gold and fine jewelry."

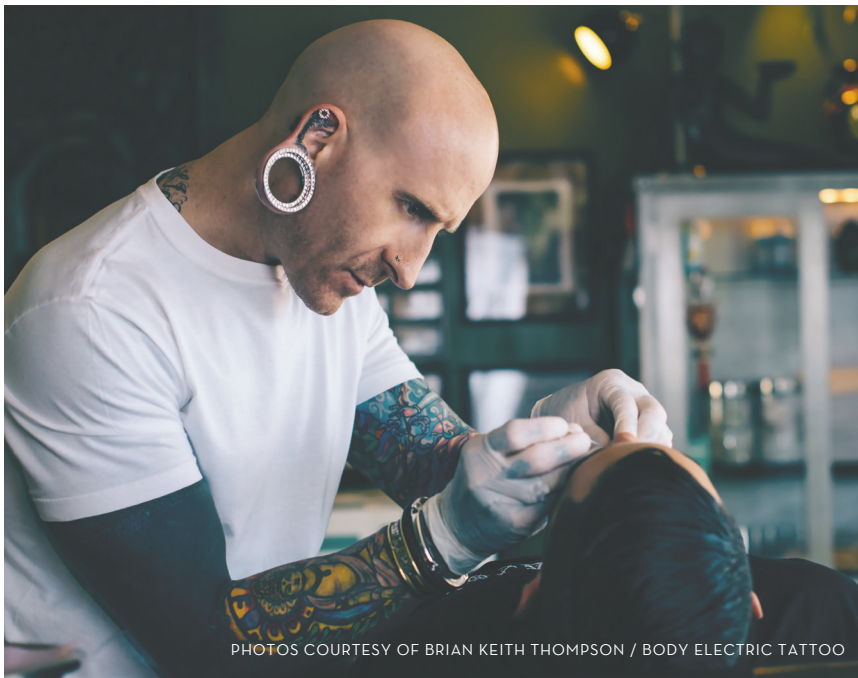
Thompson's presence and personal style only add to this vibe. Dressed in stylish suits and pristine sneakers – his signature look – he also has a shaved head and an array of iced piercings, including stretched earlobes that shimmer under overhead lighting and in the sunshine that beams into the shop from large windows overlooking Melrose Ave. This is an elevated piercing environment that's also quite relaxed and welcoming, for famous people (he pierces in a private backroom), for alternative types, and for families.

Thompson got into getting heavily tattooed in 2001, and he got into piercing in 2006. But he had always been fascinated by both. "One of my favorite movies was



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON / BODY ELECTRIC TATTOO

CULTURE



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON / BODY ELECTRIC TATTOO

Pulp Fiction,” he recalls, about what first made him think seriously about the art of piercing. “That whole scene where John Travolta asks about piercing guns when he gets his drugs and (Rosanna Arquette) says how guns go against everything it’s about... Then he talks about ‘all the shit in her face,’ and (Eric Stoltz) says, ‘that’s Judy, my wife.’ That scene is burned in my brain. And then I became a fucking piercer. That’s just so weird to me.”

THE GAUNTLET RAN THE GAMUT

While Thompson has forged his own path in the world of piercing, we’d be remiss if we didn’t give a nod to the groundbreaking figures of the past who turned piercing into a bona fide movement, based right here in L.A. The Gauntlet, founded by master piercer Jim Ward in the late ‘70s, was the first business of its type, with an original location in West Hollywood on Santa Monica Boulevard, followed by shops in San Francisco, New York, Seattle and even Paris.

Though piercing first emerged from queer and BDSM communities in Southern California and gained traction with the popularity of the modern primitive movement (as seen in the iconic Re:Search book *Modern Primitives: Tattoo, Piercing, Scarification*) it quickly grew and became popular with all kinds of people who steadily had more and more jewelry and designs

to choose from, including different gauges (thicknesses) and of course, places to pierce. As the Gauntlet piercers and those who learned from them became more popular, the public became more educated, too. The safe, professional practices in place led to the popularity of more intimate body parts (nipples, tongues and genitalia, for example) for many.

“Its primary focus was on body piercing as a way to enhance sex,” says the Gauntlet’s owner and recognized pioneer of piercing Jim Ward tells *LA Weekly*. “In those days, we did a lot of nipple and genital piercings. Things have changed dramatically since then. Gauntlet may have created an industry, but the focus these days is primarily on piercings above the neck and for cosmetic purposes.”

“Today’s standards for techniques, tools, jewelry designs, and ethos, shared by the most advanced practitioners, nearly all trace their roots back to the Gauntlet,” adds Paul King, a master piercer who worked for Ward in all three former Gauntlet locations and later went on to open his own space Cold Steel in SF. “The modern body piercing industry rose from the foundation developed by (Jim) and spread by masterfully skilled piercers such as Elayne Angel.”

Angel, the first person to be certified as a Master Piercer at Gauntlet, literally wrote the book on the practice, *The Piercing*



SCARLETT JOHANSSON

Bible, which features information on everything you’d ever want to know about piercing. “When I was a Gauntlet client in the early 1980s and became manager there later in that decade, body piercing was not yet an accepted part of modern culture,” she says. “Piercing was an obscure fringe activity, and people thought we were freaks, weirdos and perverts. It was so different, it is hard for younger people today to even imagine the shock and disgust onlookers often displayed when confronted with body piercings back then.”

“There was a tremendous sense of newness and adventure when the field was still in its infancy,” she continues. “Piercing had yet to become an industry. That was a period of experimentation and innovation, including trials and errors. We learned a lot about what not to do, along with our successes. It was a truly exciting era that I recall fondly. Though my family was far less enthusiastic about my career choice; they’d never heard of a ‘professional piercer.’ Eventually, they came around, and they’re now proud of me for my role as a pioneer in the field. Nowadays, everyone knows that piercing exists, and it has become an option that nearly anyone might exercise.”

Both Angel and King highly recommend Ward’s book *Running the Gauntlet* (and its accompanying website (runningthegauntlet-book.com) as an essential resource for anyone interested in piercing culture. For more background and history check out King’s *Body Piercing Archive* (bodypiercingarchive.org) and Angel’s book site (piercingbible.com/the-piercing-bible-book)

STARS AND STUDS

While piercing is no longer necessarily an outsider thing, it still gives a little edge to anyone who chooses to do it. Rihanna (a Thompson client) has proudly shown off her nipple piercing, which surely inspired copycats and normalized the practice. Thompson and Body Electric get the most attention media-wise thanks to the celebrity angle, but he’s built a strong community fan base as well. Like most practitioners with close client relationships, he is not a name-dropper. His longtime client list is out there on the web, though, and in addition to RiRi, it’s stellar to say the least: Queen Bey, as well as Christina Aguilera, Scarlett Johansson, Angelina Jolie and most recently Doja Cat, just to name a few.

Visiting the shop (which still offers an array of tattoo artists up front and a piercing studio in the back) has become popular content for influencers not only due to the star power, but also Thompson’s eye-catching star-like placement style, especially on ears. Other shops and piercers have tried to copy his popular constellation designs, but he’s the recognized best, taking an artful approach not only to where, but to what – choosing various weights and shapes that adorn each ear, nose and body part he works on. He might not be the cheapest, but when puncturing one’s face and body, who really wants to skimp? You get what you pay for.

“When I started here I wanted to show a finer side of piercing,” Thompson tells us, as we finish up our kid’s session and a truly engaging conversation. “I wanted to do something fresh and new. You know, when I got into this business, everyone said ‘you can’t make money in the tattoo/piercing business anymore.’ I’d tell them ‘yeah, you’re right, you can’t, but watch me because I will not stop.’ When I am into something and want to do something, I will just master what I love every day. I will outwork everyone. And I will give each client the same intensity in the first five fucking minutes that I get here, as I do the last five minutes before I leave. I give everybody the same and they feel it. It’s part of the experience.”

Body Electric, 7274 Melrose Ave., 323-954-0408.
bodyelectrictattoo.com

CLOSURE OF FIVEPOINT AMPHITHEATER BRINGS CONFUSION, BLAME TO IRVINE

VENUE PROMOTER LIVE NATION ANNOUNCED THE CLOSURE OF THE NEAR-DECADE OLD TEMPORARY VENUE, RESULTING IN LOCAL MUSIC FANS PLACING BLAME ON IRVINE POLITICIANS.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Music fans in Irvine and Orange County are voicing their disappointment regarding the closure of Irvine's FivePoint Amphitheater after Live Nation abruptly announced the venue's closure on Saturday, Oct. 21.

Live Nation, the promoter of Irvine's temporary amphitheater, made the announcement via social media, stating that the venue's sudden closure was due to FivePoint's "residential development" in the area.

Longtime concert goers took to social media to voice their sadness and frustration regarding the closure of the city's only outdoor concert venue, which opened in 2017 following the closure of the Irvine Meadows Amphitheater.

Instagram user Jessica Fawcett, whose handle is @jfwcett, commented on FivePoint's post adding that she will miss the venue and considered FivePoint Amphitheater to be one of Orange County's best places for entertainment.

"This is absolutely ridiculous. There is zero entertainment in Orange county outside of strip malls and chain restaurants and now they're taking the one legit venue for live music cause they want to build 1,000 more over-priced homes or office buildings," she wrote. "We have loved this venue and everything it brought to the area. It will be sorely missed. @irvine should be ashamed."

Other users on social media were quick to blame the closure of the outdoor music venue on the Great

Park Board of Director's 3-2 decision to terminate the design, construction and operation agreement (DCOA) with Live Nation in July.

Instagram user Julie Tapp, who uses the handle @Jtappster, wrote a lengthy comment referencing the Board of Director decision.

"The Irvine city council's decision on July 25 to tank a years-long planning process with Live Nation for a large permanent amphitheater was a great example of the will of the people being overruled by those in power who were elected to represent them," Tapp wrote. "As I recall from the two meetings I attended about the issue, the majority of Irvine residents wanted the large amphitheater, based on survey data that was collected as part of that process."

Even FivePoint executives became part of the public reaction.

Steve Churm, who lists Executive Vice President, Public Affairs at FivePoint Holdings in his Facebook intro, shared a post explaining that encouraging the public to urge the city council to "act now."

"Unless Irvine officials and land developer FivePoint Holdings act immediately to extend agreements to keep FivePoint Amphitheater open through the 2024 season," Churm wrote. "For us, it's a cultural loss, the shuttering of an era that spanned multiple generations. A safe, welcoming place to sing, dance and connect, is about to vanish. Email the Irvine City Council at [irvinecity-](mailto:irvinecity-council@cityofirvine.org)



PHOTO COURTESY OF EVAN J. LANCASTER

council@cityofirvine.org to turn up the volume and urge them to act now to save this special destination."

However, in text messages to Irvine Weekly, Irvine City Manager Oliver Chi said that keeping the lights on at FivePoint Amphitheater was out of the city's control. Adding the Great Park Board's July decision to terminate negotiations with LiveNation is an unrelated matter.

Chi explained that the decision to close the 12,000 seat outdoor amphitheater came as the result of the expiration of a private contract between FivePoint Development and Live Nation – a contract that the city of Irvine was not involved with.

"Live Nation's agreement with FivePoint to facilitate the temporary FivePoint Amphitheater expired, and given construction related priorities that FivePoint has to execute, the parties couldn't facilitate access into the temporary FivePoint Amphitheater to allow for an extension of the temporary venue," Chi wrote via text message.

Irvine City Council member Tammy Kim said she had received dozens of messages following the sudden closure of the concert venue, but added that she was not aware of any action the council could take.

"The city has absolutely nothing to do with this private deal – they're not renewing the lease because they need to do stuff with the land, so there's nothing necessarily for the council to address," Kim explained by phone to Irvine Weekly.

Kim explained that in terms of infrastructure, the parking lot and roads leading into FivePoint Amphitheater have been eliminated due to the ongoing construction of the Great Park. Kim added that while the city of Irvine agreed to support parking for the venue, the land is controlled by FivePoint.

Kim said the council was made aware of the ongoing issues pertaining to the elimination of roads and the venue's parking, but did not know the terms of the lease.

"We knew that there were some issues because there were no roads able to get in and out and we said, 'Hey, we'll help provide parking for you, but you need to do something with the roads,'" Kim explained. "And it looked like they just weren't ready to do that. But we weren't privy to the actual lease termination. Because it's not our deal."

FivePoint has not yet responded to Irvine Weekly's request for comment.

NEWS

OC SOCCER CLUB'S NEW DEAL COULD BE COSTLY FOR IRVINE

IRVINE AND ORANGE COUNTY SOCCER CLUB AGREE TO 10 MORE YEARS AT CHAMPIONSHIP STADIUM AT THE GREAT PARK.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The Great Park Board, on Tues., Oct. 10, unanimously agreed to enter into a new contract with the Orange County Soccer Club that could ensure 10 more years for the United Soccer League club in Irvine.

The new five year contract, with an optional five year extension, remains very similar to the club's current agreement with the Great Park, and allows for priority scheduling of 18 home games and for up to four playoff games.

The new agreement also gives Irvine some additional options for advertising revenue through designated areas around the stadium – revenue which will be split 80% to 20% between OCSC and Irvine.

The new partnership, according Irvine City Manager Oliver Chi, is projected to generate \$300,000 to \$500,000 annually through facility fees and the advertising revenue.

However, without the anticipated 80/20 percentage split from sponsorship, Chi estimated that the annual revenue from the city would be roughly \$300,000.

"Ultimately what this contemplates isn't that the soccer club is there every day of the year. It contemplates them using the stadium for 18 games a year and the net revenue the city generates off that through this agreement that's guaranteed to be roughly \$300,000 a year," Chi explained.

Irvine leaders were also quick to remove language from the contract that would have given OCSC exclusive rights to pursue third-party sponsorship

for the stadium's naming rights.

The aspect of including naming rights in the new contract received the most pushback from Great Park Board Director Tammy Kim who explained that naming rights had become a point of contention during discussions with Live Nation.

"This is exactly the issue I have with the Live Nation deal and the amphitheater," Kim said. "If we are going to decide to offer naming rights, then this needs to be ours and ours alone – meaning 100% the city of Irvine. Now we can decide to pay a broker's fee and I'm fine with that type of arrangement. But, I am not okay with giving to any entity."

As an alternative to the removal of naming rights sponsorship, Irvine City Attorney Jeff Melching provided a statement that would enable discussions involving the subject of potential naming rights to continue at a later date. In addition to the continuance of discussions, the provision allows OCSC to market naming rights, with Irvine maintaining final approval of all potential sponsors.

"Nothing in this provision precludes either: A) Orange County Soccer Club discussing stadium rights with third parties. Or B) the city and Orange County Soccer Club negotiating a separate agreement that provides for among other things, the allocation of revenues from naming rights. Provided, however, that any agreement for the granting of stadium naming rights remains subject to City Council review and approval in its sole and absolute discretion," Melching's statement read.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY SOCCER CLUB

Irvine leaders also approved the new contract without any discussion regarding the stadium's annual cost of operation.

In 2022, a staff report indicated that annual maintenance fees associated with the grass-turf stadium ranged between \$500,000 - \$700,000 per year.

With this new contract, Irvine could end up spending approximately \$3.5 million on maintenance costs for Championship Stadium over the next five years – \$7 million over the next decade.

Irvine is expecting a return of approximately \$300,000 a year from OCSC, which is equal to \$3 million over the next decade. With the current contract, the city of Irvine will lose approximately \$4 million on stadium costs over the next 10 years.

In addition to OCSC, Championship Stadium will also be used by other local clubs Zeta FC and the Strikers FC.

The agreement comes as the current Memorandum of Understanding, which permits OCSC's use of Championship Stadium within the Great Park, is set to expire on Nov. 30.

Last Sept. there was worry that OCSC

might be evicted from Championship Stadium given Irvine's discussions with the L.A. Galaxy II for Division 3 use.

However, dozens of protesters opposed the move and OCSC was able to secure a one-year agreement with the city, despite community reports that OCSC's schedule at Championship Stadium was making it difficult for other groups to access the stadium.

With the 2023 contract official, Dan Rutstein, OCSC President of Business Operations, said in a statement that he is looking forward to celebrating the future of OCSC with fans in Irvine and throughout Orange County.

"We are delighted to ink this deal that gives our fans and our community the security and certainty they've craved for so long," Rutstein said. "The last 12 months have been an uncertain time for our fans and we're delighted to have secured this new deal. We're incredibly grateful to the Great Park Board, the Irvine City Council, as well as the City of Irvine Staff, led by City Manager Oliver Chi. Our fans wake up today knowing we will be playing at this beautiful stadium until 2033 – when we will be able to have a 20-year celebration."