



NEW HOMES are under construction at the Portola Springs development in Irvine. Over the last year, median home values have surged to \$1.56 million in the central Orange County city, according to analysts.

# Defying the trend, Irvine has hottest housing market in U.S.

City in O.C. outperforms California communities in growth, homebuilding



“A CLEAN, SAFE city that still has room to add more housing and jobs. Nothing else in Southern California is like that,” an expert says.

BY LIAM DILLON  
AND CINDY CHANG

After only a few months in her new one-bedroom condominium in Irvine’s booming Great Park community, Kim Pohas started paying attention to real estate prices again.

She loved her condo, which she bought in May 2023 for \$643,000 within days of touring a model unit and deciding to splurge on upgrades to the floors and kitchen backsplash. But her Zillow alerts were telling her that values in her neighborhood were soaring.

On a lark, Pohas listed the condo for sale. Then in late May, a year after her purchase, came an offer too good to pass up: \$821,000.

“It’s like I flipped a house but I didn’t do anything to it,” said Pohas. [See Irvine, A10]

## ANALYSIS

# Both parties race to shape Harris’ image

This week, the vice president may focus on defining herself by contrast with Biden.

BY DAVID LAUTER

WASHINGTON — Vice presidents seeking the top job almost always feel a need to separate themselves from the presidents they’ve served.

For Hubert Humphrey, the moment came late in his campaign. In a nationally televised speech Sept. 30, 1968, he called for a halt to the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, departing from the Johnson administration’s war policy.

George H.W. Bush struggled to establish a distinct identity with voters after eight years as second fiddle to the very popular President Reagan. In his speech to the Republican convention in August 1988, he called for a “kinder, gentler nation” — to which Nancy Reagan famously retorted: “Kinder and gentler than whom?”

Vice President Al Gore faced a problem less acute than Humphrey’s, but more pressing than Bush’s: Most voters in 2000 approved of President Clinton’s job performance, but many disapproved of his personal conduct.

Gore chose a symbolic separation, picking as his running mate Sen. Joe Lieberman, who two years earlier had become the first prominent Democrat to publicly rebuke Clinton for his affair with Monica Lewinsky, calling his actions “disgraceful” and “immoral.”

At this week’s Democratic convention, one major question to pay attention to will be the extent to which Vice President Kamala Harris follows the pattern of those previous vice presidents and defines herself by contrast with President Biden.

That’s not the only question mark. Among others:

- How heavily will Harris lean into her experience as a prosecutor? Her law enforcement experience served as a liability during her 2020 primary campaign, but now has reemerged as a [See Image, A6]

# Playing offense over border security

Co-opting a GOP issue, Democrats across U.S. call for safety improvements.

BY ANDREA CASTILLO

WASHINGTON — Democrats are flipping the script on border security, with political ads for races across the country highlighting an issue Republicans have repeatedly used as an attack. In key swing districts that could determine which party controls Congress, Democrats are criticizing a lack of solutions and calling for public safety improvements at the U.S.-Mexico border.

“Ken Calvert has had 32 years to secure the border,” Democrat Will Rollins says in an ad that debuted last week, arguing that the incumbent Republican he’s seeking to oust in California’s 41st Congressional District has not gotten the job done.

In the ad, Rollins says that as a prosecutor in the U.S. attorney’s office, he put away drug lords, Mexican Mafia members and violent criminals. The video cuts to a Calvert for Congress sign that reads, “Secure the border!”

But that posture is a lie, Rollins says, pointing to Calvert’s vote against a bipartisan security bill that would have added 1,500 more agents on the border.

The same day Rollins’ ad dropped, Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.) launched an ad for his Senate campaign that opens with Arizona’s Santa Cruz County Sheriff David Hathaway driving parallel to the border, the steel barrier with concertina wire looming in the background.

“Every day on the border is a challenge,” Hathaway says. “Both parties created it, and neither has the guts to fix it. But Ruben Gallego has stood side by side with me, the only member of Congress that has come regularly to my border. And he’s fighting for solutions — better technology, more manpower, so people like me can [See Offense, A6]

# A FLiRT variant sustains relentless COVID-19 surge

BY RONG-GONG LIN II

California’s relentless FLiRT-fueled COVID surge is continuing to spawn infections at a dizzying rate, with coronavirus levels in wastewater reaching some of the highest levels seen since 2022.

Wastewater readings are now higher than all but one COVID peak in the last two years, and have far surpassed those seen during the typical summertime seasonal spikes in the vaccine era.

“This is a very large surge that we are seeing currently. This is starting to rival,

really, what we saw this past winter,” said Dr. Elizabeth Hudson, regional chief of infectious diseases at Kaiser Permanente Southern California.

For the week that ended Aug. 10, coronavirus levels in sewage were 84% of last winter’s peak in California, according to estimates posted Friday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus levels in wastewater have already blown past the peaks for the prior two summers, as well as the winter of 2022 to ’23.

“It’s so surprising to me that it hasn’t gone down yet,” said Dr. Peter Chin- [See FLiRT, A5]



LONGTIME friends Jim Stewart, left and Francesco Cura work to maintain a community garden in their neighborhood that had been a dumping ground.

# A ‘Magical Park’ takes root in East Hollywood

Google Maps recognizes the location as such, and the story of how it took over a small strip of dirt borders on fantastical.

BY LILA SEIDMAN

On a temperate August afternoon, a girthy black carpenter bee with a cape of yellow fuzz circled around the stump that started it all.

“I swear to you, they recognize us,” 47-year-old Francesco Cura said of the bee as it dove into the base of a palm tree once filled with trash and reeking of urine on a strip of land between the sidewalk and

the street in the heart of East Hollywood.

Four years ago, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cura became so infuriated by the state of the stump that he decided to clean it up — along with the surrounding parkway. Longtime friend and fellow photographer Jim Stewart, 53, joined the effort, and together they jammed the mess into derelict shopping carts and hauled it all to a trash bin.

Now the former dumping ground on Normandie Avenue and Harold Way comes up on Google Maps as “The Magical Park” — a tag given to it not by Cura or Stewart but an apparently awed visitor.

There is something subtly enchanting about the area crammed with a haphaz- [See Park, A10]

## Elmo’s mental health follow-up

The Muppet’s lighthearted question has led to research on Americans’ well-being. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**

## AI envisions new future for L.A.

Images of a sustainable city are on exhibit at USC’s Catalina Island campus. **BUSINESS, A7**

## Weather

Sunny and very warm. L.A. Basin: 91/67. **B5**

For the latest news, go to **latimes.com**.

## In foster care but on the streets

A lawsuit says Los Angeles County isn’t keeping track of youths in its care. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

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