



MICHAEL OWEN BAKER For The Times  
“I WAS scared ... of coming here,” said Jamie Nelson, who began living outside Ojai’s City Hall in fall. “And I got here and the people are just — they’re very precious. They are very good and very intelligent, and just had things happen.”

# A tent encampment rises on the grounds of Ojai’s City Hall

For three decades, Jamie Nelson has considered Ojai her personal paradise. It’s where she raised her children and cherishes the springtime, when the air smells like jasmine and orange blossoms.

“Lots of times, I’ve said, ‘God, I think Heaven probably smells like this,’ ” Nelson said of this artsy tourist town of 7,500 people.

Now, Nelson, a 74-year-old grandmother who has heart problems and bad knees and leans heavily on a cane, is homeless. She lives in a tent outside the historic Ojai City Hall, where a growing encampment filled with older people has vexed a community known for spiritual retreats, chakra-aligning crystals and organic farms.

Longtime residents are priced out. ‘It’s not a new problem,’ one says. ‘It’s just been moved to where you can see it.’

By Hailey Branson-Potts  
Reporting from Ojai, Calif.

“I was scared to death of coming here,” said Nelson, who moved to City Hall in November. “I was so afraid, because I’m older. And I got here and the people are just — they’re very precious. They are very good and very intelligent, and just had things happen.”

Thirty people live on the wooded eight-acre campus. Half are older than 55, and eight are older than 65. And — despite some locals’ assertions that they are refugees from bigger cities like Ventura and Santa Barbara — most are longtime Ojai residents, said Rick Raine, the city’s new homeless services coordinator.

“They say, ‘You’re bringing in [See Ojai, A10]

## On the path to House control

California’s role in winning the chamber in November is one thing Republicans and Democrats agree on.

By Julia Wick

Barring divine intervention or the West Coast falling into the sea, President Biden will handily win California in the November election.

But should he — or presumptive GOP nominee Donald Trump — secure a second term in the fall, the future of either’s policy agenda rests heavily on which party controls Congress, where Republicans currently hold a wafer-thin majority in the U.S. House of Representatives.

With the Golden State home to some of the most hotly contested swing districts in the country, the House’s fate will almost certainly come down to California.

The battle for the next two years of partisan political control will be waged door-to-door, from California’s beachside suburban cul-de-sacs to the tiny farm towns in the state’s fertile Central Valley.

Those battlefields will look a lot like Bridgecreek Plaza — a sun-bleached shopping center a few hundred yards from a freeway onramp in Orange County’s Huntington Beach. The mall is home to a crystal store, several insurance brokers, a dentist and the local Republican Party head- [See House races, A11]

## Oscars’ last hurrah for ‘Barbenheimer’

Nominees had strong showings at the box office. But the year ahead is uncertain.

By Christi Carras

Sunday’s 96th Academy Awards ceremony is expected to serve as a culmination of last summer’s “Barbenheimer” phenomenon, with Christopher Nolan’s three-hour historical drama about J. Robert Oppenheimer — a nearly \$1-billion hit — the clear favorite to win best picture.



CHRIS PIZZELLO Invision  
MARGOT Robbie and Ryan Gosling at the “Barbie” premiere in L.A. It is nominated for eight Oscars.

But the expected toast to this achievement of commercial event cinema comes at an uncertain time for Hollywood, as the domestic box office this year is off to a shaky start.

While some 2024 releases, such as Paramount Pictures’ reggae biopic “Bob Marley: One Love” and the musical reboot of “Mean Girls,” have posted decent results, others — including Sony Pictures’ superhero disaster “Madame Web” and Apple’s spy thriller “Argylle” — tanked spectacularly.

It wasn’t until last weekend that Warner Bros. and [See Movies, A13]



OSCARS TONIGHT  
4 p.m. PDT | TV: Channel 7  
Our guide to the Academy Awards, including what to watch for.  
CALENDAR, E1

## State feels the pain of China-U.S. trade shift

Chinese firms bypass barriers by sending goods via Mexico. California loses jobs.

By Don Lee

WASHINGTON — As if it weren’t worrisome enough for California that more highly skilled, highly paid workers have been leaving for Texas, evidence shows that the Lone Star State has begun to siphon trade dollars and uncounted jobs away from the Southland’s ports and the distribution hubs in the Inland Empire.

And the apparent cause of the new wrinkle in the Texas-California rivalry is not some new policies or programs adopted in Texas to make it a greater magnet for economic activity that was previously in California. Instead, it’s a consequence of the U.S.-China trade war that began when Donald Trump occupied the White House and has continued with President Biden’s efforts to reduce American dependence on China, especially for high-tech products that involve national security- [See Trade, A12]

## Avian flu is killing sea mammals. Is a die-off in California next?

The virus caused a mass mortality event in South America.

By Susanne Rust

An “apocalyptic” mass mortality event that has left thousands of sea lions and elephant seals dead on the beaches of South America is raising alarms among California sea mammal experts who fear that similar scenes

could play out along the Pacific coastline of North America, and in other continents, as the H5N1 bird flu continues its march across the globe.

Strains of the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus have become notorious for their devastating effects on wild and domestic bird populations over the last four years, but only recently has H5N1 inflicted so many deaths in a mammal population.

Until now, the ability of

the virus to jump from mammal to mammal has been limited. But the scale of infections and deaths in South America has raised troubling questions about whether something has changed.

While it remains unclear whether a particular strain of H5N1 has improved its ability to pass easily between mammals, such a development would have potentially devastating consequences for endan- [See Avian flu, A9]

### End of an era for Times press plant

The Olympic facility, once a crown jewel of a media empire, is closing as production shifts to Riverside. CALIFORNIA, B1

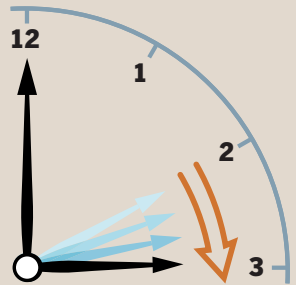
### A Gaza pier of Lego-like pieces

The U.S. military is working on a structure that will allow ships to deliver big loads of food via the sea. WORLD, A5

### Weather

Partly sunny.  
L.A. Basin: 68/50. B10

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### Timely reminder

Daylight saving time began today at 2 a.m.

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