

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# **City of San Diego Taps Well-Known Restaurant Owners to Revitalize Balboa Park's Former Village Grill**

## **RESTAURATEURS BRING EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE WITH OPERATING PANAMA 66 AND BLIND LADY ALE HOUSE**

SAN DIEGO – The City of San Diego has selected highly-regarded San Diego restaurateurs Jeff Motch and Clea Hantman to bring new life to the former Village Grill in Balboa Park. Motch and Hantman currently co-own Panama 66 in Balboa Park's San Diego Museum of Art and Blind Lady Ale House in Normal Heights.

In October 2024, the City issued a Request for Proposals for the renovation, operation and lease of the restaurant site near the Spanish Village Art Center. Through this competitive process, Motch and Hantman's proposal – a fast-casual restaurant concept – was selected. They presented a detailed operating plan and a strong demonstration of their experience and qualifications.

With this selection, Motch and Hantman can now begin working toward implementing their vision. They will work in coordination with the City's Economic Development Department to negotiate lease terms and with the Parks and Recreation Department on design approvals that are consistent with the [Balboa Park Central Mesa Precise Plan](#). The former Village Grill, built in 1973, last served customers from 2014 through 2017.

Like their other food establishment endeavors, Motch and Hantman hope to create a space that fosters a sense of community and gathering, along with more food options in the park.

**"We are excited to work with Jeff and Clea to develop an eatery that best serves the park and its visitors,"** said Economic Development Director Christina Bibler. **"Creating a vibrant restaurant in Balboa Park can come with unique complexities, but given their successful background and excitement for the project, we're confident it will become a beloved destination in the park."**

The new restaurant offering comes as part of a larger effort to ensure Balboa Park remains a vibrant and sustainable cultural and recreational gem for future generations.

The Botanical Building, which underwent a \$26.45 million ground-up reconstruction, also reopened to the public in December, just in time for the City's largest and free holiday festival, December Nights. It is now open seven days a week for the public to visit.

In February, the City entered into an Exclusive Negotiation Agreement with Save Starlight for the historic and famed Starlight Bowl near the Palisades Plaza area of the park.

The Marston House is also undergoing a significant restoration due to a \$1 million grant from the State of California, administered by the City.



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