



The Desert Sun

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

SERVING THE COACHELLA VALLEY SINCE 1927



L'Horizon Hotel's SO.PA offers the world on a plate

FOOD & DRINK, 1D

Erin Corwin murder trial moved to San Bernardino

COACHELLA VALLEY, 4A

Larry Bohannon's picks for PGA annual awards

SPORTS, 3C

PEDREGAL DEAL

FBI probing Wessman-council deal

Pouget pushed 2012 plan that another developer says cost him millions

Barrett Newkirk
The Desert Sun

When Palm Springs — prodded by Mayor Steve Pouget — offered Wessman Development millions of dollars in private money to build condos at the base of Tramway Road, the developer on the losing end of the deal felt cheated.

Dennis Cunningham had worked for years to build 132 @ Pedregal across from the Palm Springs Visitors Center, but as the economy tanked and the local housing market languished, he lost the

land in a foreclosure. Wessman purchased the mostly vacant property in 2012 for \$1.1 million.

Soon after, Wessman asked for a favor: Would the city collect payment on the bonds Cunningham put down to guarantee completion of street upgrades, sewer lines and other site improvements?

If the request was granted, Cunningham and his partners could be responsible for paying as much as \$4 million. It wasn't an unprecedented request, but Cunningham considered it unwarranted.

"I want you to act in all fairness on this," Cunningham pleaded with council members during a meeting at City Hall on July 11, 2012.

His effort fell short. The council, in a 3-2 vote, gave Wessman what the bond company in a court filing later called "an unjust \$4.0 million windfall at no cost."

In other words, a benefit to Wessman, pushed by Pouget, out of Cunningham's pocket.

Sitting in the audience for the vote, ac-

Please see **PEDREGAL**, 6A



MARILYN CHUNG/THE DESERT SUN

Developer John Wessman, right, with Mayor Steve Pouget, left, and City Council members Ginny Foat, front, and Chris Mills, rear, in 2014 at a downtown redevelopment project groundbreaking. This project is not related to the public corruption investigation.

Pope keeps locals inspired in fight for social justice



JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

Fabiola Alvarez, front, and Alex Luna pray upon entering Our Lady of Solitude Church in Palm Springs. The two will be traveling to see Pope Francis during his visit to the United States. "Political parties are not the representation of God. The representation of God is the faith," Luna said.

3 faithful make journey to hear pontiff's message

Paulina Rojas | The Desert Sun

On Saturday Pope Francis will give a speech on immigration and religious freedom at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, standing in the crowd will be Coachella Valley locals, Fabiola Alvarez, Alex Luna and Oventh Estino.

The visit to the 'City of Brotherly Love' will be the last stop in the pope's first visit to the U.S. His trip, which began on Tuesday will take him through other northeast cities — Washington D.C and New York City respectively.

Alvarez, Estino and Luna — all members of Our Lady of Solitude church in Palm Springs, will be attending Francis' visit as a part of a delegation representing the Inland Congregations United for Change, which is an affiliate of the national organization PICO Network (People Improving Communities Through Organizing).

"I think what Pope Francis really allows us to see is that the exclusions that are occurring from immigration, from

Please see **POPE**, 8A



GETTY IMAGES

Pope Francis is escorted by President Barack Obama as he greets other political and Catholic church leaders after arriving from Cuba on Tuesday at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. Francis will be visiting the U.S. until Sunday.

Virgin Hotels eyeing Palm Springs

Skip Descant
The Desert Sun

Virgin Hotels has at least an eye on Palm Springs.

Officials with the luxurious and stylish hotel brand — perhaps best known for the red and white sleek imagery of Virgin airplanes — say the company is considering Palm Springs.

"Palm Springs is a very desirable destination for Virgin Hotels and we're excited at the possibility of opening a property there," wrote Laura Kilroy, communications and social media manager for Virgin Hotels, in an email Tuesday. "At the moment we're not in a position to elaborate but as soon as we are, we'll be in touch."

The news comes as Wessman Development is proposing a six-story, 142-room hotel in downtown Palm Springs. Officials with Wessman will not say what brand the company is developing the hotel for, but has said it is as recognizable as Google or Microsoft.

Michael Braun, a senior vice-president with Wessman Development, has said the brand he is in talks with would "bring a new demographic to Palm Springs and not really compete with existing properties."

Braun and his associates have also said the brand appreciates the merger of entertainment and style.

"What really facilitated and got the hotel brand interested in Palm Springs is this event space," Chris Pardo, designer for the new hotel — and several other buildings in the downtown redevelopment — told the Palm Springs Architectural Advisory Committee on Monday as it reviewed the project.

Please see **VIRGIN HOTELS**, 7A

USA TODAY

WORLD LEADERS CONVERGE IN WASHINGTON **PAGE 1B**



LA leaders consider 'state of emergency' for city's homeless problem

CALIFORNIA, 11A

HI 102° LO 79°
Mostly sunny.
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