



CHRIS RAMIREZ Firehouse Road

**IN MAY 2019**, a fire destroyed a former Ellenville, N.Y., auto dealership that was being used as a set for an HBO miniseries starring Mark Ruffalo. The blaze resulted in an estimated \$15 million in property damage.

**COLUMN ONE**

## Five years later, no Hollywood ending for this New York town

HBO's alleged role in a fire on set of a miniseries still upsets residents

By MEG JAMES  
REPORTING FROM ELLENVILLE, N.Y.

**H**ollywood came to town, bringing bright lights, movie stars and a glint of glory.

In the foothills of the Catskill Mountains, Ellenville residents were thrilled when HBO began filming a Mark Ruffalo television series, "I Know This Much Is True," in the village known in the region for its maximum-security state prison. A casting call for extras in nearby Poughkeepsie drew nearly 3,000. At Ellenville's hospital, doctors and nurses doubled as background actors.

A Main Street landmark was spiffed up to depict a 1990s-era car dealership with gleaming props — Chevrolet Camaros and Corvettes — on loan from car buffs throughout the [See Ellenville, A8]



ARISTIDE ECONOMOPOULOS For The Times

**FROM THE** front door of his trailer, Pablo Ferrada Arias looks at some of the siding melted by the huge fire on the set of the HBO miniseries.

## Extortion effort alleged in Combs case

Unnamed L.A. celeb says accusers' lawyer made wild claims and demanded a payout.

By RICHARD WINTON

A Los Angeles-based celebrity who is keeping his identity secret is suing an attorney representing 120 alleged victims of Sean "Diddy" Combs, alleging the lawyer tried to extort a payout in return for not identify-

ing him as a sexual abuser tied to the hip-hop mogul.

The celebrity — referred to in the lawsuit as a "high-profile individual" and identified only as John Doe through his lawyers — says Houston attorney Tony Buzbee wrote demand letters in which he made "wildly false horrific allegations." According to the lawsuit, Buzbee asserted that the individual raped minors at a Combs party and that — unless he agreed to a mediated settlement — there would be consequences.

The allegations mark a new twist in a sprawling and complex Hollywood legal drama that includes an ongoing federal probe into sex trafficking allegations and a growing number of civil lawsuits against Combs and others accused of being involved in wrongdoing.

Federal prosecutors allege that the founder of Bad Boy Entertainment used his empire for decades to coerce victims into sex at gatherings known as "freak-offs." Authorities have suggested they are still examining oth-

ers in the entertainment business who might have enabled Combs or participated in the alleged assaults.

The federal case alleges a complicated scheme that would have required the knowledge and involvement of multiple people to recruit victims, organize the freak-offs, clean up after the wild affairs and cover the tracks so law enforcement would not investigate.

In the latest twist, federal prosecutors accused Combs on Friday of using secretive [See Combs, A11]

**ANALYSIS**

## Golden State Democrats take hard look in the mirror

For some, Trump's win shows the party is out of touch with the American people.

By TARYN LUNA AND SEEMA MEHTA

After voters across the nation chose President-elect Donald Trump over Vice President Kamala Harris, California Gov. Gavin Newsom cautioned against buying into the first wave of hot takes and "punditry" about what went wrong for Democrats.

"I think this will reveal itself, and I think we have a responsibility to interrogate ourselves. I'm not naive about that, and that includes all of us, individually," Newsom said in a video address. "We have to look into the mirror and really reflect on what happened more broadly."

Some Democrats say California politics are part of the problem.

The party's loss to a candidate they often liken to a fascist dictator "says some-

thing is broken with the vanguard of Democratic policies and Democratic messaging that starts in places like California," Mike Gatto, a former Democratic state Assembly member, said in written comments.

"We don't want to ever get into a position where we're not sticking up for the least among us. But at the same time, we also have to focus on things that the majority of voters care about and those things are affordability and the perception that some of the more extremes of the left wing of the Democratic party have gone too far."

The GOP tried to cast Harris, a Californian, as epitomizing a West Coast liberalism that the party portrays as more focused on identity politics than on the bread-and-butter issues that mattered most to American voters: their ability to pay rent and buy groceries.

Many factors probably contributed to Trump beating Harris, the first Black female presidential nominee of a major political party, in a [See Analysis, A6]

## Still tallying O.C. ballots in a close U.S. House race

Democrat Tran leads Republican Rep. Steel by just 314 votes in the latest update.

By LAURA J. NELSON

An Orange County congressional race that is one of the closest in the country has such a slim margin of victory that it feels more like a small-town city council contest than a race for the House of Representatives.

On Friday, Republican Rep. Michelle Steel led the race by 58 votes. Her challenger, Democrat Derek Tran, took the lead Saturday by 36 votes and widened it Tuesday to 314 votes as ballots continue to be counted.

"People who have been watching closely and feel like the race is on a knife's edge

are anxious to see this one get called," said Paul Mitchell, whose firm Political Data Inc. tracks voting trends.

The earliest votes counted in the 45th District showed Steel leading by more than 5 percentage points, but that lead vanished as elections officials counted ballots deposited in drop boxes or sent by mail. California law requires that ballots be counted as long as they are postmarked by election day and arrive at the registrar's office within a week of the election.

The shift from comfortably red on election night to uncomfortably purple two weeks later has been held up by right-wing agitators as evidence of voter fraud. Elon Musk reshared a post on X alleging that Tran had moved into the lead 11 days after the election because California was "corrupt as [See 45th District, A6]

### Prosecutors oppose tossing Trump case

D.A.'s office in Manhattan is open to delaying sentencing, but not nullifying the felony conviction. **NATION, A5**

### Suspect held in 2021 gang killing

Ousted member Samuel Villalba's death was a settling of scores in the Mexican Mafia, records show. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

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### UCLA coach talks some trash

In run-up to rivalry game against USC, Foster teases about where really smart students go to college. **SPORTS, B10**

### 'Inside the NBA' to air on ESPN

Long-running studio show finds a new home after TNT loses its TV rights. **BUSINESS, A10**

### Weather

Sunny, warming up. L.A. Basin: 73/48. **B5**



## In L.A., workers race for deportation reprieve

By SUHAUNA HUSSAIN

A line of immigrant workers formed outside an office building in Koreatown on a recent Friday afternoon.

They followed makeshift signs to a small courtyard, where scores of volunteer lawyers, translators and other staff helped them apply for a little-known federal program that offers an unusual — and probably fleeting — reprieve from deportation.

Under the Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement program, people in the U.S.



DAMIAN DOVARGANES Associated Press

**PROTESTER** Herman Armando holds up a Trump sign as advocates demand protection for immigrants.

illegally who work at companies under investigation for workplace violations can receive permission to work in the country for four years. The program, which was started during the Biden administration, is intended to encourage undocumented workers to cooperate with investigations into safety violations, employment abuses and other issues without fear that their immigration status will be used against them.

Earlier registration clinics like the three-day push that the Koreatown Immi- [See Workers, A11]



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