

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DOWNTOWN DISCUSSIONS SERIES TO TACKLE COVID-19 AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

*DLBA's Virtual Roundtable Event to be Held January 8*

**(December 23, 2020 – Long Beach, CA)** The Downtown Long Beach Alliance's webinar series, [Downtown Discussions](#), returns on January 8, 2021 with a seasoned and diverse panel of technology professionals who will discuss the topic of COVID-19 and the Digital Divide. The virtual event will examine how the pandemic has revealed the extent of the digital divide within Long Beach and urban communities, and how high-speed internet access is becoming a human right. Guest speakers will discuss lessons learned during the pandemic, creative solutions implemented, and how these experiences and initiatives could influence future strategies to address the digital divide – with a contextual focus on urban areas, small business, and Downtown Long Beach.

Roundtable participants will include the following. Headshots and bios are provided at the end of this release.

**Moderator:** Marcelle Epley, President & CEO, [Long Beach Community Foundation](#)

**Panelists:**

- Gabe Middleton, CEO and Co-founder, [human-I-T](#)
- Thomas Phelps, Senior Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Chief Information Officer, [Laserfiche](#)
- Dr. Gwen Schaffer, Chair, Long Beach Technology & Innovation Commission and Associate Professor, [CSULB](#)
- TBA: Internet Service Provider

"In 2016, the Long Beach Community Foundation initiated the Long Beach Media Collaborative, a project that convened the city's top newsrooms to investigate the digital divide in Long Beach," said Epley. "Since that time, great strides have been made by the City and its corporate and nonprofit partners in addressing the issue of internet and technology access – collaborative efforts that have put Long Beach at the forefront of a national conversation. But the pandemic has revealed the extent that this issue currently affects our community, the limitations of our progress, and the need for new creative solutions. I am looking forward to moderating this panel of experts in the field of technology and broadband access, whose combined perspectives will shed a unique light on the topic."

"Downtown Discussions: COVID-19 and the Digital Divide" will take place January 8, 10-11:30 AM, via Zoom Webinar and will also be livestreamed on DLBA's Facebook account [@downtownlongbeach](#). The event will include a 10-minute introduction, a 60-minute roundtable discussion, and a 20-minute Q&A session. Audience members may submit questions via Zoom's Q&A function, and the moderator will ask those she chooses.

"We encourage the Downtown community to join us for this key conversation," said Morris Mills, DLBA Research & Policy Analyst. "The digital divide affects our Downtown in several ways, including a barrier to entry for high-speed internet access among low-income households and small businesses operating on tight budgets, as well as those located in areas with weak connections, such as the waterfront."

To sign up for this free event, visit <https://downtownlongbeach.org/downtown-discussions/>.

### PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES



**Marcelle Epley**, *President & CEO, Long Beach Community Foundation*

Marcelle Epley is the President & CEO of the Long Beach Community Foundation where she and her team manage charitable funds and estate gifts on behalf of individuals, families, and corporations. She works with professional advisors to support their clients' charitable goals, and continually fosters philanthropy to improve communities through convening, grant-making, and endowments.

Ms. Epley earned her BA and MBA from California State University, Long Beach. She serves on several non-profit boards and committees including the Long Beach Rotary Club, Long Beach

Rotary Scholarship Foundation, Long Beach City College Foundation, California State University Long Beach, Long Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Long Beach Memorial Medical Center, and is a current Board Member and past President of the Long Beach Estate Planning & Trust Council. She has garnered several honors throughout her career for her efforts to improve the community, including Rotarian of the Year, the Long Beach City Prosecutor's Impact Award, and the Long Beach Mayor's "40 Under 40" Honoree.



**Gabe Middleton**, *CEO and Co-founder, human-I-T*

A social entrepreneur with an understanding of start-ups and sustainable, technological practices. Passionate about technology, collaborating, and giving back, he decided to start an organization that incorporates all three. Now he is the CEO and Co-Founder of human-I-T, an organization committed to providing digital access to those in need.



**Thomas Phelps**, *Senior Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Chief Information Officer, Laserfiche*

Thomas Phelps IV is the Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Chief Information Officer for [Laserfiche](#), a global provider of intelligent content management and process automation software. Thomas joined Laserfiche in 2014 and leads IT, industry marketing, analyst relations and major strategic initiatives. He was part of the executive team that launched Laserfiche Cloud in 2015. Prior to Laserfiche, Thomas was the national entertainment and media champion for cybersecurity at PwC. He led the initiative to innovate [content security practices \[mpaa.org\]](#) used worldwide in the motion picture industry. He was the Advisory Services leader for two major accounts, and provided Fortune 500 clients with consulting services on IT audit, IT transformation, security, privacy, and business continuity areas.

Thomas is the chairperson of [Long Beach Accelerator™](#), a nonprofit whose mission is to accelerate early stage startups with seed funding, mentorship and exit strategy. He serves on the board of directors for [Innovate@UCLA](#), [Southern California, SIM](#) and [Advancing Women in Technology](#). Thomas is a past president of [ISACA Los Angeles](#), and on the [50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary](#) Governance Panel. He is a founding member and past president of [Ascend](#) Los Angeles, a Pan-Asian leadership development organization. Thomas has co-authored and contributed to five books. In 2019, Thomas became an adjunct professor teaching IT Auditing and Analytics in the [USC Master of Accounting](#) program.



**Dr. Gwen Schaffer**, *Chair, Long Beach Technology & Innovation Commission*

Dr. Gwen Schaffer is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Public Relations at California State University, Long Beach, where she teaches courses on internet regulation and communication law. Her research on topics such as broadband connectivity and data privacy explore ways in which digital exclusion and algorithmic bias compound existing challenges. Her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation; the Haynes Foundation; the Media, Inequality and Change Center housed at the University of Pennsylvania; and METRANS. In her role as chair for the Long Beach Technology and Innovation Commission, Dr. Schaffer has co-authored policy reports on the city's digital inclusion efforts and the privacy implications of deploying smart

city technologies.

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**About the Downtown Long Beach Alliance:** The Downtown Long Beach Alliance is a non-profit, community-based organization whose mission is to cultivate, preserve and promote a healthy, safe, and prosperous Downtown. By balancing the interests of the residents, as well as businesses, the DLBA creates tangible progress by way of vested interest and solidified partnerships across local, municipal, and commercial lines. For additional information, visit [www.downtownlongbeach.org](http://www.downtownlongbeach.org), follow on Facebook [@downtownlongbeach](#), and follow on Twitter and Instagram [@DLBA](#).