

# Pasadena Star-News

## LA Port director working overtime in push to secure coronavirus medical supplies

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Unearthing leads and braving cut-throat bidding wars for medical supplies — welcome to Gene Seroka’s second “day job.”

On March 31, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announced he had appointed Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, as the city’s chief logistics officer.

The charge: to make sure hospitals, first responders and local communities have the medical supplies and protective equipment they need to meet the enormous challenge posed by COVID-19.

Not an easy task.

But Seroka’s inside contacts and knowledge of trade and the supply chain, Garcetti said, put him in a unique position to steer the urgent quest for medical supplies as hospitals braced for the task.

Seroka said the massive ramp-up has been compared to the port’s World War II days when Victory class ships were being built in port.

It’s been a nonstop, full-court press.

“To date we’ve researched and vetted more than 400 leads,” Seroka said in an April 21 telephone interview. Most, he said, come from “opportunists,” requiring a bit of a chase in order to get to the ones that are reputable.

While some of the earlier, more dire estimates on hospital overcrowding haven’t come to pass, Seroka said it’s better to be over-prepared.

“There are still shortages across the board for varying products at various locations,” Seroka said.

Along with supply shortages and knock-off products, rising prices present another hurdle.

Take isolation gowns, one of the items for which there is still an ongoing need. The cost for one of those, Seroka said has gone up from about 30 cents to \$3 each.

Also still needed are N95 medical-grade masks, exam gloves, face shields and goggles, surgical over-shoe slippers, and hair protector bonnets.

Within 10 days of his new appointment, Seroka and his 18-member city team were in business with a new city department and website —

[www.lovla.org](http://www.lovla.org) (Logistics Victory Los Angeles) — that has a mission “to link providers and qualified leads” for supplies with the medical providers who are in need of them.

Consider it a craigslist-style mix-and-match service, but one that comes with sometimes lengthy vetting before a deal can be made.

Companies that have such items as ventilators or test kits or any of the other protective and treatment supplies needed can register on the website.



Los Angeles Port Executive Director Gene Seroka



Gene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, says port leaders are focused on \$367 million in long-term infrastructure investments. (Photo by Scott Varley, Daily Breeze/SCNG)

Hospitals and others in need of specific items can also register.

Seroka said other aims are to expedite and speed up shipments coming through the ports or LAX and to find alternative sources for items that are hard to procure.

Stockpiling of goods by various layers of government is another challenge, he said.

But donations also are rolling in. On April 17, Apple donated 160,000 face masks to Logistics Victory Los Angeles.

In a written comment, Patrick Halloran, director of Global Trade Logistics for Cardinal Health, credited Seroka and the team with bringing together terminal operators, dockworkers, ocean carriers and truckers to get medical supplies delivered and distributed efficiently.

Supplies being rounded up by the new city department include those needed to serve essential workers at the massive twin ports.

Early on, some longshore workers and truck drivers expressed concerns about a lack of protective gear.

Seroka said that situation is improving.



Gene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, speaks during Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's welcome news conference for the fourth annual LA Fleet Week event. The welcome remarks were made onboard the Battleship Iowa, Wednesday morning August 28, 2019. (Photo by Chuck Bennett, Contributing Photographer)

NEXT Trucking has provided 1,500 surgical masks for the Harbor Trucking Association and the unions, Seroka said. Harbor Freight donated masks and spray bottles to keep terminals cleaned.

When it was learned that there was not enough cleaning solution to keep equipment and terminals sterilized, Seroka said, "we jumped into action."

The general manager of the city's Department of Water and Power secured 700 gallons of industrial-grade bleach that could be diluted and used in 32-ounce spray bottles.

But where to find the thousands of bottles needed?

"My senior staff and I combed the stores," Seroka said. The Home Depot in Playa Vista came through, he said.

The Pacific Maritime Association also has purchased face protective wear and masks for longshore workers on the docks, Seroka said.



## **Donna Littlejohn | Reporter**

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Donna Littlejohn received a bachelor's degree (double major) in journalism and political science from California State University, Long Beach, and began her career in daily journalism with the San Pedro News-Pilot, transferring to The Daily Breeze staff in 1998 after the San Pedro publication closed.