

## Mesa West Sees Opportunities in Crisis

**FINANCE:** Lender is poised to thrive amid the pandemic

By **JAMES B. CUTCHIN** Staff Reporter

Mesa West Capital, a pioneer in the commercial real estate investing field, was one of the many nonbank lenders that thrived amid the tightly regulated banking environment following the 2008 financial crisis.

The Brentwood-based business went from making \$500 million in loans annually before the crisis to more than \$4 billion last year, according to the company.

Now, having survived one major recession and seen long-term growth in its wake, Mesa West founders **Jeff Friedman** and **Mark Zytko** believe the aftermath of Covid-19 could create similar opportunities in their space.

“We are already seeing (lending) opportunities that wouldn’t have been there in January,”

Friedman said. “In this type of environment, we can lend at lower leverage with better covenants and charge more.”

The company’s track record, along with its ability to capitalize on unique situations, were among the reasons Mesa West was acquired by **Morgan Stanley** in 2018.

“From our perspective, we had grown from an independent boutique firm to a firm compet-



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Founders **Jeff Friedman** and **Mark Zytko**.

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Harvesting Data:  
Farm Dog execs  
Alon Shmueli,  
Bar Galditzky and  
founder Liron Brish.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

LA’s burgeoning agtech industry sees green acres ahead

By **COCO HUANG** Staff Reporter

**W**hile plenty of tech companies are interested in filling up consumers’ feeds, some are more interested in feeding consumers.

And Los Angeles, with its rich pool of tech talent and its extensive legacy of agriculture — L.A. County ranked as the nation’s top farm county from 1909 to 1949 — has become a rising hub for these agricultural technology companies

“One of the very exciting things is that

... we are very close in proximity to our stakeholders along the food value chain,” said **Milena Bogdanova Bursztyn**, a Venice-based investor at **Germin8 Ventures**, a venture capital firm that specializes in foodtech and agtech investment.

In addition to farmers and growers, L.A. is home to food processing companies like El Segundo-based **Beyond Meat Inc.**, traditional grocers such as Monrovia-based **Trader Joe’s Co.** and ecommerce food marketers including Marina del Rey-based **Thrive Market Inc.**

And in late August, in a blurring of the lines between online and in-person food shopping, **Amazon.com Inc.** opened its first Amazon Fresh grocery store in Woodland Hills.

One local agtech business, **Sensei Ag Holdings Inc.**, launched in Santa Monica in July. The company was founded by **Oracle Corp.** founder **Larry Ellison** and **David Agus**, founding director of USC’s Lawrence J. Ellison Institute for Transfor-

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## Surf Air Lands Big Investment

**TRANSPORTATION:** Carrier is considering SPAC or IPO

By **HOWARD FINE** Staff Reporter

Hawthorne-based **Surf Air Mobility Corp.**, the subscription private air service that initially specialized in flying execs between Silicon Beach and Silicon Valley, has secured a \$200 million investment that is contingent upon the company going public.

Surf Air recently pivoted from upscale commuters to the upscale leisure market, announcing Sept. 2 that **Global Emerging Markets Group**

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## Readying for Their Closeup

**LAW:** Local litigators apply new skills for remote trials

By **NEAL KOCH** Deputy Editor

Silent film careers typically tanked with the talkies, and stars of the silver screen often didn’t transition well to TV.

In the real-life theater that is Los Angeles County’s court system — the world’s largest — litigators are the performers. And to ensure they make the grade in a new era of remote trials and hearings, many have begun retraining and reforeshaping their skills.

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Ranked by total assets  
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### REAL ESTATE: LA Rising

Upscale developments and a prime location are driving a boom in Koreatown. **Page 15**

### REAL ESTATE: Multifamily Makeover

Watts housing complex Jordan Downs is getting a \$1 billion redevelopment. **Page 10**



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