

City of Long Beach

Mayor's Office

Mayor of Long Beach is the first political office Beverly O'Neill has held. She took on the city's leadership

during a period that would have been daunting even to the most seasoned politician. Yet it was the perfect time for Beverly O'Neill. She had recently retired as president-superintendent of Long Beach City College. As an educator, civic leader and Long Beach native, O'Neill not only knew the city well, but she had an intrinsic commitment to preserving its goodness.

The spirit of the Long Beach renaissance emanates from Mayor O'Neill. She has inspired the city's talented population and helped guide its ascendancy. Her prime ambition was not political, but rather to educate and exalt her fellow citizens to be proud of their city.



Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, Mayor O'Neill, and Richard Cannon, former chair of the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation at the 1999 EDDY Award dinner, where the mayor was recognized for her leadership role in Long Beach's economic resurgence.

There has always been much to be proud of in Long Beach. The beautiful seaside city has long been appreciated for its climate, location and friendly atmosphere. The U.S.

Navy established a station and shipyard that would define Long Beach as a Navy town for more than 70 years. Douglas Aircraft, which then became McDonnell Douglas and then Boeing, brought eager, intelligent workers, engineers and technicians to the city to build the world's finest flying machines.

A crisis then shook the city's foundation even more powerfully than the infamous 1933 earthquake. The Navy, Long Beach's main source of jobs, income and identity, bid

its hometown adieu. The Long Beach Naval Station closed in 1994, the year Mayor O'Neill took office, and the Navy shipyard shut down toward the end of her first term. The aerospace industry, which fed off the military's presence, withered. The negative economic impact

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totaled some \$3 billion. More than 50,000 jobs were lost.

A similar fate has befallen other cities, many of which never recovered; Long Beach was different. It seized upon the opportunity to redefine itself and step into the future as a new city.

Mayor O'Neill's educational background had helped to prepare her for this challenge. When she was president-superintendent of Long Beach City College, O'Neill held regular meetings with the president of California State University, Long Beach, and the superintendent of schools of the Long Beach Unified School District. The group discussed changes on the horizon that signaled potential problems for education and for the city, too. They met with local business leaders to tell them what they thought was happening to education in Long Beach. They discussed a way to make it easier for students to transition from elementary school to high school, on to college and university. The concept was one of seamless education.

Mayor O'Neil knew instinctively that in addition to attracting new businesses and creating jobs, the same spirit of renewal, of establishing a vital city that was an attractive place to raise children and a place where those children would want to work once they had reached adulthood was essential. It would help revitalize the integrity that Long Beach needed to fulfill its destiny as one of California's great cities.

During the 1980s more than 100,000 immigrants settled in Long Beach. The impact on city services was dramatic. In less than a decade the languages spoken by the student population of the Long Beach Unified School District increased from four to 40.

When Beverly O'Neill took office, Long Beach was straining to the bursting point. The economy was in a tailspin.

and city services were overburdened. Mayor O'Neill valued the city's unique attributes and assets. She saw her role as mayor as a chance to show the city's diverse population that they had common objectives, and that by heading in the same direction they could achieve strength through unity that would empower them to accomplish their goals.

Mayor O'Neill rallied her forces. City officials took a hard look at what they were facing and began searching for ways to maintain the financial strength necessary to sustain the quality of life and provide citizens with needed services. They developed policies anchored by what came to be called the three Ts and an R - Tourism, Trade, Technology and Retail. Although military and aerospace cutbacks and the recession of the early 1990s had hit Long Beach hard, the city still had inalienable strengths.

It had the No. 1 port in the Western Hemisphere, which made trade a foregone conclusion. Long Beach had a great location for companies that needed to consolidate Los Angeles and Orange County operations and an excellent educational infrastructure, which made it a viable home for technology-based businesses. In addition, it was a natural haven for tourism-related enterprises.

O'Neill was a motivator and facilitator. She worked with the city government and business leaders to translate



The closing ceremony at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard (from left to right) Mayor O'Neill, Congressman Horn and Governor Pete Wilson.

policies into plans and plans into action.

The mayor's sixth State of the City address, given on January 11, 2000, acknowledged the struggle — the road the citizens of Long Beach had traversed together and the hill they had climbed — and it celebrated the successes: falling crime rates, soaring educational scores, an influx of major tourism, trade, technology and retail businesses; and the first balanced budget in a decade.

The mayor made it clear that while Long Beach may be gratified by its accomplishments, it is not complacent. The city's strategic plan for the next decade focuses on safe, clean neighborhoods and continued managed growth. It seeks to maintain the quality of life and to offer youth opportunities for success that will allow the city to continue to renew itself.

Beverly O'Neill's positive attitude, her belief in the attributes of her city, and the potential of her fellow citizens have been rewarded. The new Long Beach is a shining city by the sea - its skyline gleaming with a sophisticated sparkle, and its people beaming with hometown pride.

Gen. Colin Powell and Mayor O'Neill at the opening of the Colin Powell Arena.

