

# Business by the Beach

by Anna G. Hobart



This solicitation isn't a yellowed clipping from a newspaper archive; it's modern reality in Oxnard.



GREATER OXNARD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

*As the community kicks off a centennial celebration, City of Opportunity seems an appropriate sobriquet.*

Despite the typical beachfront advantages—sailing, surfing, an abundance of marine life—Oxnard grew up a hard-working, blue-collar town. Farm fields stretch beyond its boundaries. Oil rigs punctuate the horizon. The adjacent Port of Huene bustles with industry. For much of its history, travelers have known this town primarily as the site of the only commercial airport serving Ventura County. Indeed the city of Ventura, just 10 miles away, with its “surfs-up” fun and quaint architecture, is a major tourist draw. Not so Oxnard.

Even the name seemed to inhibit the community's ability to reach its highest potential. Christened for the brothers who built the town's first sugar beet factory in the late 1800s, “Oxnard” lacks the poetry of so many neighboring monikers. San Buenaventura, Ventura's original name, indicates good fortune. Camarillo is fraught with Spanish romance. Thousand Oaks sounds pastoral. Oxnard? It just doesn't reflect the beauty of this place. It's no wonder cit-

izens periodically rally to change their city's name to something more representative of its many benefits. As the community kicks off a centennial celebration, City of Opportunity seems an appropriate sobriquet.

A decade ago, Oxnard leaders confronted a declining economy head-on by launching an aggressive economic development campaign. It seems to be working. Among its greatest assets—geography, land and people. Steve Kinney, president of the Economic Development Corporation, explains, “The location is ideal. The beaches are beautiful.” Recently his organization launched a new and highly appropriate marketing slogan, “Business by the Beach.”

In 1980, the pleasant beachfront lifestyle was further enhanced when Congress established Channel Islands National Park just 11 miles off Oxnard's coast. Five distinct islands make up the park, which is visited by only 30,000 people a year. It is a haven for kayakers, scuba divers and all those who want to observe vast quantities of marine life—dolphins, whales, seals, sea lions and more—in a pristine setting. The islands are a tremendous lifestyle advantage, according to Kinney, who moved to the area from Virginia's Chesapeake Bay area in 1987

Opposite page: Channel Islands off the coast of Oxnard. This page (l to r): Channel Islands Harbor; agriculture is still a big part of Oxnard's economy; Silverstrand Beach.



and spent his first eight years in Oxnard living on a sailboat. "When you live on a boat, you are much more attuned to weather. The conditions here are moderate all through the year. To a great extent Southern California is a desert. Only artificial irrigation allows L.A. to grow. The temperature down there goes up 10-15 degrees above what we experience here. We don't need air conditioning. We don't have bugs. Our situation on the coast adds a great deal in terms of personal comfort, and in a business setting it is a tremendous energy savings."

Lowering the cost of doing business in pricey California is a big part of Oxnard's economic development strategy.

Kinney explains, "We were able to set aside large tracts of land for future development. Because of a county-wide, growth-control measure, prohibiting expansion of city boundaries, that means a lot." Especially when price is factored in. "We do see a fairly dramatic price differential between our land and the rest of southern California," Kinney said.

Currently there are four major industrial complexes in the city. The largest is the Pacific Commerce Center, 1,400 acres set aside for mixed-use development. Established in 1997, approximately 50% has been developed.

A master plan for more than 430 acres is underway. It will add residential as well as industrial and office properties.

"We have a new industrial zoning designation that allows every kind of commercial use—manufacturing, distribution, research and development, office—up to but not including heavy industrial," Kinney explained.

It's an effort to balance the city's economic mix. "Much of the 1990s was spent developing a strong retail sector," Kinney said. "With that in place, it is easier to attract other business."

Kinney's principle recruiting ground is just an hour south in Los Angeles. "We do best with companies already attuned to the California lifestyle and the cost of doing business here. Consi-

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United Express serves Oxnard with five daily flights to and from Los Angeles.





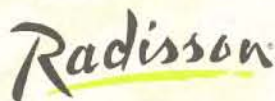
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dering our proximity to Los Angeles, we have a reasonably priced housing market as well as a good selection of land."

The city also boasts a workforce willing to work in manufacturing and other industrial pursuits. The local college tailors training programs to meet the needs of business. "Generations of our citizens have been farm workers. We are trying to offer them more opportunity," Kinney explained.

Toward that goal, city policies accommodate developers. "We don't waste their time. We make sure they have the right information and the right contacts. The EDC essentially acts as the company's representative. We offer a complimentary processing of some of the critical permits. It saves the company time and money and doesn't cost manufacturers and distributors anything." Along the same lines, the EDC works with the city to guarantee that developers' permits will be processed within a specific time frame or their application fees will be refunded.

As a further incentive to developers, the city offers a variety of financial assistance, including tax-exempt industrial bonds that can be used to purchase land, make improvements and even purchase equipment.

Oxnard's only local tax consists of a business license fee that Kinney says is "nominal. A large company that might spend \$1,000 a year in Los Angeles would probably spend \$100-\$200 a year here. I'd say our city government is a model for an entity that wants to work with business." 

## Oxnard By the Numbers

- 1 With a population of 182,027, Oxnard is the 20th largest among California's 475 major cities.
- 2 Downtown Los Angeles is 62 miles southeast of Oxnard.
- 3 Santa Barbara is 35 miles west.
- 4 The average mean temperature is 61 degrees. The average minimum temperature is 52.4 degrees. The average maximum temperature is 69.6 degrees.
- 5 Annual rainfall is approximately 14.75 inches.
- 6 The city is served by one community college and one four-year-university — California State University - Channel Islands opened its doors for students in the fall of 1999.

# It Ought to Be in Pictures

**CREDIT THE OXNARD PHENOMENON** — the city's traditionally anonymous attributes—with its increasing success as a film site. From Melrose Place, to Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen flicks, Oxnard shines.

Vast stretches of easily accessible and uncrowded beachfront, a highly diverse assortment of buildings, easy access to steam and diesel trains, vintage automobiles and all the action of a bustling seaport are just part of draw. This is also a community that works hard to make it easy for filmmakers.

"We have the most aggressive film-marketing program in Ventura County," Steve Kinney, executive director of the Economic Development Corporation, said. "We'd already developed a library of distinctive images of

city and county sites when an official Ventura County film commission was established a year ago. So it made sense that we would help lead that effort."

Much of the film activity revolves around the beach. "The number of people using our beaches compared to those further south is infinitesimal. There are also a couple of sections of park right on the water, so the site can be used to make it look like they're out in the middle of nowhere. It's been extremely popular for commercials."

In addition to representing locations throughout Oxnard, the commission also represents Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, Simi Valley,

Thousand Oaks and Ventura. For more information, check out the website [filmventuracounty.com](http://filmventuracounty.com). 📷

Hollywood Beach



OXNARD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION