

Conejo residents tour 'niche' port

Contributed by: YourHub.com on 7/17/2007

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Some Conejo Valley residents may not know where in Ventura County the Port of Hueneme is positioned. Nonetheless, the port, which is a major industry in the small city of Port Hueneme and the county, has a major impact on our area believes George Lange, Thousand Oaks.



That's why Lange, president of the Ventura County Special Districts Association, engineered a family field trip for Ascension Lutheran Church's Men's Ministry. Lange leads that group as a church member. Another volunteer, Jim Bragg, drove the bus down the Conejo Grade and across the Oxnard Plains to the only deep-water commercial shipping port between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Mark Von Kronemann was on-board helper since Lange drove his own car to the office of the Oxnard Harbor District, which operates the port, to ensure the catered breakfast was ready.



Thousand Oaks City Councilmember Dennis Gillette, right, was on tour led by Will Berg, Port Of Hueneme's Director of Marketing & Trade Zone Services for the Oxnard Harbor District where autos are important imports.

While eating, we listened to a fascinating orientation by Will Berg, port director of marketing and trade zone services. In 2002, California's international gateways handled one-fifth of all U.S. international trade, he said. "The transportation infrastructure needed to accommodate this trade has experienced explosive growth, creating more than 500,000 high paying local jobs. California's ports remain the heavy lifters of the State's global economy."

So what does that mean? "The California legislature as early as the 1970s identified the state's port system, including the Port of Hueneme, as a primary economic resource, critical as platforms for economic growth."



Blue Skies, blue waters frame the port on a busy day

While Port Hueneme of course doesn't match the stature of the other giant ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the Port of Hueneme is a "niche" port," primarily handling perishable fresh fruit and automobile imports. Los Angeles and Long Beach ports are "first and foremost" container ports handling about 200 million tons of cargo each year, per Berg's description. That's 400 million tons of cargo annually compared with Hueneme's 1.3 million annually, he said. The Port of Los Angeles sits on 7,500 acres and has 270 spots for ships; Long Beach is on 3,200 acres with 80 spots for ships; and Hueneme sits on about 135 acres with five berths. The larger ports average about 2,000 ship calls a year, while Hueneme racks up 400, Berg reported. No ship was in port this day. Berg said the port is a West Coast distribution hub for goods heading "all the way to the Rocky Mountains up into Canada" and western states.

Trekkers included Treva Bohning, who cheerfully posed for a photo in front of a ship model in the district office lobby.

Thousand Oaks council member Dennis Gillette, with his wife, said, "After being involved in government in this country for over 40 years, I appreciate an opportunity like this to be reminded how valuable this port is as a national, state and regional asset, and how well the residents are served by this port here."

Lu Mitchell didn't realize the port was no longer exclusively the military's and called the tour "wonderful."

Berg said, "Despite its relatively modest and highly constrained size, the Port of Hueneme grew rapidly during the 1990s," almost tripling both the value and weight of cargo handled between 1990 and 2001. At our time recently, the port was generating more than 5,000 direct and indirect jobs in Ventura County, and handling about \$6 million in cargo value annually, he said.

Each port's strengths vary. The county port's strength is in handling palletized cargo: "Our workforce unloads upwards of 135 pallets per hour off the ships, with LA/LB may move 60-65 pallets on a good day."

