

Local History of the Channel Island Harbor, Port of Hueneme, Ventura Harbor

The purpose of the session is to give you enough information about the local history so that you will feel comfortable when you are on the floor discussing the harbors in our area. We have a collection of photographs which show the development of the harbor and its environs. It is a good starting point because it acclimates the visitor to our location via a visit to the local harbors.

Briefly the history of the area revolves around the Chumash Indians who are believed to have migrated here about 13,000 years ago. They lived on many of the Channel Islands as well as the land area between San Luis Obispo and Malibu. They were a sea-faring group who built a boat called a tomol. They knew that there was a deep water trench under what is the entrance to the Port of Hueneme.

Our area was first noted in Western European history with the visit of Juan Cabrillo in 1542. He actually landed at Point Mugu, and explored the area as far north as Ventura. The next visitor from Europe was the explorer Sebastian Viscaïno, who sailed by Port Hueneme into the Channel between the Anacapas and the coastline, naming it "Santa Barbara Channel." This was in the year 1602. The Franciscan friars began their establishment of the missions in 1700's, and thereafter the population of present-day Ventura County began to grow.

This area was under a Spanish land grant from 1837. However, the original grantees sold and resold the land because few of them wanted to live here, preferring Spain. One of the major purchasers of this land was Thomas Scott, of New York, and another was Christian Borchard. Thomas Scott was an absentee owner, a wealthy business and oil entrepreneur. He sent his faithful employee Thomas Bard to California to represent his interests in California.

In 1873, the County of Ventura was formed, being carved out of the larger Santa Barbara County. The separation was by mutual agreement, and the development of Ventura County actually began. Thomas Bard, the representative of Thomas Scott, was to become a renowned county father. He later became Senator Bard, and was a leader among the many early Ventura County families, who included the McGraths, Oxnards, Petits, Donions, and Ruggles.

PORT OF HUENEME

Thomas Bard "discovered," probably from the Chumash Indians, the deep subterranean sea canyon at the edge of the Scott property bordering the Pacific. This great underwater canyon was long known to the Chumash who lived in settlements between Point Conception and Point Mugu. One of the settlements was called "Weneme," or "Wenumu," even "Wynerna," which translated as "resting place" in the

Chumash language. Once Bard learned of the sea canyon, it was his dream to have a harbor built there.

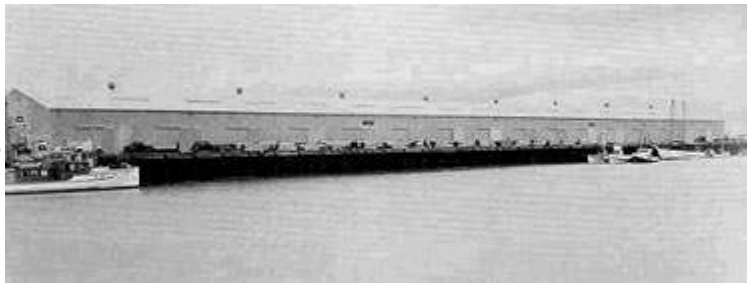
However, harbors cost more, and in the meantime, it was the construction of a wharf for the area that consumed his time. Up until 1871, all ships calling at the area of Point Mugu or "Wynerna" had to be unloaded at sea transferring their cargo to "lighters," vessels designed to bring the cargo to the land, and to deliver cargo to the outlying ships for the transport of local products to other places. In May 1871, Thomas Bard formed the Hueneme Wharf and Lighter Company, to build a 900 foot wharf and warehouses. In expectance for receiving a permit to build, Bard had erected a fence around the property involved.

This served as a notice, and caused a little "war" Squatters had occupied the property, and filed suit challenging the ownership of the coastline. These people were the men who operated the "lighter" businesses, and they were afraid of losing their clients who would be able to unload right at the end of the wharf. One of the squatter organizers was William Barnard, and he persuaded the squatters that they must take action against the proposed wharf. On the day that the materials arrived to begin the construction, Barnard and a number of squatters armed themselves with sticks and clubs, and advanced on the wharf workers. Thomas Bard himself came to the "front line," and seeing Barnard wildly thrashing about the fence came to him and calmly picked him up bodily and deposited him some distance away. After an hour or so, cooler heads prevailed, and a compromise was settled upon. One of the clauses in the agreement was Bard offering to sell to the settlers the land upon which they had "squatted," thus ending the one-day "Hueneme War."

The museum has a painting of Bard's Wharf by Gilkerson. Wharf shown as it was in the late 1890's. David Leach took photographs of the wharf area and the Channel Islands so Gilkerson could place them correctly.

After a lifetime of service his community and to his employer, Thomas Bard died in 1915, not living long enough to see his dream of a harbor for the area fulfilled. His son, Richard Bard, took the reins in administering the businesses of his father, and must have inherited his father's business acumen. He also intended to continue his push for a harbor, as his father would have done.

By the early 1920s, agriculture in Ventura County began evolving, becoming more diversified. Lemons appearing on the rich Oxnard plain were destined to outstrip both the lima bean and the sugar beet as the



County's principal crop. The impact of citrus would be immediate and long lasting with the construction in 1922 of two giant Sunkist lemon-packing plants. In an instant Sunkist

became one of the port village's largest employers. Within ten years, the once mighty sugar beet declined to such an extent that the Ventura County Railway removed much of its trackage linking the local ranches.

Agriculture's continued growth however, coupled with the decline in railway service challenged local farmers to create a competitive edge in the marketplace. Leading the way was one of Ventura County's most influential citizens, Richard Bard, son of Thomas who in his later years served in the U.S. Senate. Senator Thomas Bard though instrumental in the earlier construction of Bard's Wharf had never given up the idea of a truly modern transportation alternative in the form of a deep-sea commercial port.

Early in 1926, the California State Assembly enacted legislation to establish a harbor for the area, but never funded the harbor. The county then tried for federal funding, but was rejected.

By the early 1930s it became clear that the elder Bard's vision of a commercial port was not an elusive dream. Continuing his father's efforts, Richard would influence events and shepherd the area into the modern age and he, more than anyone else would bring the vision of a seaport to Hueneme. Bard and the area's farmers applied for a PWA loan of \$1,600,000 to build Port Hueneme. They did their best to prove the project sound --- both to government engineers and government economists. To the engineers they cited the presence of the Channel Islands, eighteen miles west of the mud flats where the harbor was to be located. The islands, they said, formed a natural breakwater. They explained how Hueneme Canyon (which alone would save \$1,500,000 in dredging costs) came within 300 feet of the proposed channel and how an underground river would keep the channel free of silt. To the economists they cited figures: within trucking distance of Hueneme were 25% of California's sugar beets, half of its walnuts and almonds, 60 percent of its cotton, practically all its borax and potash. The Ventura oil fields were only twelve miles away. The promoters ran a truck from Castaic junction, dividing point for southern San Joaquin Valley traffic, first to the Port of Los Angeles, then to Hueneme. The route to Hueneme was twenty-eight miles shorter, had 432 fewer street crossings, and no electric railroad crossings.

But Harold Ickes, PWA head, ruled that the project did not make sense. As the farmers' stubbornness grew, they decided to build the harbor themselves --- On Election Day, April 29, 1937 led by Richard Bard, the tenacity of the citizens of Oxnard, Hueneme and Ventura County was rewarded with the creation of the Oxnard Harbor District.

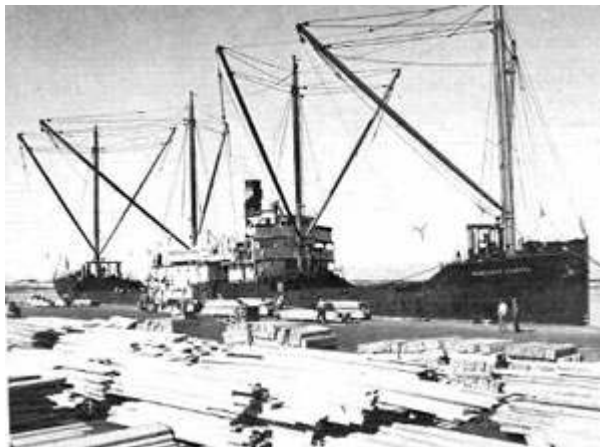
The District's first three Commissioners were Eugene H. Agee, an Oxnard businessman, Elmer O. Green a Hueneme Banker and Fred M. Aggen, a Somis rancher. Frustrated by Washington D.C.'s inability or unwillingness to fund the port's construction these men proposed a bond issue in the amount of \$1,750,000 to fund the project. On May 5th 1938

in less than fifteen minutes after the sale opened, the entire bond issue was fully subscribed. For perhaps the first time in American history a port would be constructed without a cent of federal government money. At that time it was proposed and accepted by the City of Oxnard that the harbor property it had previously annexed be released to the Harbor District and that it should never be a part of any incorporated city.

On January 24, 1939 the Standard Dredging Company began operations in the channel, although the official groundbreaking ceremonies weren't held until February 4th, with Oxnard attorney Mark Durley serving as master of ceremonies. Appropriately enough, Richard Bard who was destined to be known as the 'Father of Port Hueneme," was asked to turn the first shovel. The harbor was officially completed by July 4, 1940. The two-day dedication was held over the weekend of July 6th & 7th 1940.

The harbor opened and was closed almost immediately by a labor dispute. The new harbor commissioners, unfamiliar with the ways of the waterfront, had signed a contract with A.F. of L. longshoremen. The C.I.O. led by Harry Bridges affiliated International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) promptly closed the young port. After this error was rectified and a C.I.O. contract was signed, the port made some progress but not much. Through the rest of the first year and the whole of the next it considered itself lucky to attract a fish cannery and a kelp-processing plant and to see its new pier and wharf used by lumber steamers, Hueneme, the farmers felt, still had its future before it.

They were right, although very different from what they had intended. With the outbreak of the war in the Pacific, the government now eyed Hueneme and on March 5, 1942, confiscated the port and made it a naval base. In the harbor to which it had refused a \$1,600,000 loan as not making sense five years earlier now built six docks with a capacity for nine ships. It spent more than \$6 million on 5,205 lineal feet of wharfage, 550,000 yards of dredging, 1,200,000 square feet of building, and thirty-six miles of railroad. Nearby it built an advance-base depot, a Seabee advance base, and an amphibious-landing training school. For its money the government got what is probably the most efficient harbor in the world. By the end of the Pacific war Hueneme's wharves were handling 150,000 tons of cargo a month and it appeared the Navy has taken Port Hueneme for keeps.



The farmers got \$2 million for their port, enough to let them meet bonds and interest plus the satisfaction of having contributed importantly to the Pacific war. But they were back to trucking their crops to Los Angeles.

Following the end of the Pacific war and the hectic demobilization that followed

negotiations began for the return to commercial operations of the 'Port the Farmers Built.' After a series of fitful starts the Navy in 1947 finalized a lease agreement with the Oxnard Harbor District for the District's original Dock #1 consisting of sixteen acres of the original 322 acres it had been forced to give up five years earlier. By 1960 the Oxnard Harbor District completed a feasibility study by which the District would purchase Dock # 1 outright along with 6 additional acres for a total of 22 acres, along with the addition of 35 acres from the city of Port Hueneme. The newly reconstructed Wharf 1 was now 1,800 feet long and able to accommodate up to three ships. The 1960's saw a new and significant phase in the Port's development with the exploitation of oil deposits in the Santa Barbara Channel. The port of Hueneme remains to this day an important base for the off shore oil industry.

During the development of the wharf, Thomas Bard brought in the first gusher of oil, in California, near Piru, for the California Petroleum Company, a Thomas Scott business. More speculators of oil invaded California, and in 1890, Bard and other investors formed the Union Oil Company, which we know as Unocal today.

The decade of the 70's introduced what was to become the Port's unique cargo niche. As ports across America turned their focus to containerization an opportunity was created in the breakbulk and Ro/Ro specialties.

1977 saw the arrival of Mazda Motors of North America and the port quickly adapted to this new niche. In fiscal year 1977/1978 a total of 17,300 autos were handled at the port. As more auto manufacturers and Ro/Ro carriers such as Wallenius Lines, (today Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics) recognized the ideal conditions and location of the port more would join the port community including BMW, Mini Cooper, Roll Royce, Mitsubishi, Suzuki, Land Rover, Jaguar, Volvo, Saab and the Port's newest customers Hyundai and Kia. From the inauspicious beginning with Mazda, it would take 13 years before the port would handle its one millionth automobile during FY 1990/1991. That same year with more companies coming aboard, the port handled 100,000 automobiles or more for the first time. The port has established its presence as an important auto port along the West Coast of the United States. Eight years later in FY 1999/2000 the port not only recorded its first 200,000-auto year but simultaneously celebrated its second million cars.

Four years later in FY 2004/2005 the port handled its three millionth automobile, as it approached the 300,000 auto mark.

The 17,300 autos handled in FY 1977/78 would be a poor performing month today.

Searching for a new home, Del Monte Fresh produce in 1979 chose the Port of Hueneme as their west coast distribution hub and the port seized another niche cargo opportunity. To reinforce its fresh produce niche the port built a 140,000 square-foot refrigerated facility in 1994 for Cool Carriers (later to become NYKCool) and Sunkist Growers and in 1995 a 30,000 square foot facility for Del Monte (which has since been expanded to 86,000 Sq. Ft.). With the arrival of Pacific Fruit and Chiquita Fresh produce the port now

records in excess of 600,000 metric tons of bananas making the Port of Hueneme one of the busiest banana gateways in the country. In addition to bananas from Ecuador, Costa Rica and Guatemala port customers also import pineapple, mangos, melons, cantaloupe, avocados and even fresh-cut flowers.

Fortunately, Port expansion continued to keep pace allowing the accommodation of new customers as well as the Port's existing customer's growth. In 1985, the harbor district purchased 22 acres of land from the Navy to expand Wharf # 2. The extension and reinforcement of Wharf 2 was completed by 1988 creating a 1,450 linear-foot concrete piling wharf specially designed to support the Port's growing auto terminal operations as well as high and heavy cargos. In 1992 the port received a long sought port-of-entry designation joining 11 other California ports and kicking off a decade of unprecedented growth. By the 1997/98 fiscal year, the port exceeded the million ton mark in general cargo tonnage for the first time, a mark which has steadily increased ever since.

CHANNEL ISLANDS HARBOR

More than 300 vessels were evicted from Port Hueneme at the time the Navy took over, and docking space had to be found. Owners looked from Santa Barbara to San Pedro. They clamored for a new harbor. In 1945, the United States Congress, through the auspices of a new California Congressman, Richard Nixon, authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to begin surveying the need for a new harbor in the vicinity of Port Hueneme. Of course, every city and town wanted the harbor, as it would be built at government expense. The government needed the harbor to replace the Port of Hueneme as promised to the local citizens, but a more pressing reason prevailed as well. The beach at Hueneme was experiencing devastating erosion because of the building of the jetties at the port. Oxnard wanted it situated at the Silver Strand site, Ventura wanted it near the Pierpont Bay site, and Santa Monica wanted it as well. The site was chosen at Silver Strand for many reasons. First, fewer occupied residences would have to be bought out, and the undeveloped land needed was quite inexpensive; but most importantly, it was closest to the eroding beaches at Hueneme, and the dredged material forming the new harbor could easily be transported to the affected area.

Now the task of funding began. It took 18 years from the time of the authorization to the dedication in 1965 of the Channel Islands Harbor. The master plan of the harbor had been known to a few people for a number of years, but to the folks who lived in the approximate area, it came as a great surprise. The most fun anyone had in Oxnard before the beginning of the dredging was to go down to 5th and Roosevelt Road, or West Road, as it was also known, and watch the bean picking machines, then go through the "bean sheds" where the product was sized and packed. Now you could take your beach chairs and watch the dredging operations for hours on end!

A great pipe extended from the dredger across the beach at Silver Strand, all the way to the port, under the port to the area of erosion. There all the material taken from the

site of the new harbor was moved through pneumatic pumping to Hueneme. What a beautiful sight to see the sea water advancing further and further along the rock jetties as they formed the new harbor.

Development of the area began as soon as the dredging started. Requests for docks were received on a daily basis. It was soon apparent that the arrival of a new harbor was going to be a tremendous boon for the entire area. Before the harbor was completed by the Corps of Engineers, the Oxnard Water Development Commission was formed, with the directive to enlarge the harbor, building more slips, and erecting a bridge along Channel Islands Boulevard so private residential subdivisions could have their own docking facilities as well as access to the open sea.

The first of the subdivisions was called Leeward Estates, and only two channels were originally envisioned - one secondary channel and the "main channel." But with the decision to enlarge the harbor, plans were changed. A new "main channel" would be dug and subsidiary channels jutting off from this new main channel. Another development was begun, of "shared walls" housing, also with private docking, and this development was called "Mandalay Bay." Eventually the entire area would generically be called "Mandalay Bay."

Martin V. Smith, a local developer and businessman, built the Casa Sirena Hotel, the Lobster Trap restaurant and the Anchorage Waterfront apartments. The Channel Islands Yacht Club, oldest in the area, founded in 1960, obtained a new residence for their club along the main channel, and other yacht clubs soon followed. Boat owners from Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley, and up and down the coast were vying for docking space. The Harbor has been a wonderful extension for Oxnard, and has paid for itself all the way. Up until 1997, funds received from the slip fees and rents of properties in and around the Harbor had paid for all the Park and Recreation expenses in the City of Oxnard.

In the late 1980's serious problems began to emerge with the seawalls. Small cracks were developing at the major cross section at Victoria and Channel Islands Harbor, as well as in a number of the seawalls in the "Mandalay Bay" development of the harbor. These were not easy or inexpensive "fixes," and in 1997 the City Council reversed the collection of harbor monies for the Parks and Recreation Department, and instead applied those monies to the rebuilding of the seawalls. In a conversation with the Deputy Director of Channel Islands Harbor, it was learned that the County of Ventura is responsible for the up-keep of the seawalls from the bridge at Channel Islands Boulevard to the South, and the City of Oxnard is responsible for the up-keep from the bridge to the North. Of course, tax revenues on private properties were increased considerably, and were able to by-pass the Proposition 13 amendment by calling it a "special assessment" rather than a tax increase.

Oxnard, as a city, has been growth-oriented, inviting many businesses to come here, and many have answered that call. The harbor has not been able to sustain the

same level growth, for reasons citizens cannot understand. In spite of the tremendous growth in personal properties, our harbor businesses have not flourished. This is a problem our five County Supervisors must deal with, and we will keep you posted on any developments in this area.

There will be an extension of channels in the new Westport and Sea Bridge developments at Victoria, between Wooley and Harbor Boulevard, and will become part of our Channel Islands Harbor family.

VENTURA HARBOR and MARINA

At the time the Corps of Engineers was looking for a site for the new harbor residents of the City of Ventura were very anxious to have it dredged in the vicinity of Pierpont Bay, just a few miles north of the Santa Clara River. The Corps of Engineers rejected the Pierpont site because of its proximity to the river. When the Channel Islands site was chosen, the people of the City of Ventura decide to build their own harbor.

The Ventura Port District was formed on May 10, 1952, and through the Port District lobbied for the proposed harbor to be funded through the State Waterways Commission, as well as with federal funds. Even though the Corps of Engineers had rejected the Pierpont site, local engineers still felt the harbor could be built. To support their plans, blueprints of the projected harbor were sent to a company on the east coast which was in the business of designing and building harbors. They built a replica of the planned harbor, and sent a report affirming the design as being feasible.

With this report in hand, the Port District went to the State Assembly and to the federal government and received the funds to proceed. Brochures were sent out to prospective tenants for the shopping areas, yacht sales businesses, and yacht clubs. Applications for the 1600 proposed boat slips were in hand before the harbor was completed. Everything seemed hunkey-dory.

The harbor was dedicated in 1960, with great fanfare. But before you could say boy-howdy complaints were received from the yachtsmen that the entrance to the harbor was totally dangerous. A one-million dollar 10-year study began to see what could be done to fix the brand new harbor. Richard Parsons, general manager of the Ventura Port District, called the entrance to the Ventura Harbor "the most dangerous in California."

Disaster struck again in the 1969 flood, the Santa Clara River having flooded exactly as the Corps of Engineers feared it would when they rejected the site originally. Now both the harbor entrance and other features would have to be re-engineered, a series of lawsuits now fell on the beleaguered harbor. The Ventura Keys Homeowners Associations sued because of silt filling in their channels - they won a \$15 million dollar settlement. The original builders of the harbor, Village Ocean Services, declared bankruptcy and later sued the Port District, winning a \$31 million dollar settlement. Harbor vendors sued for not being able to conduct their businesses. It just did not stop. Finally, the Port District itself asked for protection in bankruptcy court.

After re-engineering, a \$7.7 million dollar rebuilding project began. The South Beach Groin was completed at 650 ft. long, 300 feet was added to the existing breakwater, and a 200 foot North Jetty Spur groin was added to the harbor.

The Ventura Marina and Harbor complex was selected to hold the Channel Islands Museum and Marine Sanctuary, which added greatly to the interest in the Harbor. Today it is full of restaurants and shops, yacht sales businesses, yacht repair yards, the Pierpont Yacht Club and is doing very well, thank you, after a horrendous 10-year beginning. The Port District no longer operates under bankruptcy protection, and the County has corrected this situation with the appointment of a new set of commissioners who have settled with the plaintiffs, and are now enjoying being a most successful harbor.

Ventura County Maritime Museum

Currently located at Fisherman's Wharf in Oxnard, the Ventura County Maritime Museum is on the move. The new location for the museum is directly on the Channel across from the Coast Guard Station and next door to the new Boating Center. The ground breaking was held in October of 2011 and the remodeling of the existing Port Royal Restaurant has begun. It is hoped that construction will be completed by the spring of 2012. The new museum will afford the visitors with a stunning view of the Channel.

In the picture:

Bill Bunger, museum board president

John Zaragoza, county supervisor

Joyce Nelson, museum board member and supporter

Bill Conroy, executive director of the Museum



Channel Islands Boating Center



CHANNEL ISLANDS HARBOR

Groundbreaking ceremony dig (from left to right) Bill Douros, NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries; Kathy Long, Ventura County Supervisor; Peter Foy, Ventura County Supervisor; Steve Bennett, Ventura County Supervisor; Julia Brownley, Assemblywoman, CA State Assembly; John Zaragoza, Ventura County Supervisor; Richard Rush, President, CSU Channel Islands; Robert Snyders, President, Channel Islands Harbor Foundation; Cindi Smith Daley, Smith Family Foundation; Greg Dair, CSU-CI Sailing Team Captain; Lyn Krieger, Director, Channel Islands Harbor; and Michael Powers, Ventura County CEO.

The County of Ventura recently celebrated the groundbreaking for the Boating Instruction and Safety Center to be located in Channel Islands Harbor. The groundbreaking ceremony took place Oct. 14. The facility, which will be known as the Channel Islands Boating Center, will be operated by [CSU Channel Islands](#) and will offer public education opportunities as well as University recreation programs.

University President Richard Rush described the project as an opportunity for the University to partner with other agencies for the benefit of all county residents and to provide unique recreational opportunities for their students. State Assembly member Julia Brownley expressed her pleasure at providing an education facility that can benefit the entire community, and the appropriateness of using boater fuel taxes for this purpose.

The project has been in development for a number of years, and is funded by a combination of private donations, grants, and Harbor revenues. When completed, the facility will include classrooms, a conference room, locker rooms, showers, indoor and outdoor boat storage, and an adjacent ADA accessible dock. A variety of exhibits on boating and the marine environment will be located at the interior and exterior of the building. The exhibits will provide information about the natural environment off the coast,

including the Channel Islands, Santa Barbara Channel, and the National Marine Sanctuary.

Supervisor John Zaragoza, who represents Oxnard, said of the project, "We are thankful to be able to help make this great resource available to our young people, schools and the public during this time of declining educational budgets. We would especially like to thank our partners who have supported the project over many years of development."

Harbor Director Lyn Krieger noted that the project has been made possible by a number of partners including California Department of Boating and Waterways, The Smith Family Foundation, NOAA Office of Ocean Services, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, and California Department of Parks and Recreation. Construction is expected to be completed in October 2012. The building was designed by DesignARC of Santa Barbara, and construction is being completed by HMH Constructors of Camarillo. For more information on the project, visit www.CIBoatingCenter.org.

Channel Islands Harbor serves as a center of recreation, boating, shopping and water sports activities. The harbor is home to three yacht clubs and nine full-service marinas that provide berths for 2,150 boats. It also hosts the Ventura County Maritime Museum. Located at Fisherman's Wharf, the museum is a cultural center dedicated to the interpretation of maritime history through interactive exhibits and educational outreach. For more information on the Channel Islands Harbor, visit www.channelislandsharbor.org.

This story is contributed by a member of the Ventura community and is neither endorsed nor affiliated with Ventura County Star

Read more:

<http://www.vcstar.com/news/2011/oct/20/channel-islands-harbor-celebrates-boating-center-g/#ixzz1cJ6xcRsd>