40 YEARS OF SERVICE
TO THE OCEAN BEACH BUSINESS COMMUNITY
THANK YOU TO THE 1000’S OF VOLUNTEERS
THAT HAVE HELPED ALONG THE WAY!

1978
BEGINNINGS

During the 1970s, Ocean Beach had been experiencing increased
problems of littering, vandalism, and drug use, which resulted in many long time
residents and business owners moving out of business, and a loss of
visitors and community pride. The Ocean Beach
Merchant’s Association

1979
BANDING TOGETHER

The first Ocean Beach
Merchant’s Association
brochures were published in 1979 by 15 members
businesses. Of those 15, more are still in business in
Newport Avenue. Today, the OB Merchants Association
hosts several annual events, including OB Street Fair,
OB Chamber of Commerce meetings, and the
Ocean Beach Community Center;

1980
HOLIDAY CHEER

The Ocean Beach
Merchant's Association

1982
EARLY DAYS

The OBMA developed

1983
REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE

Formed the Revitalization Committee to

1984
OCEAN BEACH STREET FAIR

The first major event (OB

1985
COMMUNITY GRANTS

Ocean Beach Merchant’s

1986
DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

This initiative Committee

STREET FAIR ARTWORK

Pics printed from left: Bob, Tim, Dave, Helen, Frank, Betsy, Vinnie, Gary,

LEADERSHIP: PAST & FUTURE

Pics printed from left: Bob, Tim, Dave, Helen, Frank, Betsy, Vinnie, Gary,

Chicken Shawarma
It’s 5000
GOOD!

CONGRATULATIONS OBMA ON YOUR 40TH ANNIVERSARY!
CONGRATULATIONS

Ocean Beach MainStreet Association on your 40th Anniversary!

We appreciate all you do to help support OB Businesses and make OB a great place!

CONGRATS OBMA ON 40 YEARS!

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Happy 40th Anniversary OBMA

We Support Ocean Beach MainStreet Association’s 40 years of Community Commitment!

Delivering the News to OB for more than 40 Years!
Most said it couldn’t be done.

But Ocean Beach MainStreet Association proved them wrong, and is marking its 40th anniversary this year as a homegrown business improvement district.

“I remember approaching one retailer asking them (high voice), ‘Would you join our organization, it’s only $25?’,” recalled longtime OBMA executive director Denise [Denny] Knox, who went door-to-door initially asking merchants for seed money — and support. “He joined but said, ‘You’re going to fail. We tried to do this before, It doesn’t ever work. Nobody can get along.’”

“We had no idea what to expect, none of us did,” admitted Knox of OBMA’s birth adding, “Some people were afraid we were going to change OB. We just wanted to clean it up. All we wanted at first was for people to sweep in front of their storefronts and wash their windows.”

Through hard work, determination and perseverance, Knox and a handful of core volunteers gradually won OB merchants over, persuading them to form a bid and pursue a new direction. Originally formed in 1978 as the Ocean Beach Merchant’s Association, in June of 1998 OBMA received national and state designation into the “Main Street” program, changing its name in the process. Ever since, OBMA, a 501(c)6 private nonprofit business organization with 14 elected board members, has worked to promote and support local business and economic vitality in OB.

Other OBMA core members talked about the merchant group’s early days. Longtime OB activist Mike Akey cited community pride as OBMA’s foundation for success.

“I’m a native Obecian and wanted to give back to my community, make sure it was going in the right direction, do what I could to make OB a little better,” said Akey, who started a chili cook-off in 1984 that evolved into the community’s summer street fair, which now draws about 70,000 visitors annually.

Mike James, one of five brothers who started OB’s James Gang printers, pointed out that finding the right events to promote and raise funds for OBMA helped it solidify its niche as the community’s business leader.

“We started getting organized and putting some public campaigns together to increase awareness about our community,” James said. “We decided to bring back the fireworks to the pier for the Fourth of July, which turned into the fireworks festival.”

Knox, whose family owned an OB gallery and art supply store, said OBMA helped OB re-brand itself after the turbulent ’60s and ’70s left people wary of shopping in town.

“Those of us in business then found the community was dissolving around us,” Knox said adding patrons “fled and went everywhere else because of fear of
Main Street America Institute offers resources, technical services and educational offerings to help communities effectively manage their commercial districts.

BY DAVE SCHWAB

Main Street America Institute (MSAI), of which Ocean Beach MainStreet Association (OBMA) is a member, offers a successful template guiding local business districts in finding their way.

For more than 35 years, Chicago-based MSAI, a professional development training program, offers a comprehensive set of resources, technical services and educational offerings to help communities effectively manage their downtown and commercial districts. MSAI is part of a nationwide network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, committed to building their communities while preserving their historical heritage.

Formed initially in the early ‘80s as a reaction to the abandonment of downtowns, MSAI from the start has developed methods and approaches to help communities revitalize their downtowns and business districts.

“Main Street is designed to help communities identify their vision for their downtowns or neighborhood commercial districts, then implement that vision,” said Patrice Frey, president/CEO of National Main Street Center.

Main Street has developed a four-point approach to local business development employing the following elements:

- **Economic Vitality**, focusing on economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses while creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.
- **Design**, supporting a community’s transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.
- **Promotion**, positioning the downtown/commercial district as the community’s center and hub of economic activity, creating a positive image that showcases a community’s unique characteristics.
- **Organization**, involving creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for downtown and commercial districts.

Noting that Main Street is asset-based and market-driven, Frey said the umbrella organization is motivated by several core principles.

“We believe strongly that revitalization happens when you have broad-based community support and buy-in,” said Frey. “The most effective transformations happen when folks are really focusing on leveraging their assets. The third piece is we really work with communities to help them make decisions informed by data, in addition to what they’re learning about their community’s vision.”

Frey pointed out it’s important for communities seeking self-improvement to “focus on design, recognizing their look and feel are incredibly important. That’s everything from facade improvements, to street furniture, to curb and sidewalk improvements.”

Added Frey, “Social media, a good web presence and having different programs, festivals and events that folks can come out to are all needed to make the business district an attractive draw.”

In achieving economic vitality, Frey said it’s important to ensure “a healthy mix of businesses.”

Denise [Denny] Knox, longtime director of Ocean Beach MainStreet Association, credits Main Street America with being a catalyst for the merchant group’s successful evolution during its 40-year history.

“It changed everything,” said Knox of OBMA’s joining Main Street. “We had a mission ideas we were working on, but no structure. Main Street organically helped us change our approach. They trained us, worked with us. Once we had the Main Street program, restructuring made sense to us, how to set up the committees, how to zero in on everyone trying to accomplish one thing. It’s really a great way to run an organization.”

---

**Congratulations OBMA on 40 great years!**

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Akey and his father decided that
the chili would not only help raise
money for the celebratory fireworks,
but would also, as food tends to do,
bring people together.

“Everybody knows everyone at this
thing, one reason being that it’s been
around for so long,” said Akey. “But
people come from out of town and stay
for a week just for this one day, so it’s
fun to see people you might not have
seen much during the year and catch
up with them.”

According to Akey, this is by far
OBMA’s largest and most anticipated
event of the year. Closing all of Newport
Avenue for the event, nearly 300 vend-
ors, including Rock & Roll San Diego,
set up camp next to four music stages
where bands play continuous rock,
blues, alternative and Americana.
Marcotte recalls one year when a
restaurant served up Shark Chili, which
could have stood as the most creative,
most because of how much business they
set the Street Fair apart, and why Akey
looks forward to it,” said Akey. “But
Marcotte with a laugh. “But I
was still hesitant to eat it.”

These unconventional stories are what
show the Street Fair apart, and why Akey
refers to the event as a "home week.”

“It’s a family-friendly event and every-
one looks forward to it,” said Akey. “But
it’s not just a day of vacation, it’s a big cel-
oration of who we are.”

The street fair and cook-off, founded
in 1984 by OBMA’s vice president Mike
Akey, takes place at the end of June
from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m., and proceeds
from the fair go towards purchasing
Ocean Beach’s Fourth of July fireworks.

“Events like these show our pride in
the community,” said Martin, “The
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off go a long way to paying for those
every year.”

Last year, they raised $26,000.

Akey, who also serves as the head
judge for the chili competition, came
up with the idea for the street fair cooking
with his dad. The two used to cook
chili all over the United States and have
ever Competition—amateur
and restaurant—everyone gets a chance
to show off their skills.

“I think they look forward to it the
most because of how much business they
got,” said Marcotte. “It’s a chance for
them to be creative with their business.”

Marcotte recalls one year when a
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Getting personal with Denise (Denny) Knox... a glimpse of OBMA before and after

BY DAVE SCHWAB

What was Ocean Beach like business wise before OBMA came into being?

Denny: The ’70s were an odd time for small businesses in OB. During the late-’60s through the mid-’70s the resistance to the Vietnam war, the influx of hippies, the anti-policy/anti-establishment mindset was all a deterrent to shopping in OB. Additionally, the regional shopping centers had lured all of our customers to what people perceived as a safer place to shop. Rents were relatively low in OB. OB was seen as blighted because of the lack of economic activity along with an aging infrastructure in the commercial areas. It seems unbelievable to me that a seaside community could fall off people’s radar so quickly. Actually it was a 10-year slide.

Why was the group formed, what was the impetus for its coming together?

Denny: Many of us were young entrepreneurs and we were really hoping to make a life for ourselves in OB as small business owners. We started with a very small group of merchants who just wanted everyone to clean up their storefronts, sweep, wash the windows, empty the trash. We had dismal services from the City. Trash pick-up seemed to always fall on a holiday. Many of our merchants emptied the public trash cans and just hauled the trash around the back of their buildings to the dumpsters.

What compelled you to start the organization? Was there anything in particular, or just a preponderance of things?

Denny: I think we started to organize ourselves out of self-preservation. We knew our businesses would fail if we couldn’t convince the folks in 92107 to shop in OB.

I recall you’re saying people doubted OBMA would work. Why were they wrong? Was the chemistry right in the community for everything to come together just right to create an organization to grow and thrive?

Denny: The older merchants on the street were okay with us trying to organize ourselves but really doubted if anything would ever take hold. We were so naive and had no idea what we were doing. We had no grand plans. We were just trying to spruce up the commercial districts. Years ago some accused us of having ulterior motives for improving OB. If they look back over 40 years, I think none of us had self-serving motives. We were trying our hardest to keep up with the many changes that were coming our way while preserving our small town character and friendliness.

What were/are the major challenges of running the group, keeping it together and on course?

Denny: Within a year or so we ended up with 55 paid members. I believe they paid $25 per year. We were able to put together a modest business directory towards the end of 1979. We printed a few copies and members handed them out to customers. Many of us found friendships with our fellow merchants and service providers. I think most of us felt a rewarding sense of purpose in our involvement in Ocean Beach. We banded together to find solutions to problems.

What would you say OBMA has done for the beach community over the past 40 years of its existence?

Denny: We’ve put together a timeline of the organization from its quite meager beginnings to today which visually illustrates the volunteer work of so many in our community. I hope when people look over what OBMA has accomplished since 1978, that they will agree that OBMA has been a wonderful asset to Ocean Beach and has worked to focus on the positive things in life that come from working closely with your neighbors to create the best possible environment for a thriving community.

Tell us about the composition of the group now, and in the beginning, and how it’s changed/grown/developed over the years.

Denny: In the mid-eighties we started working on what we called the Revitalization Program. It was like going back to college and learning about architecture, land planning, economic development and marketing/promotion.
Looking ahead, what are the future challenges? Will the Internet ever "replace" brick and mortar businesses?

Denny: The internet and specifically Amazon has already changed the entire landscape of small town businesses and brick and mortar businesses. We keep learning every day what the future challenges will be. It changes so fast that it makes your head spin.

What does brick and mortar need to do to keep base with the Internet and the information age?

Denny: That’s the big $20 million dollar question. Adversity can often spur a tremendous amount of creativity. I think small businesses can learn how to react quickly and decisively when new business plans are needed. Even though people love to do so much on their phones and laptops, they still need human interaction. Most people still want to get together. Having a sense of community will be what binds us together as it has in the past. You’re seeing a lot more interactive businesses, businesses that have more visibility from the sidewalk (sidewalk cafes, signs, etc).

Would you say OBMA is the community speaking voice for the business community? How so?

Denny: We have a little more than 525 members right now and that has been pretty consistent for a number of years. We aren’t a political action group so I’m not sure we can claim to speak for everyone. We just try to keep all the balls in the air from marketing and promotion to maintenance to public safety. We’ve taken on a lot more roles over the years as our membership grew. We help the business community by offering services to help them from storefront improvements to applicable loan programs. We try to get businesses to brag about what they do. That’s one of the most difficult problems – to get small business owners to talk about their businesses and tell us their stories.

Is the organization political? Does it support causes? If so, how? If not, why not?

Denny: Absolutely not. Politics is a different animal – it divides people and pits people against each other. Right now it is all negative and all consuming. We’re more like a work horse doing lots of different things. We try not to complain about the injustices of the world and we try instead to find solutions to problems that an individual can’t navigate on their own. Hopefully we are more like counselors who work with members to realize their full potential be it marketing, economic development, maintenance and so on.

Was the creation of the OB farmers market the crowning achievement of the organization’s 40-year history?

Denny: I would say based on the desires of the neighborhood at all of the workshops that were held in the 80s, that was one of the most important things we could make happen and did.

Has the farmers market been an incubator for OB businesses? Have vendors spun off into becoming brick-and-mortar businesses in the community?

Denny: Yes, when you think that 80 percent of new businesses fail, it seems prudent to give your business a spin at something like a farmers market before you jump into the brick-and-mortar world of business.
OB Tile Project: Buying a Piece of History

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

Over 4,000 6-inch square ceramic tiles span three blocks of Ocean Beach’s Newport Avenue. Each tile, purchased and personalized by OB residents or visitors, is dedicated to a special memory or special someone.

The OB Tile Project began in the 80s as a way to draw in more tourists. The committee is now on installment 30 and the tiles have become a staple in OB, functioning as a major town attraction and a way to freeze in time the last 40 years.

“We’ve had lots of families buy multiple tiles so they could put all their family members on it,” said Denise (Denny) Knox, Executive Director of OBMA. “We’ve even had requests from couples to put tiles side by side to replicate which side of the bed they sleep on.”

Most of the tiles are pretty standard, “love you forever” dedications, with hearts around the dates couples met, or tiles dedicated to family members that have passed away. But others are a little less conventional, like “Wendell—I love you like salt!” which is located in front of Ocean Beach’s U.S. Bank.

There are also tiles that are a little less easy to understand, but humorous all the same, such as “I knew Wen before he saw Space- man. -Jen” placed right above another tile at the entrance of Culture Brewing Co. reading, “I saw Spaceman before he was an alien. -Wen.”

Ron Marcotte, OBMA board member and part of the Design Committee, actually dedicated a tile to his late dog, Tawny. The tile reads, “Tawny, the best dog in the world,” with her birth and death dates, plus two paw prints on either side.

“It’s within feet of the sea walk because that’s where she always used to sit,” said Marcotte. “She can always see the ocean from her tile.”

While creativity is welcome, obscenity is not. All the tiles have to be family-friendly and each tile request goes through a screening process.

“I remember one tile that had four or five capital letters and we couldn’t figure out what it stood for,” said Knox. “Feeling like it could be something obscene, we called the purchaser only to find out it was the abbreviation for one of our local church groups. That was pretty funny.”

Upkeep on the tiles is also a high priority for OBMA. While each is “guaranteed” for the life of the Ocean Beach Mainstreet Association, it’s hard to protect from outside damages and, often, tiles have to be replaced.

“Usually the tiles that get broken are the ones in front of bars,” said Marcotte. “People come to unload kegs on the sidewalk corners and they just drop them too hard on the tiles.”

Marcotte says that they’ve also had tiles “destroyed” by a bad divorce or break-up.

“We get requests now and again to remove tiles, especially from couples who are getting divorced, but we really don’t like to remove them unless both people agree,” said Marcotte. “That’s why one of my friends is just hoping hers gets broken by a keg.”

But regardless of the wears and tears of life, the tile project remains beloved by most residents and is yet another feature that sets the Ocean Beach community apart.

“It’s a way for people to make a literal mark in the city. It’s a tangible memory you can look back on and know it’ll be preserved.”

Each tile costs $150 and can be purchased by downloading the application from oceanbeachsandiego.com

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electricchairob.com
Public Safety Committee: Stepping up where the city falls short

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

Roughly 1,400,000 people live in the city of San Diego and its surrounding towns. Of that population, 2,781 individuals work for the San Diego Police Department, according to the city of San Diego police records. Of those, only 1,834 are sworn police officers.

“Honestly, the city is short-handed on police,” said Denny Knox, Executive Director of OBMA. “We can complain all we want and demand from the city all we want, but the reality is, it’s not going to happen overnight.”

According to Knox, Ocean Beach has been a hot-spot for crime since the rise in homeless populations. Not only does OBMA’s Executive Director believe it, but the nearby newly refurbished bar and grill, they should feel safe and secure.

“You can get people down here to shop and come to events, but they have to feel good when they’re here,” said Knox. “They need to know they’re going to be protected. They need to feel safe when they’re here, so when they’re here, with the homeless population and all that,” said Balestrieri. “But hopefully we can curve the violent crime and have people feel safe to go out and grab a bite to eat. Having grown up in OB, my heart is definitely there and I think that, in the last four years, there’s definitely been an improvement.”

Knox adds, “If we can’t work together, it’s not like the city is going to come in and say, ‘Here we’re going to give you all this money to fix up your community.’ It’s really up to us.”

Julie Klein, local merchant and property owner, spearheaded establishing the public safety committee four years ago which led to hiring NPS.

“Three or four years ago, it was questionable if I could even take my kids down to Ocean Beach,” said Balestrieri, who was born and raised in the area. “But now it’s a pretty fluid situation where if the San Diego Police Department is not there when a crime is happening, at least we’re able to be there and keep individuals out of harm’s way until the police get there. It’s just good having more feet on the ground to keep the community safe.”

Before their contract with National Public Safety, the total crime counts for Ocean Beach in 2013 was 400 cases, according to SDPD Crime Reports. But in 2014 the number began to decrease from 330 cases, to less than 200 cases this year, cutting OB’s neighborhood crime in half.

“Whether or not it’s safer is debatable with several people, but I feel safe going into the community knowing that there’s people looking out for each other and seeing the community come together to try and make it a safer community so everyone is able to enjoy it, be it tourists or business owners,” said Balestrieri. “They can all flourish in the community and I believe it’s a great partnership between us and OBMA. I mean, obviously something’s working if they keep renewing our contract.”

In addition to National Public Safety contractors patrolling in OB five to seven days a week, another part of OBMA’s safety initiative is a monthly meeting for the OB Clean and Safe Program. Open to members of the association, the meetings are held at 8:30 a.m. on the third Tuesday of every month. Here, local merchants and OBMA members, SDPD and National Public Safety discuss crime reports in the community, safety concerns and how they can work to make the neighborhoods safer. Even OB lifeguards are expected in attendance.

“There will never be a cure-all to the problems that they have down there, with the homeless population and all that,” said Balestrieri. “But hopefully we can curve the violent crime and have people feel safe to go out and grab a bite to eat. Having grown up in OB, my heart is definitely there and I think that, in the last four years, there’s definitely been an improvement.”
OBMA’s Little Big Helpers: OB Women’s Club and Town Council

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

The summer Street Fair and Chili Cook-Off might be OBMA’s pride and joy, but fall is definitely the non-profit’s most lively season. There’s Oktoberfest, with all-you-can-taste beer on the OB pier October 12 and 13, and the OB Restaurant Walk November 13, which gives visitors unique access to 40 local restaurants and helps support December’s Food and Toy Drive. It’s a lot of fun, and a lot of afootwork, and OBMA certainly doesn’t do it alone.

OBMA has not only helped build and grow the community of Ocean Beach, but has also built its own pro-active web of resources. Two of their most prominent support systems are the OB Town Council, and the OB Women’s Club. Both of these people-fueled organizations not only volunteer to support OBMA’s events, but also host some neighborhood gatherings of their own.

“OBMA has been an instrumental part in the success of our events,” said Marcus Turner, Ocean Beach’s Town Council president. “We all have the same goal, making a better Ocean Beach as it changes and grows throughout the years.”

Turner has only been on the council for a little under three years, while he admits his quick transition into the presidential chair was a little overwhelming and an adjustment, the support he received from OBMA, especially from executive director Denny Knox, was a big help.

“I really get to see the inner working of everything that goes on now”, said Turner.

“I really get to see the inner working of everything that goes on now,” said Turner. “It’s a team effort, and that’s what I’ve been trying really hard to really harp on, that we’re all in this together. It really has made me feel more a part of the community.”

The Town Council partners with OBMA on not only the Restaurant Walk, perhaps the biggest fundraiser of the year, but with the Chili Cook-Off as well. In return, OBMA offers Turner their support with the council’s Holiday Parade and Christmas Tree Planting in December. Turner says that OBMA’s assistance with the logistics of the Town Council’s events has also helped open the door to new business partnerships between them and the local merchants.

“We’re the community neighbors aspect and they are the business aspect. You need both parts,” said Turner. “We share a lot of the same volunteers so when it comes to all these different events we put on, it kind of results in this huge, awesome melting pot of volunteers working together on these different events.”

The OB Women’s Club has been a key player in that melting pot since 1924, setting their sights on supporting women in the Ocean Beach community. While six years ago the club experienced a severe decline in members, leaving only five women to keep the non-profit afloat, their numbers have grown to now 64 members.

“It’s about bringing women together, not just in a philanthropic way, but in a sisterhood,” said Alison Lyons, OB Women’s Club President. “We’re there to support each other. I’ve met women who are fun, intelligent, powerful leaders…it’s changed everything for me actually. I’ve never had such a full social calendar.”

While they host their own book clubs and social events, the Women’s Club also volunteers at the Food and Toy Drive, bakes cupcakes for the Ocean Beach Recreation Center, provides outreach at the Farmers Market and helps with the Town Council’s Pancake Breakfast.

“It’s amazing how many people were not aware that we exist—ed for so many years,” said Lyons, who is currently in planning mode for OBWC’s sixth annual luau fundraiser November 3. “But we’re becoming more of a presence now, partnering with OBMA. It’s really helped. It’s not just about keeping our lights on anymore.”

Right now, the goal of both the Town Council and the Women’s Club is to get more young people involved and branch out further into the community.

“The first step to getting involved is really going to one of these events and just talking with the volunteers,” said Turner. “It’s not scary and it’s not weird. To all the new people, you have something to contribute. And the bottom line is, we need you.”

OBMA really took off, noted Knox, when it successfully lobbied City Hall to get $100,000 in grant funding to do a design study.

Said Knox, “We all wore dark suits, maybe 25 of us, and we all stood up before the City Council and said, ‘We’re the people from OB. We’re the hippies.’”

The Council was won over.

OBMA also held community pow-wow’s to help merchants figure out how best to promote their business district. Such grand ideas as turning the pier parking lot into a big stage and grassy area were proposed. But another more-durable suggestion, starting a community farmers market, ultimately carried the day.

“That we could deal with,” said Knox. “That got people excited.”

Last year, OB Farmers Market celebrated its 25th anniversary as a major community draw and business incubator. What else kick-started OBMA, energizing the bid to do even more to burnish OB’s image?

“The MainStreet component really changed the dynamics of our group,” pointed out Mike James, one of the original OBMA “gang.” (See “MainStreet” story in this section.) Barb Iacometti, President of OBMA, has served as head of the organization since 2011.

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HISTORY

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drugs and dissent. We knew we had to do something to get people to come back and revitalize the community.”

“There was a lot of negativity about OB,” continued Knox. “We set out to change that. We started out with a slogan, OB is OK, because we didn’t think we could sell OB is great.”

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OB Farmers Market: A family of ‘kooks’
BY VICTORIA DAVIS

With 120 vendors each year selling everything from fresh gourmet foods to hand-made jewelry, the Ocean Beach Farmers Market, open every Wednesday 4-8 p.m., emanates with the eclectic, free-spirited spunk of the town’s residents.

“It’s the wild hippy town,” said Farmers Market manager David Klaman. “Ocean Beach is San Diego’s Venice Beach. It’s where you find all the kooks, mostly in a good way.”

When Klaman first got involved with the Farmers Market 20 years ago, he was one of about 30 or 40 produce vendors. His wife was actually the market’s first manager.

“I’ve been doing the market for so many years that I’ve actually gotten to watch some of these guys’ kids grow up,” said Klaman of his long-time vendors. “I’m pretty close to everyone here, some I was even friends with before I took the job. So, for me, it’s like getting together with my family every week.”

Back in the 80s, early OBMA board members would hold regular meetings to brainstorm what events would help improve the town after the hectic anti-war rallies in the 70s, which had made the area less-than-popular. One of the first ideas was to create a large open market, where both residents and visitors from out of town could taste fresh produce from local farmers.

“It’s been a cool incubator for people who have a great product or a great idea and want to see if it’ll fly,” said Klaman. “It’s a really good opportunity for people to reach out and get new customers.”

Over the last 26 years, the Newport Avenue market has expanded its reach to include not only food vendors but florists, graphic designers, clothing designers and jewelry makers. This is also the place to get educated on some local and national bands like Shake Down String Band playing October 10, Frankie T and the Triple B (October 17) and Coloso on tour from Vancouver, WA (October 24).

“You’ll get around a hundred people just standing around the stage with their tacos enjoying the music,” said Klaman. “It eventually gets to be more like a party atmosphere.”

The people may be unusual, but the food choices are just as unique. There’s pizza slices bigger than a human head and a little thing called “Torpastas,” baguettes stuffed with pasta. Guests will also find a selection of authentic crepes, ceviche, tamales, and more. It’s a place to try new things for those who love to be adventurous in both style and snacking. This is one of the reason’s Klaman believes the market has continued to grow.

According to a survey done by OBMA last year, the people who attend the farmers market are almost exactly 50 percent residents and 50 percent out-of-town visitors.