

Statement of Significance

CULTURAL HISTORY

... The property is identified with the historic merger of three services to produce the busiest lifeguard service in the world.

The Los Angeles County Fire Department Lifeguard Division is the **busiest lifeguard service in the world**. The **history** of the **Venice Lifeguard Station** located at 2300 Ocean Front Walk **illustrates the growth pattern that made this possible**.

The facility, built in the mid-1960s and dedicated on November 29th, 1969, was **home to three different lifeguard divisions** through the years. Originally the Los Angeles City Lifeguard Service, in 1975 it was merged into the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service (Department of Beaches). The year prior to the city merger, the City of Santa Monica merged its lifeguard service into the county. This created a seamless cost-efficient service with no jurisdictional disruption from Long Beach to the Ventura County Line and Catalina (72 miles of coastline and Catalina). All county wide lifeguard administrative services were relocated to the Venice facility. As time went on the Department of Beaches merged with Small Craft Harbors creating the Department of Beaches and Harbors. In 1994 the Lifeguard Division of the Department of Beaches and Harbors was transferred to the management of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. As the Lifeguard Division took on additional responsibilities many units were relocated to Manhattan Beach (Bruce's Beach) where the old Department of Beaches facility was remodeled to house many of the additional functions.

In 2015 the remaining personnel vacated the second and third stories and moved to Manhattan Beach. The upper two floors have remained vacant ever since. The ground floor continues to house the Lifeguard Services and Beach Maintenance for Venice Beach (vehicles, heavy equipment and supplies).

THREAT

It was happenstance that alerted the Venice community to the looming threat of demolition to this **cultural icon**. To date, 1,481 concerned people have signed a petition (see attached) against demolition. January 5, 2023, Commissioners of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks heard and declined authorization of Beaches and Harbors demolition proposal. Los Angeles City Councilperson Traci Park, representing Venice, wrote a letter (see attached) against the demolition. She states that Los Angeles County Supervisor, Lindsey Horvath, concurs that demolition is not to move forward. The Los Angeles Conservancy, has requested that California State Coastal Commission revoke its inaccurate de minimus waiver for demolition (see attached). The goal is to preserve the entire building and, if the tower portion is not needed by lifeguard services,

to repurpose it as a community asset such as a public observation tower, lifeguard and/or oceanarium museum.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

... The property embodies the distinctive character of a style and method of construction in addition to being the work of a master architect.

The property was built and owned by the City of Los Angeles as the Venice Lifeguard Station, the work of master landscape architects Cornell, Bridgers & Troller together with architects Prescott, Whalley & Weit.

The building is an excellent example of Mid-Century institutional development featuring wood beam and glass with a wraparound deck. It is a hexagonal ground floor building, with a second & third story hexagonal central tower. The 40-foot tower has a third story observation deck. This the building's most distinctive feature.

SurveyLA identified the Venice Lifeguard Station as a "Rare example of a lifeguard station headquarters building in Venice; appears to be the only example along this stretch of the beach."

The building repeats the distinctive hexagonal design of the historic Venice Beach "Pagoda" shade structures which span Ocean Front Walk.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACCESS

The view from the tower is an unparalleled 360-degree view of the entire Santa Monica Bay, the ocean, coastline, city and mountains. The building is located on the sand, in the center of Santa Monica Bay. It is a spectacular and irreplaceable view, available in all weather conditions. Surf conditions, flora and fauna within the ocean can be seen from the tower. The tower provides an optimal site for studying environmental conditions including sea level rise and water quality. Historically, the unique location was used by weather station antennae located on the roof. The large adjacent public parking lot provides easy, direct access to the building.

LIFEGUARD CULTURAL HISTORY

... The property is associated with lifeguards of note either to its history or who have become persons of note in their own right.

The history of LACFD Lifeguard Division is one of heroism, diversity, innovations and like much of Los Angeles, movie stars. If not needed for current lifeguard services, the

tower portion of the station would be an excellent location to present artifacts, tell stories and show images of our lifeguard service from its inception in the early 1900s.

... A Hawaiian transplant in 1907, George Freeth, has been a much written about Venice lifeguard. He was credited with introducing surfing to the country. Safety was a priority to him as a lifeguard and he was considered the “**father of modern ocean lifesaving**” with his ideas instrumental in revolutionizing the profession.

LA County Lifeguards have gone on to become prominent in several fields including politicians, ...

... On the opposite end of the fame spectrum is a young woman whose name, not many people, if any, will remember, but she made an important lifeguard contribution in her own right. Kiane Lokelani Nowell Gray, then known as Kai Nowell, was assigned to serve at Venice Beach in 1973 at which time the City of Los Angeles got its **first female lifeguard**. It is said that Kai bore the brunt of sexist media attention, men who showed up to the beach to ‘be saved’ and belittlement from her superiors. Venice Headquarters had no facilities for women, no uniform, no rules...

... Remember the television show “**Baywatch**”? One of the creators was Greg Bonann, a Los Angeles County lifeguard himself. The show featured the exploits of a stream of pretty people running on the beach while becoming heroes by saving lives. Amazingly, by the mid-'90s, each episode was viewed by 1.1 billion people on average, across more than 142 countries, and translated into 15 languages besides English. With the world population around 5.77 billion at the time, that means roughly one in five people — worldwide — tuned into watch actors modeled after Los Angeles County lifeguards on “Baywatch”.

... **Tom Schnabel**, Venice resident, is an internationally recognized radio producer, pioneer, and innovator in world music. He helped introduce world music to American audiences as KCRW’s first music director and host of Morning Becomes Eclectic (1979-1991).

Need more.

It is imperative that Los Angeles City's historic-cultural treasures be celebrated, and foremost, that its iconic historical sites be preserved for future generations. As such, the historic-cultural merits of this property need to be assessed as it relates to the applicable historic-cultural monument criteria.

SOURCES

(COMPLETE LINKS NEEDED)

LACOFD Lifeguard Division overview video
Retired Lifeguard Captain Mickey Gallagher history notes
KCET George Freeth: King of the Surfers and a Forgotten Hero

Article by Venice Heritage Museum in Venice Paparazzi newsletter (undated) Kai
Nowell
<https://www.looper.com/217957/the-untold-truth-of-baywatch/> Baywatch
Adrian Scott Fine, Los Angeles Conservancy