

## LOCAL NEWS

# Little Saigon turns 25

By **DOUG MORINO** | [dmorino@gmail.com](mailto:dmorino@gmail.com) and **KENDRA ABLAZA** | Orange County Register

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WESTMINSTER – City leaders, residents and businesses owners on Saturday celebrated Little Saigon, the beating-heart of the Orange County's Vietnamese community for 25 years.

Vietnamese folk dancers and singers took to the stage at Asian Garden Mall, the same place where former Gov. George Deukmejian officially designated the business district Little Saigon on June 17, 1988, with freeway signs promoting it.

The district has since expanded past its Garden Grove and Westminster boundaries into parts of Fountain Valley, Santa Ana and Huntington Beach.

Little Saigon was born from the waves of refugees after the fall of Saigon to communists in 1975 during the Vietnam War. Camp Pendleton was a temporary camp; the pleasant climate and farm lands of Westminster prompted many to stay. Today, the area is home to the largest population of Vietnamese outside of Vietnam, and its influence has spread to cities such as San Francisco, Sacramento and, more recently, San Diego.

"The effect we've had here has clearly made an impact nationally and internationally," said Tam Nguyen, president of the Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce of Orange County. "They've seen the sense of community and identity that has been created in Little Saigon here. They've seen what can happen when a community comes together culturally."

Jeffrey Brody, a communications professor and member of the Asian American Studies Program Council at Cal State Fullerton, said the district's role as a hub for Vietnamese refugees and immigrants is what helped it thrive. "That's why it's an economic generator, because people who are not as comfortable with the language could go to an area where people will treat them with respect and understand their culture," Brody said.



Brody said the district's challenge would now be improving its tourism to increase business as younger generations spread out across the county.

"As the second generation grows up and the third generation attends school here ... the question for Little Saigon is whether they will be shopping at Little Saigon or shopping at South Coast Plaza," he said.

However, Eric Nguyen, 20, and his brother Irvin, 19, said it is the sense of community that draws them to Little Saigon. The brothers, who moved to Westminster from Seattle this year to attend UC Irvine, were having lunch with visiting family during the celebration. "There's not that many Vietnamese people in Washington," Eric Nguyen said. "Here, we blend in. It's more interesting."

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