

Deukmejian Courts 'Little Saigon' Votes

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK, Times Staff Writer

Gov. George Deukmejian, courting Orange County's growing Asian community, toured the Vietnamese business district in Westminster on Friday and unveiled a freeway sign officially designating the area "Little Saigon."

"Each year, Little Saigon attracts thousands of tourists, shoppers and business people," Deukmejian said. "The dedication of this new freeway sign is further recognition of the importance of Little Saigon as a major cultural, social and commercial center of Southern California."

The Republican governor's words were greeted with enthusiasm by several hundred Vietnamese refugees who viewed the unveiling ceremony as official acknowledgment of their community.

Thriving Business Area

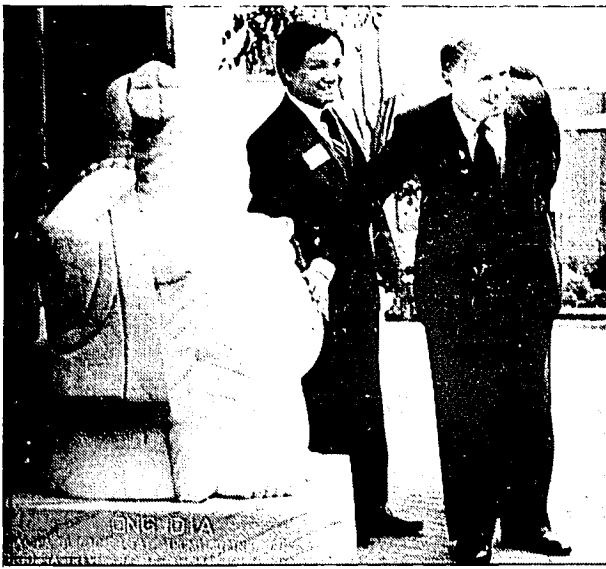
In the 13 years since the communist victory in South Vietnam, nearly 100,000 Vietnamese refugees have emigrated to Orange County and turned the strip along Bolsa Avenue into a thriving commercial district with more than 1,000 shops and businesses.

Deukmejian's visit also was part of a continuing effort by the Republican Party to attract Vietnamese-Americans as voters, supporters and campaign contributors.

Unlike some other immigrant groups, the Vietnamese have been drawn to the Republican Party—in part because of their strong anti-communist views.

Already, the GOP has had considerable success in registering voters from among the Vietnamese immigrants who have become U.S. citizens.

To capitalize on the governor's appearance, Republican Party ac-



DON KELSEN / Los Angeles Times

Gov. George Deukmejian rubs stomach of Buddha statue as Co Pham, president of Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce, looks on.

tivists set up a table nearby to sign up anyone who was not yet registered to vote.

In the coming weeks, the California Department of Transportation will post 13 signs that read, "Little Saigon, Next Exit," alongside the San Diego and Garden Grove freeways—a move designed to help draw tourists to the district.

Tourist Point

"Now it will be like Disneyland as a tourist point of interest," said Van Tran, an aide to state Sen. Edward R. Royce (R-Anaheim) and an organizer of the ceremony.

At the same time, the signs will give official status to the title "Little Saigon," recalling the name of the South Vietnamese capital more than a decade after it was changed to Ho Chi Minh City by the communist government.

"Only in America is Saigon being resurrected," Tran said in an interview. Little Saigon is the largest Vietnamese community outside Vietnam, he said, and is a magnet for refugees all over the United

States. Upon Deukmejian's arrival at the Asian Gardens shopping mall, the governor first rubbed the large stomach of a statue of Buddha—a gesture that is supposed to bring good luck.

"I'll need it," joked the governor, who has been beset recently with problems stemming from a projected \$2-billion budget shortfall.

Deukmejian took a brief tour of the mall before helping to pull the cover off a large replica of the freeway signs.

"It's been said that Little Saigon is a tie to the past and a gateway to the future for the people of California's Vietnamese community," the governor told the crowd. "I'm confident that these new freeway signs will serve to remind us that the American dream is very much alive and well here in Little Saigon."

A short time later, Deukmejian delivered a luncheon address honoring 12 Vietnamese high school students who received scholarships for their outstanding records.

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