

## CALIFORNIA

# WHO DECIDED . . . ? : . . . to name San Diego 'America's Finest City'?

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\o7 SAN DIEGO\7 —

*History is a fickle beast.*

*Almost always open to conjecture, it rarely passes up the chance to avoid controversy--especially where legends are concerned. History can be kind--or incredibly, indelibly mean. It can give credit to true believers, and deservers. Or break the reputation of those who merit a far better kiss of fate.*

*San Diego is no different from any city as far as lore is concerned. Who gets credit for the legends of "America's Finest City"? Is it a pioneer, a clear thinker, a creative soul, a hard worker with a heart in the right place? Or is it someone who happened along at just the right time to inherit a priceless bit of folklore that he or she can cling to forevermore?*

*How often have you wondered who decided this or that about San Diego? Or any place you've lived? Is credit in the right hands, right name, right place? Does it matter? Did it ever?*

*How has who decided the important decisions about your town changed or affected your life, your daily motion? What about the not-so-important decisions, the obvious you never knew existed?*

*Examining "who decided" is like taking a look at how fate and time shape a city, at how who gets the credit may not always be the truest telling of what really happened.*

*Or why . . .*

Former Mayor Pete Wilson.

Arguably, Wilson's slogan was born more of mediocrity and failure than of boosteristic jingoism. Through one ill-conceived twist of fate after another, San Diego lost the opportunity of hosting the 1972 Republican National Convention.

The Sports Arena couldn't be readied in time, student protests against President Nixon were planned, local politicians were embroiled in the ITT scandal. . . .

Just about everything went wrong at once, and Miami got the convention. Many of the city's leaders considered this a devastating blow. According to Max Schetter, senior vice president of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, Wilson came to the fore with a look-at-me slogan--one the city clung to like Shriners to a fez. It was a natural for boosting morale, and consequently, stuck like jam to toast.

Before Wilson gets full credit, however, the genesis of the slogan came from Look magazine, which had once dubbed San Diego "*one of America's finest cities.*" Wilson carried the idea to its promotional zenith, instituting "America's Finest City Week" and a litter of smaller celebrations.

No one can say for sure that Wilson's coming up with a pithy slogan helped in part to ensure his election as United States senator from California in 1982.

But it probably didn't hurt.

"America's Finest Senator"?

Does he dare?

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